

the opinions of a few men whose words will be received with respect, I am sure, by hon. gentlemen on both sides of the House. The first is Right Hon. A. J. Balfour, Prime Minister of Great Britain, who is reported to have said in 1896:

I say it is a monstrous thing to compel parents whose children are at school all day long to send them to schools where the religious training and the religious education which they desire to see instilled into their youthful minds cannot be instilled, cannot be taught.

Now let me give the words of the late Sir Oliver Mowat, whose memory, I am sure, hon. gentlemen opposite hold in great respect. He said:

In what spirit was the new constitution framed? It was a compromise all round and an essential part of that compromise—so essential that without it confederation could never have taken place—was the provision by which the separate schools of Ontario, and the Protestant dissentient schools of Quebec, were guaranteed by the imperial enactment.

And now let me cite another for the special benefit of my hon. friend from East Grey (Mr. Sproule). Speaking of the Manitoba school question, the late Principal Grant expressed himself as follows:

The government of Manitoba made a great mistake in summarily abolishing instead of reforming the old school system. They have been at war ever since 1890, with the prejudices and feelings, and even religious convictions of a section of the population that deserved to be treated with the utmost consideration. This war will end only when they make concessions which, to the mass of the people interested, will seem reasonable. The sooner these are made the better.

The onus lies on the provincial government to make concessions to meet the views of the reasonable members of the aggrieved minority.

Now, as I have said, eminent lawyers in this House have given us an interpretation of the law, but have not attempted to support that interpretation by reasons which appeal to the lay mind at least. I wish to say also that, in my opinion, this parliament cannot without doing injustice overlook the legislation of 1875 and the ordinances passed thereunder by the Northwest Territories. The true and wise position to take is, that the question was settled in 1875 without dispute, and that the laws or ordinances passed by virtue of that settlement should be perpetuated. In other words, we should simply continue the existing state of affairs, not adding to, or subtracting from, the rights of the minority.

When we consider the baneful effects of past agitations in Canada on religious questions such as this, is it not the part of wisdom, on the part of wise men, having in view the best interests of their country, to take the position that there is no school question for us to settle now, inasmuch as it was settled by the Dominion government of

Mr. BICKERDIKE.

1875, and by the territorial ordinances now in force? The agitation which has arisen in the country is, I think, very largely based upon misapprehension. The average man appears to have the idea—an idea sedulously fomented by extremists, whose influence is not beneficial to the country—that this government is endeavouring to force upon the Northwest Territories a system of separate schools, against their will. The fact that a separate school system prevails, and has prevailed for thirty years, is entirely overlooked. When the true merits of the controversy come to be properly understood, I firmly believe the agitation will cease, there being no good ground for it.

What is the object of education? Why is it that the government of all countries attach so much importance to educating the young? Is not the answer to this, that it is uniformly believed that education is the foundation stone of progress, and that no nation can hope to progress unless the children thereof are well educated, the better and higher the education the more advantageous it is. Efficiency, therefore, should be the key-note. The question to be asked, then, is: Do we secure efficiency under the existing school laws of the Northwest Territories which this government proposes to perpetuate? The answer is easy and obvious. The Territories are proud of their school law. The fundamental principles of it are the greatest efficiency and uniformity of education. The schools are national and uniform. All the children have the same advantages and the same privileges. The legislation now introduced by this government does not restrict or prevent the legislatures of the new provinces from passing laws from time to time in amendment of the existing laws, in a direction of efficiency. The principle of efficiency is secured, and is not interfered with in any way whatever.

What then is all the fuss about? In a nutshell, it is that, after the usual school hours the children of the minority, or indeed of the majority can be taught religion by their religious instructors for half an hour, and the minority have the right to have a school of their own, but that school is subject to the same laws as to efficiency, &c., as all the other schools. To put it in another way, a sufficient number of Roman Catholics in any school district can decide to have their children taught in a separate national school, but religion cannot be taught those children unless after school hours, and then for half an hour only. As the Minister of Finance put it some time ago, it seems to me that this is a very small thing to quarrel about. Why should they not teach religion to the children? Sir, I believe the very best thing for this country would be to have a little more religious education in the schools—that is the ground I take upon this question. In these days of rush and hurry, when the average man is kept busy from morning till night providing bread and butter for his