

PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT IN THE NORTHWEST.

House resumed adjourned debate on the proposed motion of Sir Wilfrid Laurier for the second reading of Bill (No. 69), to establish and provide for the government of the province of Alberta, and the amendment of Mr. R. L. Borden thereto.

Hon. GEORGE E. FOSTER (North Toronto). Mr. Speaker, the proposition which is at present under the consideration of the House, and the discussion which has so far ensued upon it, have not lacked for variety and dramatic incident. No legislation introduced into this parliament in my time has been more prolific of change and of the unexpected. Changes in principle and in policy and in modes of thought may be discerned comparing the present with the past. Time was when gentlemen who within a few years made an entire change of front in regard to their method of thinking and acting upon any given subject, thought it was at least worth while and in a certain measure necessary that they should endeavour to satisfy the desire of the House and of the country for reasonable explanation. In those days consistency was somewhat prized, but in the later days of the new Liberalism cabinet ministers have grown too practical for that consideration and do not even deign to give an explanation for a complete and entire change of front brought about within the space of a very few years. A time there was when principle was considered as something somewhat precious and not to be repudiated; a time there was when responsibility attached to principle was considered to be of weight and importance. But, this new Liberalism which is confronting us, seems, when it starts for parliament, to put into its valise every other thing necessary or utilizable, and the last thing thought of is principle. Party fealty and party attachments are carefully stowed therein, and these gentlemen think that these fill the bill—or at all events fill the valise. There was a time when the constitution of this country had something stable and sacred about it. The fathers of confederation who met in Quebec and modelled our constitution, the palladium of the rights of the provinces and the Dominion alike; they believed the constitution to be an important, a stable and sacred thing. But to-day the constitution is thrown idly aside, relegated to the garret of the archives, and ministers are too practical to think of the constitution stopping them when they want to carry out their desires. And, although the Prime Minister had courage, and old-fashioned thought and method enough to bring it out and lift it to something of its old-time importance, the ministers who spoke after him kicked it as a football from floor to ceiling, and where we are, to-day we scarcely know.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER.

Changes of principles once cherished are apparent to the most casual observer, but they are treated with so delightful a carelessness as to consistency and consequence, that it makes it interesting to the mere spectator, even though it is somewhat painful to the man of thought.

Let us take into consideration for a moment the circumstances which have preceded and up to this time have accompanied the introduction and discussion of this matter in the House. Weighing these circumstances, would not the unimpassioned spectator come to the hypothesis that some time ago the Prime Minister of Canada, smarting under events which took place in 1896 and since, had determined that with reference to the great Northwest the situation should be retrieved from a certain point of view, and that in the constitution which should be given to the new provinces the principle of separate schools should be embodied, cost what it might. Would that be a violent hypothesis? Let us see how the circumstances fit in with it. For two, or three, or four years previous to the election of 1904 in the Northwest, in this parliament, and to a certain extent in the whole Dominion, the question of autonomy for the Northwest Territories was to the front. It was particularly to the front in the Northwest Territories; in 1901 a draft Bill was prepared and resolutions which met with the approval of the Northwest Legislature were adopted.

Negotiations were undertaken; the matter was pressed; the matter was considered, as we know from the speech made here by the ex-Minister of the Interior, and considered often, and to a certain extent carefully and on all sides. But the Prime Minister had determined that to that creative body whose duty it should be to give substance to the constitution of the new provinces, no possible mandate should be given by the electorate of this country before they came to this parliament and were asked to consummate the creative Act. That is important to be remembered. The Prime Minister himself refused to undertake the erection of provinces two years ago, although there cannot be any sufficient reason given as to why, if the Territories to-day are equal to the work and the duties that follow therefrom, they were not ready to an almost equal degree to be constituted two years ago, or one year previous to the elections of 1904. But it did not suit the purposes of the Prime Minister to undertake the erection of those provinces before the general election. Little less did it suit him to have the subject mooted during the time of the election of the responsible and representative body which was to be asked to consummate the Act of creation of the provinces. And so the word went forth. His own minister of the Interior, long a resident of the country, one of the most prominent if not the most prominent men from that district, one who prob-