

Shall the New Canadian Nation be British or French?

BY AN OTTAWA CATHOLIC

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One of the essentials of nationhood is a common purpose, and definite aim, on the part of all citizens. The exercise of citizenship, in a free country like Canada, demands an adequate training, accorded by the State itself to all citizens, irrespective of class, creed or condition.

The school is the main instrumentality in this training. Hence the absolute need of sound teaching methods and agents. There must be, in one word, fitting school edifices, there must be a carefully selected text book supply, there must be a competent teaching body. All these must be under State control. It is not the province of the State-controlled school to teach any form of denominational religion nor to cast reproach upon any particular set of religious doctrines, or on the adherents and professors of these doctrines. All experience shows that State-controlled schools are a powerful instrumentality in the elimination of sectarian bitternesses and animosities.

Protecting Minorities.

Go back, let us, briefly, to the era of Confederation. The statesmen of the Quebec Conference had to deal with the Quebec of to-day, then called Lower Canada, and the Ontario of to-day, then called Upper Canada, as well as with the Maritime Provinces. There was, in Lower Canada, a minority of English-speaking Protestants, strong in numbers in several Eastern Township counties, and stronger still in wealth not alone in these counties, but in the cities of Montreal and Quebec. This minority had just cause to ask for, and insist on, constitutional guarantees for the protection of its language and of religious freedom. A distinct pledge was given, in 1864, to Sir Alexander Galt, then Minister of Finance, and representative in the Canadian Cabinet of the Protestant minority, that before Confederation came into being the minority's rights should be defined clearly and established irrevocably, in an Act specially framed to that end.

Sir George Cartier, then leader of the French-Canadian race, and Attorney-General for Lower Canada, was publicly committed to this policy. Roman Catholic leaders, notably the late Thomas D'Arcy McGee, declared for the Catholic minority of Upper Canada, that that minority was thoroughly satisfied with the Separate School Act of 1863, as a final adjustment and irrevocable settlement of all its claims in the matter of educational privileges.

The progress of the Confederation movement was, with this understanding concerning a burning issue, finally arrived at, very rapid, indeed. The scheme of the Quebec conference was by large majority endorsed by the Parliament of Old Canada. Nova Scotia and New Brunswick lent, in due course, their approval of the scheme. But, in the very last session of the old Parliament of Canada (1866), there came a rift in the rainbow of political harmony. The Government had, in obedience to its pledge to Sir A. T. Galt introduced a School Act for Quebec, securing forever the educational rights of the minority there, in a manner satisfactory to the leading men of that minority.

Demand of the Bishops.

While this bill for the protection of the Quebec minority's rights was under discussion there took place, in Montreal, a meeting of the Roman Catholic bishops of Upper and Lower Canada. That meeting adopted a strong recommendation to the Government, that while the bishops had no objection to the proposed act for the protection of the minority's rights in Quebec, they felt bound to insist on a similar measure for the protection of the Roman Catholic minority's rights in Upper Canada. The two cases were not at all parallel. The minority in Quebec was not only Protestant, it was almost unanimously English-speaking. The minority in Ontario was Roman Catholic, but three-fourths English-speaking. In the case of Lower Canada, the minority had to be protected, both as to language and as to religion; in the case of Upper Canada, the minority had to be protected as to religion only, and its representatives had declared themselves solemnly satisfied with the Separate School Act of 1863 as a final settlement.

To meet the demands of the Bishops, clear-cut and imperious as they were, Mr. Robert Bell, the Protestant M.P.P., of the largely Catholic county of Russell, introduced in 1866 a bill to still further extend the Separate School Act of 1863. There arose, at once, a storm of dissent on the part of Upper Canadian members. The Government found itself in an extremely difficult position. To secure the withdrawal of the Robert Bell Bill, the bill for the protection of Protestant educational rights in Lower Canada was dropped. Sir Alexander Galt at once resigned, and the Protestant minority of Quebec found itself obliged to accept the promise of a post-Confederation Act, securing adequately the school rights of its children.

Taxed for French Schools.

What has happened in Quebec? The School Act of 1875 is, on its face, one of admirable fairness to the minority, but, through it, thousands of dollars of Protestant taxes find their way into the treasuries of Catholic school boards, notably in the cities of Montreal, Quebec, and Sherbrooke. The school taxes, for instance, of all corporations, such as railways, banks, and investment companies, are not apportioned between the Roman Catholic and Protestant boards of education, according to the religious views of the shareholders in these corporations, but according to the population of the community, wherein the assessment is made. Thus, a bank in Montreal, three-fourths of whose stockholders are Protestants, pays three-fourths of its school taxes to the Roman Catholic School Board, because three-fourths of Montreal's population is Roman Catholic. The Protestant element is, by sure and steady process, being eliminated in nearly all the Eastern Township Counties, so that in a few years, Quebec will be, politically, civilly,

and religiously, as Roman Catholic as Munster or Connaught in Ireland.

Sandfield Macdonald's Foresight.

While the scheme of Confederation was under discussion in the old Canadian Parliament, the late Hon. John Sandfield Macdonald, a Roman Catholic himself, but unfriendly to Separate Schools, proposed that the various Provinces of the proposed new Confederation should be left absolutely free to deal, as they saw fit, with the educational problem. He predicted serious trouble, certain to follow from the course proposed, of limiting the jurisdiction of the provincial legislatures in this important regard. Mr. Sandfield Macdonald's resolution was, by a large majority, voted down, several pronounced opponents of Separate Schools, such as the late George Brown, the late Alexander Mackenzie, and others voting with the majority. Confederation established, Mr. Sandfield Macdonald became first Premier of Ontario. One of his first administrative acts was to withdraw the large annual grants, then made by the Government, to the Roman Catholic Colleges at Ottawa, Kingston, Toronto, Berlin, and Sandwich. There was strong protest made by the hierarchy against this action, and Mr. Sandfield Macdonald was, at the general election of 1871, made to feel bitterly the effect of the hierarchy's anger. His candidates were defeated in such counties as Essex and Kent, where the Catholic vote was strong, and Mr. Richard W. Scott, father of the Separate School Act of 1863, was elected as an independent. He had been, in 1867, elected as a ministerialist. Mr. Scott became, a few months later, a member of the Blake Cabinet, which succeeded that of John Sandfield Macdonald, in December, 1871.

The Blake Government was, in October, 1872, succeeded by the Mowat Administration, during the greater part of whose career Mr. C. F. Fraser, of Brockville, was representative of the Catholic minority in Ontario. Mr. Fraser, a Scotch Catholic, of great ability and adroitness, was, unlike Mr. Sandfield Macdonald, thoroughly devoted to the separate school system. He secured several amendments to the act, strengthening the educational position of the Catholic minority in Ontario. But, to his credit, let it be said, that he resolutely and successfully opposed every suggestion to deprive individual Roman Catholics of the right of withdrawing their taxes from the separate school system any where, and, at any time, these individuals might see fit.

Organizing to Control.

Meantime, from 1867 till 1915, there has gone on in Ontario a remarkable transformation in the racial make up of the Province. The majority of Catholics in Ontario today are of French-Canadian origin, and they insist that the separate school was really granted the Catholic minority as much for the perpetuation of the French language as for the protection of the Catholic faith. They insist, in plain terms, on legal encouragement and State stimulus for their organized effort to Quebecize Ontario. The issue, thus raised, is one of national magnitude. The French element is already permanently supreme in Quebec. The French are one-third of the people of New Brunswick, and increasing much more rapidly in proportion than the British element there. One of the two Roman Catholic bishops of New Brunswick is Leblanc, a French-Canadian, pledged to do everything, and, in fact, doing everything, in his power to Frenchize New Brunswick. Half the population of Prince Edward Island will soon be French. The French are rapidly gaining in numbers even in Nova Scotia. There are ten or more constituencies in Ontario, where they control the political situation. In several more they hold the balance of power. The present French-Canadian Mayor of Montreal declares that that great city has seen its last English-speaking Chief Magistrate. And so the movement for the Frenchizing of the Dominion goes on steadily and uninterruptedly.

English-Speaking Catholics.

The English speaking Roman Catholic, be he Irish or Scotch in blood, must become French in language or sentiment, or find a resting place with "Les Orangeistes." The City of Ottawa affords a striking object lesson. The French-Canadian element there has seized on the Separate School machinery of the city. The English speaking priests have been banished from the once English-speaking Catholic college of Ottawa. The Grey Nuns Convent, on Rideau street, once a school for the teaching of the higher English branches, has been also converted into an exclusively French-Canadian place of instruction.

The agitation for the diffusion of the French language till it cover all Canada, from Winnipeg to Charlottetown, as a dominant political agency, is so aggressive and so pronounced, that public opinion must, in all the Provinces, take due cognizance of it. The people of Manitoba dealt with the question very effectively in the early nineties, when they abolished forever the French-Canadian Separate Schools, established and guaranteed by the Manitoba Act of 1870. No Province is bound to respect any so-called constitutional guarantee, used for its detriment. So long as the Catholic minority in Ontario respects this pact of 1867, guaranteeing Separate Schools, which shall not infringe on the public weal or security of the whole population, so long will the majority respect that pact.

But the majority would be utterly recreant to all patriotic duty, utterly false to all patriotic endeavor, utterly and wantonly traitorous to the essential Canadian sentiment that is to give us a permanent National life and being on this American continent if it permitted a minority to foreignize the land. Abraham Lincoln once declared that an American slaveholding, could not endure. On that issue he was elected President of the United States; on that issue he fought slavery out of existence in the American Republic. A Canadian nation, half British and half anti-British (according to the Henri Bourassa plan), cannot endure. Which is to survive? The Canada of our British ancestors, English, Irish and Scottish pioneers of a free civilization; or the Canada of reaction and retrogression of a Bourassa? Let the electorate of Canada decide.

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