

# Messenger and Visitor

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**Dominion Parliament.** There have been two rather sensational incidents in connection with the proceedings of Parliament during the past week. One of these was the resignation of the Minister of the Interior, Hon. Clifford Sifton, and the other a speech in the Senate by Sir Mackenzie Bowell. The fact of Mr. Sifton's resignation was announced to the House of Commons on Wednesday morning by Sir Wilfrid Laurier, who read correspondence which had taken place between his colleague and himself a day or two earlier, from which it appeared that Mr. Sifton, having come to the conclusion that under existing circumstances he could not remain a member of the Government, had accordingly resigned, and that the Premier had with much regret felt that there was no alternative but to accept the minister's resignation. In explaining his position to the House, Mr. Sifton made it plain that the reason for his resignation was his disagreement with the Government on the School Clause of the Autonomy Bill. On account of impaired health Mr. Sifton had been away from Canada for some two months. Before going away he had expressed to the Premier his views on the school question. He had not supposed that it would be considered necessary to introduce the Autonomy Bill before his return, and in view of the intimate relations of the Department of the Interior to the Northwest Territories this supposition cannot be considered unreasonable. In view of the very decided stand formerly taken by Mr. Sifton in opposition to the proposal to force separate schools on Manitoba by Dominion authority it was almost a matter of course that he would be found strongly opposed to a similar proposal in reference to the new Provinces, and accordingly his resignation as a protest against the school clause of the Autonomy Bill was to be expected. Following Mr. Sifton's explanations there were speeches in the Opposition interest from Hon. G. E. Foster, Mr. W. T. McLean, Dr. Sproule and others. Mr. Foster plainly insinuated that the Premier had used the incident as an opportunity for getting rid of the Minister of the Interior, but this Sir Wilfrid indignantly denied. It may be added here that the opposition to the school clause of the Autonomy Bill appears to have gathered a good deal of force during the past week. There have been protesting, petitions from various quarters. It is reported that the Minister of Finance and the Postmaster-General are by no means satisfied, the members of Parliament from the West are said to be united in opposition to the school clause of the Bill, and it seems to be generally expected that the Government will recognize the advisability of altering its provisions. We do not know what form the amendment is likely to take, but we believe that any settlement of the matter which does not leave the people of the new Provinces free in reference to their educational work will not satisfy the majority of the people of Canada and will cause trouble in the years to come. Sir Mackenzie Bowell's speech in the Senate was inspired by some remarks of Hon. Messrs. Foster and Haggart in the House of Commons a short time ago. These remarks had to do with what occurred during a cabinet crisis when Sir Mackenzie was Premier, of which crisis the public has first and last heard a good deal. It is evident from Sir Mackenzie's speech that time has done little to mollify his feelings toward the men who withdrew their support from him at a trying time. His heart is still bitter. But perhaps the history of that interesting incident in Canadian history has not yet been fully told.

**A Matter of Provincial Rights.** It will be pretty generally admitted we suppose, that among the newspapers of Canada there is no abler and consistent advocate of Liberalism than the Toronto *Globe*. The *Globe* has always evinced a generous admiration for Sir Wilfrid Laurier as a man and a statesman, and its support of his measures is generally hearty and unreserved. But the *Globe* very distinctly declines to support the Autonomy Bill now before Parliament in so far as it provides for imposing upon the new Provinces a separate school system. The *Globe* takes its stand in respect to this matter on the principle of Provincial Rights. In the measure now before Parliament the supreme question at issue is not the merits of separate schools. It is not a question of the value of the religious element in education, or of the rights of minorities to consideration in education. The question is not one of educational policy but of constitutional rights, "which body has the right to determine and direct the educational policy of the new western Provinces, the Dominion Parliament or the Provincial Legislatures?"

"The *Globe's* answer to that central question is the answer of the Confederation Act: "In and for each Province the Legislature may exclusively make laws in relation to education." That answer cannot be harmonized with the measure now before Parliament. That measure proposes to "make laws" for these two new Provinces in relation to the character of their schools—that there shall be both Public schools and Separate schools—and also in relation to the financial administration of such schools—how public moneys shall be raised, apportioned, and applied. Such regulations touching education are, in our judgment, as really within the constitutional rights of the Provinces as are the regulations pertaining to school hours, teachers' qualifications, and text books. It is essentially a question of Provincial rights."

Referring to the provision for separate schools in the Dominion Act of 1875 the *Globe* says: "That legislation was not asked for by the Territory, it was not contemplated by the Prime Minister, it was introduced as an amendment in committee. Whether wise or unwise, it was at that time deemed expedient, and it was at most only interim legislation intended for a Territory under Dominion supervision. Neither the terms of that enactment nor the circumstances under which it was passed, so it seems to us, make it necessary for Parliament, thirty years afterwards, to usurp the functions of the Provincial Legislatures and to bind upon these Provinces for all time, as a charge under their constitution, a system of education which may prove unsuited to their needs."

But, we are asked, have not the people who now enjoy Separate school privileges under the Territorial Government rights and claims which should be recognized? They have. The people of the nine Roman Catholic schools and of the two Protestant schools, which are all the Separate schools at this moment in operation throughout the entire region to be comprised within the two new Provinces have just claims. But those claims should be considered by the Provincial Legislatures in framing their Provincial educational policies, not by the Dominion Parliament in framing their Provincial constitutions. And, we are further asked, is it not probable that the new Legislatures would enact the present Separate school regulations? It is entirely probable, indeed almost absolutely certain. Still, it is objected, is there not ground for the fear that in the future those Separate school privileges might be withdrawn? Such privileges, once granted, could not be withdrawn without creating a grievance for which, under the Confederation Act, the Dominion Parliament may pass remedial legislation.

"So it is that on all these grounds, theoretical and practical, constitutional and historical, the *Globe* feels itself constrained to withhold support from the autonomy measures now before Parliament in so far as they interfere with the rights of the Provinces in matters of education. The highest interests of all parties, for the present and for the future, will be best served by Parliament dealing only with Federal matters, and leaving to the Legislatures of the Provinces all the duties and responsibilities which the Confederation Act intended to be Provincial. And that is the central question at issue."

## Premier Haultain on the Autonomy Bill.

The second reading of the Northwest Autonomy Bill will not take place for some little time yet, and meantime the more salient features of the Bill are being discussed in various quarters. Premier Haultain of the Northwest Territories has been heard from in this connection. Mr. Haultain is not pleased with some features of the Bill. He would have preferred that the whole territory out of which the Bill proposes to create the Provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta should have been included in one large Province. While he does not think that the division of the Territories into two Provinces will arouse much opposition, he is nevertheless convinced that it would have been better to have made only one Province. "The division," he says, "is purely arbitrary: there is no point in the country where there is a natural division. Our Provincial machinery is more suitable to a large Province than a small one, the larger the better. We are one country, we had in individuality, a progressive unity, and we have grown up together with one legislature, one Government and one set of institutions." The one argument which Mr. Haultain recognizes as having any weight against the one Province idea is that the Great Province would have a preponderating influence in the Confederation, and that from a Northwest standpoint of course would not be objectionable. Mr. Haultain also objects to that provision of the Bill by which the public lands of the new provinces are retained in the control of the Dominion Government. He holds that the claim of those Provinces to the control of their public lands is a matter of right. But apart from this, he regards the financial terms provided for in the Bill as reasonably generous. "The Provinces will be very well off to start with and there will be no need to resort to any more taxation." Mr.

Haultain also objects strongly to the way in which the school question is dealt with in the Bill. It is not that he objects to the practical working of the present separate school system in the Northwest or that he would change it if he had the power. But he objects to what he considers an invasion of Provincial rights. The Dominion Government has no right to impose a separate school system on the new Provinces. The reference which has been made to conditions in Ontario and Quebec are beside the mark. "Upper and Lower Canada voluntarily agreed to the confederation compact, subject to the special condition about separate schools. There is a vast difference between Upper and Lower Canada going voluntarily into confederation with certain conditions attached, and our being created into a Province with those conditions attached." Mr. Haultain takes exception to Sir Wilfrid Laurier's argument in regard to constitutional guarantees. "To say that because the Dominion Parliament passed an act with regard to the educational or any other matter in 1875 it stands for ever, that it must be imposed upon the Province and perpetuated, is a position which if applied with equal fairness to anything else that they did is very rapidly brought to the *reductio ad absurdum*. . . . I do not think it is desirable that the Federal Government should attach to the Provincial constitution general or specific regulations with regard to fairness, justice, honesty and good faith. These very desirable qualities must be assumed to exist if the people of the west are fit to govern themselves."

## The Commission's Finding.

The decision of the International Commission of inquiry into the North Sea incident has been officially announced. The decision does not confirm the reports, previously put in circulation, to the effect that the decision of the commission would be adverse to the contentions of Great Britain. The finding of the commission as to matters of fact appears to be in substantial agreement with the statements made, at the time when the unfortunate incident occurred, by the British fishermen whose vessels were fired upon by the Russians. The commissioners of course recognize that the fishing fleet committed no hostile act. It would be absurd to think otherwise. And all but the Russian Commissioner were of opinion that there were not among the fishing vessels or in their vicinity any torpedo boats, and therefore the opening of fire by Admiral Rojestvensky was not justified. The Commissioners however recognize unanimously that "Admiral Rojestvensky did all he could from the commencement to the end to prevent the trawlers being the object of fire by the Russian squadron." It is perhaps a little difficult to reconcile this statement with the fact that, as the Commissioners believed, there were no other crafts except the trawlers, within sight of the Russian vessels. The delinquency of the Commissioners on this point seems to amount to this, that the Russian Admiral did not wantonly fire on the trawlers, but that, being apprehensive of an attack by torpedo boats and mistaking the signals of the trawlers for those of hostile vessels, he fired upon what he supposed were torpedo boats but which in reality were harmless fishing vessels. The facts certainly do not reflect any glory on the Russian Admiral, but evidently the court wished to deal with him as gently as possible. Concerning the squadron's proceeding without assisting the damaged trawlers, the decision says: "The commissioners are unanimous that, under the circumstances preceding and following the incident, there was such uncertainty concerning the danger to the squadron as to warrant Admiral Rojestvensky in continuing his route. However, the majority regrets that the Admiral did not inform the neighboring maritime powers of what had occurred."

## Another Great Battle.

A great battle has been in progress for some days between the Russian and Japanese forces in Manchuria. The engagement lasts from day to day and appears to be of a general character. The sacrifice of life on both sides is heavy and the Russians are reported to be losing ground. A despatch from St. Petersburg says:—Although it is not officially admitted it is regarded as certain that General Kuropatkin is directing all his efforts to the withdrawal of his army to Tie Pass. It is now practically a rear guard action, but the task of extricating himself is proving very difficult. The Japanese have not only driven in his left, but a column is reported to have crossed the Hun river east of Fushun. At the same time the Japanese are pressing the Russian centre under cover of the fire of their siege guns, and General Kuropatkin is gradually retiring before the Japanese advance. The efforts of the Japanese to envelop the Russian right have been unsuccessful, but it has been forced back almost in a line with Mukden. Two Russian divisions were despatched to head off the rear flanking column advancing from the Liao river toward Sianmintin (about thirty miles west of Mukden) but according to the latest advices they were too late, the Japanese having already entered the town.