

It turned out that the Dominion cabinet was seriously divided on the subject, and on January 4 half of the ministers resigned their portfolios. Subsequently the retiring ministers were induced to withdraw their resignations. It was now clear that the only hope of the separate-school party lay in the promised interference of the Federal Parliament. No definite action was taken in the matter until March 2, 1896, when a remedial bill was introduced. The conservative government then in power had less than two months left to them before the necessary dissolution of parliament, and it was evident that the bill had no chance of being carried, or even fully considered, in the time remaining. Such discussion as took place was bitter, and the dissolution of parliament, on the 24th of April, carried the whole question back to the people of the Dominion. The question involved and the results of the election are thus set forth by an English authority:

It may be briefly stated that in the election struggle the Catholic school system was the main question, and that the Catholic bishops and clergy threw themselves vigorously into the contest and exerted their utmost strength to secure the return of members pledged either to establish separate schools, or else, in vaguer terms, to see justice done to the Catholic minority in Manitoba. But though the numerical key to the victory in the Dominion parliament was actually in the hands of the most Catholic province, Quebec, the Liberal opposition leader was returned to power by a considerable majority; and the Liberal party thus took the lead in Canadian politics for the first time in eighteen years. It is true that several considerations, rather political and economic, and even perhaps ethnological, helped to bring about Mr. Laurier's triumph; but the latter's solemn undertaking to settle within six months the Manitoba school difficulty, which had racked Canadian politics for over six years, was undoubtedly a strong element in the situation, since it was felt that it on the one hand a definitely coercive measure could never be put into operative effect in Manitoba, nor the Catholics, on the other hand, induced to accept the Manitoba public schools, the only hope of a settlement acceptable to both sides lay in some proposal emanating from a leader who would be at once a noncoercionist by political and a Catholic by religious conviction.

The next stage in the struggle is therefore the compromise at once put forward by Mr. Laurier, on the part of the Dominion, and subsequently accepted by Mr. Greenway, the premier of Manitoba. It was very much on the lines suggested by Sir Donald Smith's earlier commission, but was on the whole less favorable to the Catholics. The main points were these: On a petition signed by the parents or guardians of 10 children attending a school in a rural district, or of 25 children in a town or village, any clergyman or authorized religious teacher is to be permitted access to the school to give religious instruction at stated times. And in any town school where the average attendance of Roman Catholic children is 40 or upward (in rural districts 25 or upward) they may be entitled to the services of one Catholic teacher, who must, however, be fully qualified according to provincial or national school standards. In districts where the children speak French wholly they are to have a teacher speaking both French and English, so that the teaching may be on the bilingual system. But all schools are to be national, under provincial control, and subject to the same regulations and inspections. The same text-books are to be used, and all teachers must be properly qualified by passing the provincial examinations and taking the prescribed normal school course.

The settlement was not satisfactory to the Catholic authorities, and the Papal intervention was eventually sought. The encyclical of His