

OPTIONAL BALLOT.

Debate in the Local Legislature.

On Monday afternoon last Mr. Conmee moved the second reading of his bill to give an optional ballot to Separate Schools. He said Mr. Speaker, in rising to move the second reading of this bill I do so with a great deal of embarrassment, for the reason that outside of the provisions of the bill there is much sentiment of an undesirable character, and for the further reason that misunderstandings and misrepresentations usually follow a discussion touching such a question as surrounds this measure.

I can only say at the outset that I have no desire to say anything that would jar on the feelings of anyone, I merely wish to deal with the question from the standpoint of what I conceive should be the aim and object of all true Canadians. If in doing so I condemn that which I believe to be injurious to the future of this country, and if I refer to certain persons, I do so from a sense of duty and not from any desire to be personal.

I may say that the draft of the bill which I handed the Law Clerk to revise had an alternate provision, which left it optional with the Separate School Board as to whether they should avail themselves of the machinery of the municipality or conduct their own elections as at present. In discussing it, it was inferred that this provision was not important, and so the bill was curtailed in this respect. For the first reading it did not matter, but I attach much importance to it.

I assume that inasmuch as the measure is one dealing with the rights of the minority, no one will object to the proposition that all reasonable safeguards should be employed to the end that these rights will not be prejudiced by the legislation proposed.

When the home rule bill was passing through the British House of Commons numerous safeguards were quite properly inserted to protect the Protestant minority in Ireland, to which no one objected. In proposing that the bill should be amended in committee, so as to leave unimpaired the existing rights of the Separate School trustees to control their own elections, I assume I will have the concurrence of the House. As to whether an alternate provision should be employed by which in certain localities where the conditions would be suitable the school board at their option might apply for ballots and ballot boxes to the Municipal Council, is a matter that can be settled by the committee to which I propose to refer the bill.

Upon consideration it will be seen that the municipal machinery as used by the Public School elections would not in many cases be at all suitable to the Separate School elections, for the reason that in the case of a city, such as Toronto for instance, which is divided into wards, it would require a hundred scrutineers and other servants, and in most cases there would be but a few voters, while the Separate School Board conducting their own elections would require but a few places and a few persons, so that, although they would in the latter case bear all the expense themselves, yet it would be preferable to the municipal system as provided by the bill as it now stands. Besides, by giving the Separate School trustees the right to name their own returning officers and time and place of polling (properly regulated) it cannot be said that in this regard any right the Separate School supporters now have under the union act is taken away. That is the point I desire to safeguard, it is the point about which the minority are most anxious; they would not, I am sure, approve of any infringement of their rights under the union act. To them these rights are sacred; they prize them highly, and to anyone who would encroach upon them or seek to undermine them they would at once say hands off. No one need flatter himself that these schools can be abolished or even impaired by hostile hands without a struggle, and such a struggle as this country has never yet seen.

I propose also to provide in respect to the finding of the County Judge in cases of application to the courts as to corrupt practices and other matters affecting the elections, that a return shall be made to the Separate School Board. The only other change of importance is in regard to the means by which the ballot system may be adopted in any school section. The bill now leaves it in the control of the majority of the trustees, but as the existing trustees were not elected with such powers, it would be unfair to those they represent to give them such control. I had intended from the first not to bring the bill into operation until there would be a new election, but as a part only of the School Boards retire annually this plan is surrounded with some difficulty. Yet it would not be fair to cut out the people from expressing their views on the question. This was also pointed out by the leader of the Opposition as one objection to the bill in its present form. I propose to amend the bill so as to give the Separate School supporters the right to pass upon the question by inserting a provision that upon the presentation of a petition, signed by a certain number, the trustees shall submit the ques-

tion to a vote of the Separate School electors of the section as to whether the ballot system shall or shall not be adopted, or by deferring the coming into operation of the bill until new elections take place, making them general, so that the people could elect trustees favorable to the ballot if they so desired; but these are matters of detail that can be arranged by the committee.

By affording the means by which the minority of their own free choice can, if they so desire, use the ballot to elect these Separate School trustees, there can be no infringement of any right which Catholics enjoyed at the union; nothing is taken away, but something additional is offered, of which they may, if they please, avail themselves. It may be contended that a precedent for going further might be established by this action, but where the free will of the parties interested is maintained how can a precedent for overruling that free will be created, or how can these rights be impaired? I know that a great many leading Catholics desire the legislation I propose. I feel certain it is in the best interests of the Separate Schools and of the Catholic people, as well as of the general public. I know also that, like all other reforms, it must in the end be passed, and I desire it to pass without more strife or ill-will than has been already aroused.

Holding these views, I can only press my measure forward, trusting that the good sense of the House will assert itself, and that the measure will have a unanimous support.

I come now to speak of the general question, and as to that we have already had only a few days since a discussion as to the constitutional rights of Catholics under the British North America Act. I prefer to discuss the matter from what I conceive to be the attitude and policy of the two great parties, the Conservative and the Liberal party. The policy of hon. gentlemen opposite is actuated, I fear, by the desire for office, and by a determination to abolish so far as possible every vestige of Separate School rights guaranteed to Catholics under the union act, while the attitude of the Liberal party is one of principle. They say, and truly, "We did not make this law, we found it on the statute book when we came to office; it is a solemn contract bearing the sanction of the Sovereign, and we will not violate the constitutional rights of our Catholic fellow citizens; under it such a course would be a stultification of the principles upon which the Liberal party rests; rather would we give place and power than oppress the conscience of our Catholic fellow countrymen."

Mr. Conmee spoke at length upon the subject, the full report of which we will give in our next issue. He dealt fully with the prejudice and hostility against Catholics, and concluded:

Sir, I repeat that the Catholics of this country have upon all occasions being loyal to it. When the American army appeared before Quebec, the Catholics of that Province rallied to the defence of the country. Men of 60 and boys of 16, although under strong temptation, stood loyal in the defence of the country to which they had sworn allegiance, and spilled their best blood in defence of the nation; and if the British flag to day floats proudly over that grand old fortress we owe it to the valor and loyalty of our French-Canadian fellow-citizens of the Province of Quebec. I ask, are these the men to be alienated in the land for the preservation of which their life-blood was spilled out.

Sir, there is yet another phase of Canadian history that it may be well to remember. As it was in Lower Canada, so in Upper Canada, when the enemy crossed the border the men of Glengarry, mostly in defence of the country, and when the scene of action was on the banks of the great St. Lawrence, and when they were giving ground in the face of vastly superior numbers, and when the day was all but lost, there came to their head a Catholic priest, and with words which he well knew would quicken the blood of his Highland kinsmen, he challenged his countrymen to follow him. His valor and courage was so great that he rallied them again to the onset, and, instead of defeat the enemy was driven from Canadian soil. Are these the men to be alienated or denied the full rights of citizenship? I have too much faith in my fellow countrymen, too much hope for the future of my country, to believe that such a spirit can prevail. Let us cast away old illusions and old prejudices; let us have confidence in ourselves and in the future of our country, and march forward to the building up, not of one religion, or of one race, upon the ruins of another, but of a great, united vigorous nation. (Applause.)

HON. MR. FRASER.

Hon. Mr. Fraser said that anybody who was acquainted with the political barometer of Ontario, knew the methods and manner and circumstances of the last two or three general elections, and knew all the questions relating to the Roman Catholic minority in this Province, would have no difficulty in telling that at the present time the political mercury was pointing to a general election. Counting the proposition that had been disposed of already, there had been during the present session three general propositions dealing with the religious minority of the Province brought forward for the consideration of the House. He wished he was in

his old-time vigor, and able to say all he would like to say on the question. But, so far as he was now able to do, he would deal with some of the salient features of the proposition now before the House. He did not propose to go far afield, because, while much might be said on the topic, and some matters of history might be appropriately brought to bear upon the debate, yet, in mercy to himself, and perhaps still more in mercy to his hearers, he must be very limited and brief in what he had to say. In the proposition before the House they were dealing with the question as to whether Separate School trustees should be elected by ballot. If this question were one now arising for the first time, alongside the question as to whether we were going to have the Separate School system, that is, the establishment of the system, and we were settling the details of the whole system, including the details of the manner in which the boards of trustees should be elected, he was free to say that, although he had no particular preference for the ballot as a form of election, and considered it, in its last analysis, a badge of cowardice, and an indication, to some extent, of slavery of thought, and a proof that men are not so free as they should be, and whilst he might personally, and would personally, prefer that all his voting should be done openly, in the old way, yet, as he had said, if we were now discussing the question of Separate Schools for the first time, irrespective of all the circumstances that have grown up around them, he would have no objection whatever to the ballot if he felt that the sentiment of the House was on the whole in favor of it. But, as he had said more than once on previous occasions, and he must say again on the present occasion, it was impossible to dissociate the circumstance of this bill from all the circumstances surrounding it, which had accompanied it from the start. These circumstances, he contended, apart from the constitutional aspect, on which he hoped to be able to say something presently, were such, speaking of them with all fairness, and without urging anything acrimonious, or wishing to say anything offensive, that if the position now existing in the Province were reversed, and there were a Protestant minority instead of a Roman Catholic minority, and a Roman Catholic majority instead of a Protestant majority, then the Protestant minority would, as the Roman Catholic minority has done under existing circumstances, resent the proposition to force the ballot on the Separate Schools. It was not concealed or hidden—it was not ought to be hidden in any way—that there is a considerable portion of the community that would like to see the system of Separate Schools abolished. All their programmes and platforms looked to that end. He was satisfied that if the situation were as he had suggested, and the religious minority were composed of Protestants instead of Roman Catholics, and they saw, day after day, a large section of those who composed the majority of the people, sometimes in their newspapers, sometimes in public, always with the same motive and the same intent, saying in effect: "We propose to do away with the Separate Schools system which you enjoy, and to make you attend the Public Schools, the schools which are dominated by the Roman Catholic majority"; and suppose, further, that, while this portion of the Roman Catholic majority were continually denouncing these views, they said the ballot system must be adopted by the Protestant minority, whether they wished it or not, he asked anybody who wished to deal with this question apart from par izanship if the supposed Protestant minority would not be fairly stating their opinion when they said: "If it be your desire to abolish Separate Schools, if this is what you desire to accomplish, then we have very good reason to fear that what you propose to offer us a gift and a benefit is really intended to be an injury to the Separate School system, and therefore we are determined to resist it as far as we are allowed by the constitution." Would not that, he asked, be beyond all question the position the Protestant minority would take? But if, in addition to all this, this portion of the Roman Catholic majority which he had suggested, besides advocating the abolition of the Separate School system, and declaring that the minority must use the ballot, accompanied their arguments by the assertion that the minority required to be freed from their ministers and clergy, that they could not elect their school trustees freely and fairly unless they had the ballot, would not the supposed Protestant minority resent the proposition that accompanied it? Would not the circumstance that the proposition was accompanied by such an offensive argument be sufficient to secure the rejection of the proposition? Apart altogether from the constitutional questions, he said, these two sets of circumstances alone afforded good and sufficient reason for the Roman Catholic minority of the Province having hitherto said in response to the proposition: "If you are opposed to the existence of Separate Schools and want to impose the ballot you cannot intend to do it for the good of the system. It is not your purpose to perpetrate the Separate School system, but it is your purpose to destroy it. Part of the machinery with which you propose to do so is this ballot system. Whatever advantages you may see in the operation of the ballot, we have reason to apprehend and believe that the only motive you

have at bottom is the destruction of the system." "These two sets of circumstances," said Mr. Fraser, "would be ample warrant for those of us who belong to the Roman Catholic minority to reply this way to those who are thrusting down our throats, whether we would or not, this ballot system when we are not asking for it, and there is no grievance in the matter." But when the constitutional question stood as it did the ground was perfectly clear and straight, and the minority were bound to resist this proposition to the end. He did not hesitate to say that the position had been somewhat changed by what had occurred, not only during the present session, but by what had occurred so long ago as the session of 1890. Before that time the voice of the minority was united on the subject, but in that session Mr. Clancy voted straight, without hesitation, for a compulsory ballot. He did not want to be offensive. Mr. Clancy had a right to urge his views and adopt what course he saw fit. He (the speaker) had no more right to speak for others than had Mr. Clancy, except that he thought he (the speaker) represented the views of the minority. But in voting for the compulsory ballot Mr. Clancy had to some extent changed the situation. His action enabled many of the Protestant majority, who were to a large extent indifferent on the subject of Separate Schools—and he could quite understand their being so—to say that inasmuch as a Roman Catholic representative in the House had voted for the compulsory ballot, it could not be said thereafter there was no feeling on the part of the minority in favor of election by ballot. But this session the vote of the member for North Essex had also been cast for the recent motion declaring that the ballot system should be applied to the School Board elections. And now there was the proposition of the hon. member for Algoma. This very much changed the situation. It was said there had grown up a sentiment among Roman Catholics in favor of the ballot. It would be news for him to learn that there is another Roman Catholic in the Province, save the hon. gentleman he had mentioned (Mr. Clancy and Mr. White) who were in favor of the compulsory ballot. He thought he knew something about it. For twenty years he had moved among all classes of men, and been a close observer of public affairs. From no source had he heard of such a desire save on the part of these two gentlemen. There was nothing, he said, to indicate that the Roman Catholics were in favor of the compulsory system. But there were doubtless a great many Roman Catholics who, having regard to the agitation going on and to the outcry raised and the irritation caused by the discussion of the question; having regard to the attacks made upon the Separate Schools, and the expressions used with reference to their clergy and hierarchy, and actuated by a desire to take out of the political arena a question calculated to create so much disturbance and difference of opinion, there was no doubt, he repeated, a certain section of the Roman Catholic minority who have felt they did not care whether the Legislatures passed an optional ballot or not.

The last few sentences of Mr. Fraser had been uttered with some difficulty, and had been continually interrupted by a cough. His physical weakness was visible to all, and there was no surprise when, after struggling again for a moment, he said, "Mr. Speaker, I am afraid I shall not be able to proceed," and sank into his chair. It was only a quarter after 5, and the sympathy of the House was manifested in a unanimous suggestion to make it 6 o'clock, if Mr. Fraser could continue his speech after recess. Instead of doing this, however, other business was taken up, on the understanding the debate should proceed after recess if Mr. Fraser felt equal to it.

The Forty Hours at St. Paul's.

The Forty Hours' devotion commenced in St. Paul's Church on April 13th. His Grace the Archbishop assisted at the Mass, which was celebrated by Rev. Father Reddin, assisted by Rev. Father Kelly as deacon, and Mr. J. McMurran as sub-deacon.

The choir under the able direction of Mr. P. McEavy, rendered Hadys's Second Mass. Miss F. McDonnell presided at the organ. Full orchestral accompaniment, under the leadership of Signor Napolitano, assisted the choir. The Mass was sung most devotionally and with taste. The soloists were Messrs. Tomney, Costello, Mrs. Campbell, Tapscott, Shea, Mrs. Canall and Curran.

After Mass his Grace spoke most impressively of the devotion of Catholics to the Blessed Sacrament. His words will long be remembered in St. Paul's.

The procession took place, and was headed by the Young Ladies Sodality and the Angels' Sodality. A feature that added not a little to the grandeur of the procession and to the devotion, was the uniformed corps of the Knights of St. John that accompanied the Blessed Sacrament.

On Sunday evening Father McBrady of St. Michael's College preached; Monday evening, Father Ryan; and on Tuesday, Father Treacy of St. Mary's.

The crowds that attended the devotion were a testimony of the faith of the Catholics and the piety of the parishioners.