

## The Presbyterian Review.

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Toronto, May 21, 1896.

### A Quebec School Case.

IN the report of the Synod of Montreal and Ottawa reference was made to a case of injustice in the administration of the school law which is occasioning a good deal of discussion in the Province of Quebec at the present time, and which is deserving of fuller explanation. Under the law of the Province all public schools must be religious and are either Catholic or Protestant according as the majority of the school district is either one or the other. In either case the minority, however small, are entitled to dissent and have their taxes go to the support of a school of their own faith if they can maintain one themselves or avail themselves of one in a neighboring district. New school districts or divisions of old ones are constituted by Order-in-Council after due notice and may be made to affect either all rate-payers in the new district or simply the majority.

Something over three years ago upon a petition from the Roman Catholics of a new ecclesiastical parish which had been erected by the bishop, a corresponding new school district was formed in the suburbs of Montreal, to include a portion of the city and parts of four other neighboring school municipalities under the somewhat formidable name of St. Gregoire le Thaumaturge, and made to embrace all the taxpayers within the bounds, Protestant as well as Catholic. The Protestants in each of the several districts affected had already dissented under the law and were supporting their own schools. Those within the city had in fact been placed under the care of the Protestant Commissioners by a special act of the Legislature. They supposed, therefore, that they were safe from any further obligations towards the Roman Catholic schools. Thus off their guard, the notification of the new move of the official Gazette attracted no attention. If seen at all by any of them it was regarded as a matter in which they had no interest. It was further so arranged that three years taxes had become due before the Protestant ratepayers took in the situation, when they found to their dismay that they would have to pay this accumulated tax over and above what they had annually been paying for their own schools. Appeals to the courts have so far failed to furnish any redress. The government has so far refused to intervene, even to modify the Order-in-Council by restricting it to the Roman Catholics of the district. In order to save themselves from further demands, if possible, the Protestants have given notice of dissent which can take effect only from the first of July next, and does not in any way relieve them from the past.

Further, in order to maintain that dissent they must either provide a new school for their children, of which they feel no need being already well supplied, or attach themselves to some one of the neighboring districts.

The law will not allow them to retain connection with the several districts to which they formerly belonged unless the Order-in-Council is changed. If they attach themselves to any one of these districts, all the others will be dismembered and their schools greatly injured if not destroyed. In fact already they are face to face with burdens which they are in no good position to bear. The complaint is not so much against the law, which is probably as fair as it can be made under any dual system of education. The complaint is against the administration of the law by a Roman Catholic superintendent and a Roman Catholic government, in that the operation of it is made needlessly oppressive to the Protestant minority. One would suppose that the matter might easily be remedied by the change suggested in the Order, but the fact that though there are only some thirty or forty Protestant children in the district there is a large amount of property owned by Protestants probably accounts for their unwillingness to surrender the legal advantage which has been gained by the Roman Catholic authorities. Fresh pressure is being brought to bear upon the new ministry which has just been formed. It remains to be seen whether it will prove any more successful than before.

### National vs. Separate Schools.

Our esteemed contemporaries who guard the interests of the Methodist and Roman Catholic Churches respectively in Toronto, viz: the *Christian Guardian* and the *Catholic Register* have been exchanging civilities over the burning question of Separate and National Schools. Quoth the *Register*: "We find this plank in the platform of our free and independent contemporary. 'Canadian nationality and unity, and the development of an efficient national (religious, not sectarian nor secular) system of public education.' If not too much trouble, would the *Guardian* be good enough to define for its readers, and for us, the meaning of a 'national (religious, not sectarian nor secular) system of public education?' Having given its definition, would our contemporary point out the difference (if any) between such a system of schools as it demands in its platform and Methodist schools wherever maintained?"

To the editor of the *Guardian* this was easy, and he replies:

(1) In Methodist primary schools we would expect that Methodist teachers would be employed almost exclusively, that other things being equal, Methodists would have the preference. In national non-sectarian schools we would expect the teachers to be of all denominations about in proportion to the strength of the denominations in the population, merit alone being the basis of appointment. In the latter case educational attainment and general character are the qualifications, but in the former another is added, namely, church relationship.

(2) In Methodist primary schools we would expect a Methodist catechism to form some part of the school programme. If we were maintaining schools for the expansion of our own church, as well as for general education, we would take the same position as the English Roman Catholic bishops, that the "children should be taught catechetically by approved teachers the definite doctrines of Christian faith and morals." The introduction of "church catechism" into the school necessitates teachers from the "church organization." In national, non-sectarian schools we would have no catechism, but the reading of the Bible in suitable selections, and the memorizing of portions of the Word of God.