

Sir ADOLPHE CARON. That letter, Mr. Speaker, was written just a year ago, as Sir Donald Smith informs me. Now, Sir, these are considerations which I venture to say should have the greatest possible weight with a Parliament such as ours. This country is divided into two parties, and will be, and I for one believe that the form of government which we have here is the best possible one. But, let us not forget that if, for the sake of party advantage, any political party should divide the people by any question which can be avoided, the result would be detrimental in the extreme to the future, to the greatness, and to the development of Canada. Sir, the idea which permeated the whole of the Confederation Act, as I understand it, was protection to the minority, and the intention of the statesmen who took part in the building of that legislative monument was to give to every class of the population the fullest possible enjoyment of religious liberty.

At confederation that was evidently what was intended to be done in Manitoba, as we may see by the words of the late lamented great leader of the Conservative party, Sir John A. Macdonald. When applied to by a member of the legislative assembly of that province to express his opinion as to the laws relating to education in 1889, when the new education law abolishing separate schools was before the legislative assembly, Sir John Macdonald wrote the following letter, which explains itself :

You ask me for advice as to the course you should take upon the vexed question of separate schools in your province. There is, it seems to me, but one course open to you. By the Manitoba Act, the provisions of the British North America Act, section 93, respecting laws passed for the protection of minorities in educational matters, are made applicable to Manitoba, and cannot be changed, whereby the Imperial Act confirming the establishment of the new provinces, 34 and 35 Victoria, chapter 8, section 6, it is provided that it shall not be competent for the Parliament of Canada to alter the provisions of the Manitoba Act in so far as it relates to the province of Manitoba. Obviously, therefore, the separate school system in Manitoba is beyond the reach of the legislature or of the Dominion Parliament.

Although I fear to take up too much of the time of the House, still, I think it is important, in the discussion of a question like the present, to place before Parliament and before the country the views entertained by the leading public men of Canada. Those who remember or who have read in the political history of this country of the troublesome times which existed in Canada previous to confederation, know that the people of the provinces were divided on religious questions ; and it seems to me that we should by every possible means avoid going back to the same questions, and possibly causing a return of those old troubles which we thought had disappeared. Among some of the most distinguished statesmen and political leaders in this country, who

afterwards educated public opinion upon these questions, Sir Oliver Mowat and the Hon. Alexander Mackenzie fought fiercely against separate schools for a time ; but after the fight had been fought, and the benefits of the new system had been realized by experience, those men were the last who would advocate going back to the system which obtained previous to confederation. It is right, I think, to recall to the memory of hon. gentlemen what took place in the legislature of Quebec before the union. The Protestants of Lower Canada had by practice, although not by law, the full control of their schools, and of every question affecting the education of their children in that province ; and, although, as history proves, they never had to complain of the manner in which they were treated by the Catholics, yet when confederation was carried, and when it became necessary to prepare the Confederation Act, the Protestants insisted upon their rights and privileges being protected by a clause in the Confederation Act. At that time it seemed useless to insert such a clause, because they had always enjoyed, undisturbed, the same rights as the Catholic minority enjoyed in the province of Ontario. Still, they insisted on a clause being inserted, and it was in London that Sir Alexander Galt had inserted in the Confederation Act the very clause which to-day gives the minority in the province of Quebec the right of appeal to the Privy Council. I have heard it questioned during this debate whether the rights of the minority in the province of Quebec could be interfered with as the rights of the minority in the province of Manitoba are interfered with at present, or whether it was not ultra vires of the legislature of Quebec to pass a law that would change the status now enjoyed by the Protestant minority in that province. I cannot see that there can be a doubt on that point. I cannot see that there can be a doubt that to-morrow the legislature of Quebec could pass a law appointing Catholic inspectors, for instance, or imposing on the minority a selection of school books which they might not find acceptable. I am supposing a case ; but I am quite sure that it is a case that can never happen in the province of Quebec. But what would be the remedy of the minority ? Their remedy would be, under that clause of the Confederation Act, to come to the Governor in Council and ask the Governor in Council to hear their appeal ; and it would be for the Governor in Council, after hearing that appeal, to pass whatever remedial order the Governor in Council should deem necessary. Now, Sir, however old the history may be, it is of advantage to turn back its pages and see how far they may throw light upon questions of this kind. Some hundred years ago, when the Quebec Act was under discussion in the British Parliament, there were then in that old British