

THE SEPARATE SCHOOLS ACT OF ONTARIO

Showing the Additional Concessions Granted Since Confederation.

INTRODUCTORY.

The purpose of this pamphlet is to set out in exact form the conditions under which Separate Schools were granted by the British North America Act, and to show the concessions which have been added to the original provisions. For many years prior to 1867—when the Federal system was introduced—a persistent agitation was maintained to force a system of Roman Catholic Separate Schools upon the Province of Upper Canada (now Ontario). Hon. R. W. Scott, now Secretary of the Government of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, was a member of Parliament for the united Provinces of Upper and Lower Canada. He was most persistent in forcing upon the attention of Parliament a Separate School Act. He was met with vigorous opposition by the late Dr. Egerton Ryerson, then Superintendent of Education for Upper Canada. There was in this Province also a large and active majority opposed to Separate Schools. The conflict in Parliament and in the country raged with remarkable vigor. Both sides had their press, and the electoral campaigns were embittered, as is invariably the case in religious disputes.

Finally, in 1863, by the Quebec members of the United Parliament voting solidly with a minority of the members from the Province of Upper Canada, an Act, known as the "R. W. Scott Separate School Act," was passed. It was a comparatively innocuous measure. The late Egerton Ryerson had a good deal to do with framing it, and his strong convictions led him to safeguard the interests of the Public Schools as well as he could. This Act was accepted as a finality by the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church; but no sooner was it passed than they began agitating for amendments of the most radical character. This has gone on until the present time, and we now have a Separate School law that is not at all like that which was originally adopted. The Act illustrates in its present shape the old fable of the camel which first got its head into the house and ultimately forced the owner out. The Separate School Act, as it stands now, seriously hampers the work of the non-sectarian Public Schools, and makes it difficult for them to perform the work which their founder intended.

The following chapters contain (1) a memorandum giving the charter of the denominational schools; (2) the rights which were conceded by the original legislation; (3) statements from Minist