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THE MANITOBA SCHOOL QUESTION

A SERIES OF FOUR LETTERS

BY

JAMES FISHER, M.P.P.

To the Editor of the Free Press.

Sir,—To one who, like the writer of this letter, has from the very opening of the Manitoba school question, most earnestly contended that the legislature and people of our own province should settle it in a spirit of tolerance and conciliation, giving no justification or excuse for federal intervention, it was comforting to read the recent letters of Principal Grant and the more recent utterances of Mr. Laurier. They inspire a hope that, even yet, the grave problems which the question presents may be solved by the one body that can under any circumstances work out the most satisfactory solution. It is gratifying to find that every word uttered by those distinguished leaders of public thought is in the direction of an earnest appeal for a settlement of the question, within the province, in a spirit such as I have suggested. The great Presbyterian divine has been forced to the conclusion that "the government of Manitoba made a great mistake in summarily abolishing instead of reforming the old school system," a conclusion indeed that is heartily concurred in by thousands in Manitoba, who are thoroughly sincere in their preference for a purely national system of schools, and who regard it as a misfortune that their Roman Catholic brethern cannot be brought to see eye to eye with them on that question. The learned Principal fully realizes that the judgment of the courts finds—and his own investigation confirms it—that the minority have been aggrieved, and that for their grievance a remedy ought to be found, which will neither break up the present system in its general operation, nor restore the old one. He deprecates most earnestly any intervention by the federal parliament except as a dernier resort, when every possible means of effecting a settlement amongst ourselves shall have been exhausted. He recognizes that nowhere can the question be so satisfactorily settled as within the walls of our own legislature, and so he pleads with the government of the province that it may deal with the question and solve it. In the most earnest terms he reminds the members of the government that "they have been at war ever since 1890 with the prejudices, the feelings, and even the religious convictions of a section of the population that deserved to be treated with the utmost consideration." He warns them that this war "will end only when they make concessions, which, to the mass of the people interested will seem reasonable;" and he adds that "the sooner these are made the better." That his appeal may be as emphatic as possible he protests that "the onus lies on the provincial government to make concessions to meet the views of reasonable members of the aggrieved minority."

The eloquent words of Mr. Laurier, in his tour through Ontario, are cheering to every one who sincerely desires to see an honorable and statesmanlike settlement of the question. Especially is it gratifying to note the rapturous enthusiasm with which his utterances were received in the great meetings, composed, as we may assume, mainly of English speaking Protestants. Doubtless he was roundly applauded when he pleaded that the Greenway government should be "not only fair but generous to the minority." Who can fail to approve the patriotic words in which, at his Renfrew meeting, he

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