



THE Canadian Courier THE NATIONAL WEEKLY



Vol. 8

Toronto, October 22, 1910

No. 21

A BI-LINGUAL CONTROVERSY

Summary of a Great Discussion which is proceeding in Ontario and Quebec.

FOR some time past there has been serious unrest in the Province of Quebec over the question of the use of the French language. Some French-Canadians thought that French was being gradually pushed into the background, and they made several moves to prevent this tendency. For example, they had a law passed in Quebec which forced railway companies to print their time-tables in French as well as English. They also stirred up the people to jealously guard against too much teaching of English.

In Ontario, where the French-Canadians are gradually increasing in number, a similar movement looking to the preservation of the French language in the French settlements was inaugurated. In January last, an "Association Canadienne-Francaise d'Education d'Ontario" was formed in Ottawa by representatives from all the counties where the French reside. This was done at the suggestion of the Ontario Government, who apparently desired to base their bi-lingual school system upon a unified and coherent public opinion. The "Association" has not been publicly active, but it certainly has been privately active, judging by the results.

While this controversy was going in a moderate but persistent way for several years in both provinces, nothing very spectacular occurred until the addresses of Archbishop Bourne and Mr. Henri Bourassa at the Eucharistic Congress made the welkin ring. The archbishop spoke of the value of English as an instrument for the spread of Roman Catholic doctrines, and Mr. Bourassa replied most warmly on behalf of the French language. Archbishop Langevin gave the seal of his approval to Mr. Bourassa's attitude.

There the matter might have rested, for a while had it not been for the publication recently of some supposed opinions of Bishop Fallon, of London, which appeared in a Detroit paper. These indicated that the Bishop was not wholly satisfied with the French bi-lingual schools in his diocese. The public generally was a bit surprised, but Bishop Fallon allayed anxiety by the publication of a statement (Sept. 22nd), saying that he "never had any objection to the teaching of French or of any other language in accordance with the laws of the province of Ontario and the regulations of the provincial Department of Education." This satisfied the public for the time being, but it did not satisfy the "Association Canadienne-Francaise." At a meeting on Oct. 4th it passed a long resolution containing affidavits from various school authorities intended to show that Bishop Fallon was restricting the teaching of French in convents and separate schools. It ended with this strong statement:

"The Association Canadienne-Francaise d'Education d'Ontario regrets to have been driven to the conclusion that it cannot give credit to the public denial of His Grace Bishop Fallon."

The Hanna Letter.

Even this strong resolution did not create much stir on the outside, but it happened that about the same time a letter was published in the French press purporting to give the views of Bishop Fallon, which views did not wholly correspond with his statement of September 22nd. This letter was supposed to have been written by the Hon. W. J. Hanna, Provincial Secretary for Ontario, to the Hon. Dr. Pyne, Minister of Education. This letter was dated May 23rd, and recorded an interview between Bishop Fallon and Hon. Mr. Hanna, which occurred on the previous day. This letter was a

confidential document from one Ontario Cabinet Minister to another, and how it got out was a mystery. It was first published in the Toronto papers on October 13th, and it then created as big a sensation in Ontario as it had already created in Quebec.

The following paragraphs from this letter, or supposed letter, by Mr. Hanna, will give some idea of its character.

"Sarnia, Ont., May 23, 1910.

"Dear Dr. Pyne: Yesterday afternoon Rev. Father Kennedy (Cure of Sarnia) telephoned me asking myself and Mrs. Hanna to go to meet Mgr. Fallon, Bishop of London, who was to officiate here on the occasion of his first visit to this part of his diocese. After some



Bishop Fallon, of London, on the day of his consecration, April 29th, 1910.

conversation Bishop Fallon expressed the desire to see me particularly with regard to a matter of great importance to this part of the province, which concerned the whole question of bi-lingual teaching in the schools. It is difficult to quote him literally, but I will give you the substance of his words:

"He has not reached this conclusion at once, but he has resolved, so far as it is in his power, to cause to disappear every trace of bi-lingual teaching in the public schools of his diocese. The interests of the children, boys and girls, demand that bi-lingual teaching should be disapproved and prohibited. He says he is assured that there are to-day children going to the public schools in certain parts of Essex who are unable to speak English, and this three generations after their ancestors arrived in the country. Assuredly nothing more could be needed to prove that the teaching of English has been completely neglected amongst the French-Canadians of that district. We belong to a province of English-speaking people, part of an English-speaking continent, where all children leaving school to engage in the battles of life must be armed

first of all with the English language, cost what it may. If in addition they are able to speak French, Italian, Polish, or any other language, so much the better, but it is absolutely necessary that the base of their education should be English.

"I observed to his Grace that, according to my views, in districts where the French-Canadians were numerous and spoke French it was believed that the master of such a school would succeed better and would be able with better advantage to conduct the children to the use of English by speaking French.

"To this he replied that it was a mistake, and if it was thus in theory it was never put honestly into practice; that the argument in favour of having a French master in French-speaking districts was the argument of clerical or political agitators."

Political Consternation.

Of course there was political consternation in Toronto, with the result that a Mr. Maisonville, secretary to Dr. Reaume, Minister of Public Works, admitted taking the letter from Dr. Reaume's private file and sending it to a friend in Walkerville. Mr. Maisonville was at once dismissed. But his departure was like the outgoing of a man who was proud of the trouble he had created.

The subject was thus under newspaper discussion until Sunday last, when Bishop Fallon issued a statement which put the issue clearly before the people. He indicated that while he was not opposed to the French people, or even to the teaching of French in schools, he is utterly opposed to the present bi-lingual system. Curiously enough, he quoted from Sir Wilfrid Laurier's speech in Montreal last Monday, in declaring that his statement would not be accepted by those in Quebec whom Sir Wilfrid described as "The Pharisee end of Canadian Catholicism."

Bishop Fallon quoted his previous statement of Sept. 22nd, admitted his conversation with Mr. Hanna, and discussed the dismissal of Mr. Maisonville. He is not ready to free Dr. Reaume, the Minister of Public Works, from blame, and rather indicated that Dr. Reaume takes an opposite view in this controversy. He goes on:—

"But, on the main issue, Mr. Hanna stated my views with absolute exactitude, and I desire to reaffirm them. The alleged bi-lingual system of education, as it prevails in certain parts of the Province of Ontario, is absolutely futile as concerning the teaching of either English or French, and utterly hostile to the best interests of the children, both English and French. Let me cite a few facts, culled from a multitude, that I have collected on my tour through the Diocese of London.

"The French-Canadian parishes of Belle River, Big Point, French Settlement, McGregor, Ruscomb, Staples, Stoney Point, Paincourt and Tilbury, with separate schools, and upwards of two thousand children on the rolls, passed a total of ten pupils at the recent entrance examinations. It is from some of these parishes that the loudest noise comes regarding my insistence that these conditions are a disgrace. If the separate schools in these districts are bad, the public schools, also under the alleged bi-lingual system, are worse.

"For the above-mentioned nine districts the public schools succeeded in getting only seven children through the entrance examination, of which Tilbury furnished four, McGregor, Big Point, and Paincourt one each, and the others none. And I could cite many other instances of equal inefficiency. All these facts have been supplied to me, over their own signatures, by the pastors of the parishes I have named.

"Is it any wonder that I should raise my voice on behalf of all the children who live in what might be called the bi-lingual belt of my diocese? And is it not monstrous that for so doing I should be charged with hostility to the French language and to the interests of the French-Canadian people?"

The Bishop's Conclusion.

"This whole question is not a contest between English-speaking and French-speaking Catholics; it is a