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Glimpses of the Political Field

The controversy over the Northwest school question has occasionally developed a discussion concerning the authorship of the Manitoba School Act. Hon. Thomas Greenway has always boasted that he was the author of the legislation which abolished separate schools in Manitoba. On the floor of the house a couple of months ago Hon. Clifford Sifton openly took credit for the part he played in nationalizing the Manitoba school system. These claims are ill-founded. Thomas Greenway and Clifford Sifton had about as much to do with the abolition of separate schools in Manitoba as had Bill Adams with the winning of the Battle of Waterloo. The true story of the Manitoba School Act has been often told in that inside circle of politicians who "know" and are willing to confess the truth when they speak in confidence.

The story as told by enemies of Hon. Joseph Martin is this. Mr. Martin was not content to play the subordinate to Hon. Thomas Greenway. He conspired, or tried to conspire, so it is said, with his colleagues in the Greenway cabinet looking to the overthrow of the premier. The conspiracy did not succeed. Then Mr. Martin in an off-hand way proposed to Mr. Greenway that the government take up the question of abolishing separate schools. Mr. Greenway said: "No." There had been no petitions against the existing system, he pointed out, there had been no complaints of any consequence, and he preferred to let sleeping dogs lie. Mr. Martin assented, or pretended to assent. Some time later the Manitoba public was startled by a speech delivered by Mr. Martin in Brandon, declaring in favor of the abolition of separate schools, and expressing his determination to leave the government if it declined to adopt his educational program.

Thomas Greenway was also startled. He knew that Mr. Martin could fire the prairies with the school question. He knew also that Mr. Martin expected him to maintain the position he had taken against the proposed reform. Mr. Greenway thought the situation over and decided to do what Mr. Martin did not expect him to do. He gracefully concurred in the policy of returning to a distinct national school system, and the necessary legislation was introduced. Mr. Greenway and Mr. Sifton were merely consenting parties to the Manitoba School Act. The credit is due to Hon. Joseph Martin, who took the initiative and compelled the unwilling support of Hon. Clifford Sifton and Hon. Thomas Greenway.

Hon. Robert Rogers has completed the exposure of the pretty fairy tale to the effect that the Northwest in educational matters is being placed in precisely the same position in which the Province of Manitoba voluntarily placed itself. Thianalogy was presented early in the fight over the autonomy bill. Its falsity was evident from the fact that the system which Manitoba accepted did not recognize the principle of separation in education, and that Manitoba is in a position at any time to return to a purely national school system. Hon. Robert Rogers now states, in reply to Rev. Dr. Bryce, that not a cent of the public moneys of Manitoba goes to the support of separate schools. From all these facts it is evident that Manitoba admits an exceedingly mild innovation on its public school system and reserves the right to cancel even these few concessions if

it seems fit. The autonomy legislation, on the other hand, recognizes the fundamental principle of separate or sectional schools—that of separation in education. It places public money at the disposal of these sectarian institutions and it imposes separate schools on the Northwest for all time.

The organs and campaign orators in the service of the government are continually dwelling on the excellence of separate schools which the federal parliament is thrusting on the west. When these tributes to the worth of the Northwest school system are examined they are found to be largely a matter of hearsay. All the testimony we have is from interested persons, men like Dr. Bryce, Rev. Mr. Carmichael and others whose chief concern is the safety of the Dominion government. What do members from provinces three or four thousand miles distant from the Northwest know about the merits of the separate schools that exist out there? No more than members from British Columbia or the territories know about the character of the schools of Prince Edward Island. Yet nine-tenths of the members who voted on the question of fastening separate schools on the Northwest are precisely in this position. They know what the separate schools in the Northwest are only from hearsay and as a rule it has been very unreliable hearsay.

Ordinary common sense is outraged by the suggestion that all the political intrigue, all the clerical interference and all the noise and turmoil of a political crisis were for the purpose of creating a dual national school system in the Northwest. If there was a little difference between the public and separate schools in the Northwest the minority would be as well suited by one as by the other. Roman Catholics would not go to the trouble of establishing schools which differed only in name from the public schools. The fact is that on the principle of separation in education is given practical recognition separate schools will be what they want to be. This is what Mr. Sbarretti fought so hard for in Manitoba, the separation of the children of Roman Catholics from the children of Protestants. A separate school controlled by Roman Catholic trustees and taught by a Roman Catholic teacher will be exactly what teacher and trustees desire it to be in spite of government inspection.

Some good, kind friends of the cloth are trying to help The Globe out of its dilemma. They are testifying to the holy calm that prevails in the Northwest, and expressing a fond contentment with the terms of the autonomy bill. Without their aid The Globe would have found it more difficult to switch from championship of provincial rights to advocacy of coercion in such a short space of time. But what do these clerical observations amount to? They are inspired by a bitter and unreasoning partisanship, and in most cases their testimony is discredited by the friendship they professed for the cause of provincial rights in the campaign of '96. It would be well for the church if ministers like Rev. Dr. Bryce, Rev. E. D. MacLaren and Rev. Mr. Carmichael, who have the party instinct so abnormally developed, would observe a discreet silence. Let them have their party prejudices if they will but let them hide those prejudices as a weakness rather than parade them as a virtue.

The ordinary thinking Canadian citizen of to-day is not a dyed-in-the-wool partisan. He is not wedded to party, except insofar as a party may at a given time be the medium for the enforcement of principle. What principle will triumph if Rev. Dr. Bryce, Rev. E. D. MacLaren and Rev. Mr. Carmichael succeed in misrepresenting the Northwest school section? What ideal will be advanced by the election of Hon. Charles Hyman in London or George Smith in North Oxford? The narrow political prejudices of certain ministers of the gospel see no farther than the interests of their party. What is the layman to gather from this mad devotion to party shibboleths? Assuredly nothing which will increase his respect for deliverances from the pulpit.

The clergy is not flattered by such exhibitions as we are having from Rev. Dr. Bryce and his brethren in the cause of coercion. Yet it is in a measure true that the clergy has shown a greater unwillingness to turn its back on party traditions than any other section of the community. Members of the other learned professions, the tradesman, the mechanic, the farmer, the laborer, are learning to identify right and wrong in politics wholly apart from the professions of one party or the other. And they are learning very rapidly that the old idea of one party being chronically right and the other chronically wrong is a delusion and a myth. The breaking up of party lines finds no encouragement from the clergy. The wildest party fanatics in things political to-day are ministers of the gospel, some of them of considerable eminence. It is too bad that the great body of the clergy, which wisely, perhaps, keeps out of politics, should be misrepresented by the few howling clericals who cannot even suppress their fanaticism when a great question of civil and religious liberty is at stake.

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British and foreign mails close at the Toronto postoffice during June as follows:
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