

THE BALLOT.

Debate in the Local Legislature.

On Wednesday, the 11th instant, Mr. Meredith moved the following resolution:

"That in the opinion of this House the election of Public and Separate School Trustees in cities, towns and incorporated villages, and in townships in which Township Boards are established, should be by ballot; and that it be referred to a committee consisting of _____ to prepare and report to the House, with all convenient speed, a bill to amend the Public and Separate School Act so as to provide that in cities, towns and incorporated villages and in townships in which Township Boards are established, the election of Public and Separate School Trustees shall be by ballot."

Mr. Meredith began by referring to the attitude of the Opposition in the session preceding the general election of 1890 in regard to this question of Separate Schools. He recounted the changes in the law then asked from the Opposition side of the House. The first opposed the right of Separate School Boards to elect a member of the High School Board, the second related to the status of the Separate School supporter, the third proposed legislation in line with the present resolution, the fourth related to qualifications of Separate Schools. Then the Opposition had also introduced a resolution objecting to a plan which allowed the rights of Roman Catholic citizens in regard to Separate Schools to be invaded by any other class of citizens. All these bills and resolutions were negatived and the Government was maintained by a considerable majority at the ensuing general election. Now the statement had been made on behalf of the Opposition during the present session that there was no receding from that position taken in that session of 1890, as stated in those propositions. But it was felt that questions of this kind led to propositions that were not in question at all and which involved a discussion of the religious beliefs of the different sections of the community, which of course was not the intention of the Opposition at all. Therefore, except in so far as the statement to which he had referred was concerned it had not been deemed necessary by the Opposition to reaffirm their policy on these questions during the present Legislature. But when such questions came up in the House the Opposition was bound to take in regard to them the same attitude they had taken in 1890. A bill dealing with this question having been brought in by an hon. member (Mr. Connée), the Opposition feel, therefore, called upon to reaffirm its position in the matter. There was more involved in this question than the mere right of holding an election in the manner in which the resolution declared it should be held. It was the duty of the State, in providing for the education of children and taxing the citizens therefor, to formulate a system of education and to determine, as far as secular education at all events is concerned, the limits within which that education shall take place. Nothing was more important to the consolidation of a nation and the making of progress than that the school system of that nation should be so constituted that its young people should be trained to have, as far as possible, similar objects and ambitions in life. He had said, when discussing this subject in 1890, that the Separate School system was not adapted to doing this. For saying this he had been charged with bigotry and narrow-mindedness. It was strange, indeed, that a man could not in this country express an opinion on a question of this kind without having such a charge as this preferred against him. We had long ago in this country done away

with anything like a connection between church and State. When that connection existed it would have been the duty of the State schools to teach the dogmas of the State church, but the moment that the State church is abolished it is a logical sequence that the doctrine or dogma of no sect should be taught in the State schools. A school teacher is as much an official of the State as the Attorney General himself, and it is not right that officials of the State should teach under the authority of the State the views of any particular church. Mr. Meredith then cited the Separate Schools Act of 1893, which embodied the system sanctioned by the B.N.A. act, and was, therefore, put beyond the reach of the Legislature. He thought that a reasonable system to have adopted would have been that persons who on religious grounds did not wish to send their children to the Public Schools should, on giving evidence of having satisfactory private schools, have been exempt from taxation for Public School purposes. The act of 1868, however, went further, and gave the Roman Catholic minority the rights of the State as to imposition of taxes and maintenance of the school system. Still, Mr. Meredith thought, the contention which had been put forward in 1890 that the question of the ballot was beyond the power of the Legislature, that operating was an inalienable right of the Roman Catholic minority, would bear examination. The 1893 act in its preamble stated that its purpose was to put the Separate School system in harmony with that of the Common Schools. The cardinal feature of the act was that five or more heads of families could set up a Separate School, but the school once established, the machinery for the election of trustees and the appointment of the Chairmen and other officials was to be identical with the machinery in use in the Common School system. The inspection of the schools, too, was to be on the same lines as that of the Common Schools. The whole tone of the act, Mr. Meredith argued, was in favor of preserving a uniformity of system between the Common and the Separate Schools. While Dr. Ryerson was in power. Mr. Meredith remarked, this plan was not departed from, but when the political head of the Education Department assumed office those changes were made which have created so much irritation. At present there are Public Schools which are almost Separate Schools, the teachers and scholars all being Roman Catholics; yet these schools are inspected by Protestant inspectors, and no trouble arises. It is an insult to the Protestant majority to say that Protestants are not to be chosen as inspectors of Roman Catholic schools; he would have no objection to having a Roman Catholic inspector for Public Schools, and could see no reason why the reverse could not take place. Under that statute, too, the State had as full control over the text-books used in Separate Schools as in Public Schools. Mr. Meredith holding that the Attorney-General had receded from his position of 1890, that the Legislature had no control over the text-books of the Separate Schools. He protested, Mr. Meredith went on, against any imputation of intolerance. He did not wish to be considered as a Protestant champion; he was there as a representative and a citizen, to do his duty with regard to the State and the State schools. He was there to assert his views and to endeavor to get them placed on the statute book; he did not wish to attack any man's religion, and if the Anglican Church, of which he was a member, were to hold the same privileges as those held by the Roman Catholic Church he would raise his voice against them. He then defended the people of Ontario from the charge of being more illiberal than those of Quebec, holding that in

Quebec the Public Schools are denominational, and that the Protestant must have recourse to the Separate School or else have Roman Catholic dogmas taught to his children, whereas in Ontario the Public Schools are secular, and a Roman Catholic will not have any unwelcome doctrines taught to his children. As for the ballot, the position of the Roman Catholic Church, i.e., of the hierarchy, was that the schools were the property of the church, which has rights of direction and control, which it exercises directly or indirectly. Against any such proposition the speaker most emphatically protested. The rights as to Separate Schools were given to individual citizens to be exercised by them as citizens; the rights are civil rights, and no man can control them. It had been said that even if the Roman Catholics had the ballot they would still be influenced in their vote by the Church. Even granting that, the State would have done its duty; it would have given the citizen the protection, and if he chose to surrender it, it was then none of the State's business. But if the State does not give that protection it does not do its duty. The contention that the Roman Catholics have not expressed a desire for the ballot Mr. Meredith met by the argument that the duty of the Legislature is to deal with these questions, no other machinery for amendments being provided. When the first ballot bill regarding Public Schools was introduced in 1878 the courts declared that such a proposition as that embodied in the present resolution was in the control of the Legislature, and Mr. Meredith thought that the optional clause in that bill was introduced to pave the way for the Government when the time came to support such a measure as Mr. Connée's present bill. One rule should prevail throughout the Province. If the elections were open anywhere they should be open everywhere. If the ballot was used anywhere it should be used all over Ontario. Why should not the Government go the full length of these resolutions? Had the position changed since 1890? Did the hon. member for Algoma (Mr. Connée), because he was a member of the Roman Catholic Church, speak for that Church with any more authority than the hon. member for Kent (Mr. Clancy), who was also a member of that Church? He thought not. Yet Mr. Clancy had voted for a resolution similar to the present one in 1890. The position had not changed since then, despite the assertion of the Attorney-General to the contrary. Such a contention was but a sham. Mr. Meredith closed his speech by an emphatic repudiation of the charge of bigotry, or of any attempt on the part of himself and followers to stir up religious animosities. They set themselves against no man because of his religion, they considered no man unfit to hold any position on account of his religion. The charges brought against the Opposition in this respect at the last general election had caused the thousands of votes of the Roman Catholic Church to be turned against them, and the Government had, consequently, triumphed. But the Opposition had done its duty, and would do its duty again by abiding by the principles that were then enunciated. He did not desire to go any further into the matter, and so stir up feeling on the subject unnecessarily, but he thought it was essential that the occasion should not pass without the attitude of the Opposition being plainly placed on record. (Opposition applause.)

Hon. Geo. W. Ross said Mr. Meredith had spoken more moderately than he had done in 1890, though he held to the principles he then enunciated, in a somewhat modified form. The hon. gentleman was raising a great question. There was no question which would so soon raise disturbances in almost every phase of life as that of

religious education in the schools. Ontario had suffered much from them in the past, and those who recollected the disputes of old in Parliament and in the country could not but regret that he was again raising this great problem. The old Parliament of Upper Canada was the scene of conflict, not only on religious lines but on political lines, springing from these religious disputes. He did not wonder that Mr. Meredith had spoken solemnly and with less fervor than usual in unfolding his policy for the renewal of these troubles. Would he contend that the renewal of such disturbances would be to the advantage of the country? He could not do so. Similar disturbances in the past, in England, Scotland and Ireland, had sadly interfered with the prosperity of these countries while they prevailed. By renewing those troubles here we should be following the worst examples in the history of the old countries. It was an unpatriotic course to follow. No one had ventured to endeavor to unlock the door of the past in this respect until the hon. gentleman had come into the House and thrown down the gauntlet in 1890. Before that year, in which Mr. Meredith had first enunciated this policy in the hope of capturing the support of a section of the Protestant party, the Roman Catholics of the Province had appeared to be, to a large extent, contenting themselves with the Public Schools provided by the State. Since 1880, when this agitation had commenced, and since when it had been maintained, there had been a very much larger number proportionately of Separate Schools established than before the enunciation of this anti-Separate School policy. The hon. gentleman had said he wanted national consolidation. He (Mr. Ross) thought it was clear the present agitation would lead only to national disturbance and disintegration. Glancing at the system of the United States, Mr. Ross showed that, although Roman Catholics there are required to support the Public School, as well as their own Separate School, if they choose to have the latter, yet the proportion of Roman Catholic children attending Roman Catholic Separate Schools was fully as large as in Ontario, and in Ontario the number would have been smaller than it is but for the agitation of hon. gentlemen opposite. If Separate or denominational Schools prevented national consolidation, why was it that it had not had that effect in England, where the annual grant on behalf of voluntary, or denominational, schools was a very large proportion of the whole? Had a denominational system of education prevented a national consolidation in England? Surely not. It would certainly be a pleasant thing if all the children of the Province were educated in the same schools, and had objects and ambitions in common. But when were those halcyon times coming? He feared the time was far distant. Mr. Meredith had said the severance of the relations of church and State had meant that no religious dogmas should be taught in schools. The fact was that Separate Schools had been allowed in 1868 simply that the Roman Catholics might have the privilege of giving religious instruction in their schools. Mr. Ross then briefly traced the history of the Separate School act of 1868, and the amendments subsequently made thereto in regard to the status of voters, which amendments had been, he said, the natural result of the municipal development of the Province. Surely hon. gentlemen would not pretend that the act of 1868 was to remain as it was passed, and never to be amended, no matter what developments might take place elsewhere, or what necessities might arise in regard to the education of the children attending Separate Schools. (Mr. Meredith—Hear, hear.) The Legislature had full right, Mr. Ross