

TO THE

Electors of the County of Glengarry.

GENTLEMEN—As I understand that considerable speculation and uncertainty exists throughout the County as to the position which I shall occupy at the coming General Election, now within measurable distance whether there be a further session of the existing Parliament or not, I deem it fair to the Electorate and just to myself definitely and immediately to state the position which I shall then assume.

It is within the knowledge of you all that there has recently arisen, owing to the decision of the Judicial Committee of Her Majesty's Privy Council in England, the highest Court in the British Empire, an important issue in Canadian affairs which calls for prompt action or declaration of policy, if not immediate solution.

I refer to the vexed question of the Separate Schools in the Province of Manitoba. Shortly the position is as follows:

Previous to the entry of what now constitutes that Province, which was then known as the Red River Settlement, ~~with~~ the Dominion of Canada in 1870, Separate Schools of both denominations, Catholic and Protestant, had for many years existed and were supported and controlled by those belonging to the respective denominations. It was then stipulated and expressly understood and agreed, as much in the interest of the Protestant portion of the community as of the French Canadian and Catholics—for it was then a matter of conjecture only whether that Province would in process of time have preponderating Protestant or Catholic population—that in the event of future settlement what it might the system of Separate Schools should continue to prevail, recognized by law and sanctioned and aided by Government under the new Constitution. It was on those terms only that Manitoba entered the Confederation.

The compact as to Separate Schools continued to be recognized and faithfully observed by the Government and Legislature of the Province until the year 1890, when the Legislature passed an Act abolishing the Separate Schools of the Catholics and declaring that in the future, a system of Common schools only should prevail, to which Catholics and Protestants must send their children, and to which both alike must contribute their School rates, with the result that not only were the Catholic Schools confiscated without compensation to those who erected them, but the Catholic people are now compelled to pay two sets of School rates—the one to satisfy the law and the other to satisfy their consciences and afford their children education.

To obtain redress from this intolerable injustice the Catholics promptly appealed to the Courts to have the Act annulled as being beyond the jurisdiction of the Legislature, relying upon the express terms of the Act of Union and the situation of affairs previous to the entry of Manitoba into the Confederation. After a number of decisions had been given in the Courts, some in favor of the contention of the Catholics and others adverse thereto (that of the Supreme Court of Canada being unanimous in their favor), it was ultimately decided by the Privy Council in England that the Act was within the competency of the Legislature to pass, and that it could not on that ground, whatever its demerits or flagrant injustice, be declared invalid.

Again did the Catholics of the Province, conscious of the inherent justice of their case and confident that in the end right must prevail, appeal to the Courts of Law, this time to settle the question as to whether it was not within the power of the Governor-General-in-Council to afford relief by remedial legislation or otherwise, with the result that the Privy Council of Great Britain eventually and very recently declared that the Governor-General-in-Council—meaning thereby the Government of Canada—had the power, if disposed, to apply the remedy.

Such, to-day, is the position of affairs, and the situation is one of extreme gravity.

It must be manfully met by those who are actuated by a sense of justice and possessed of the courage of their convictions. The question then is: shall there or shall there not be remedial legislation or other substantial relief such as will meet the exigency of the case and be satisfactory and just to the Manitoba minority?

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