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House of Commons Debates

THIRD SESSION—EIGHTH PARLIAMENT

SPEECH

OF

J. H. N. BOURASSA, M.P.

ON THE

MANITOBA SCHOOL QUESTION

OTTAWA, THURSDAY, 12TH MAY, 1898

Mr. BOURASSA. Mr. Speaker, I feel confident that all the members on this side of the House and most of the members on the other side had hoped that this third session of the present Parliament would have passed without having forced upon us a discussion of this kind; without having obliged us to listen once more to the passionate appeals to racial and religious prejudices such as we have heard in this debate. I have always been of the opinion that this was not the place to discuss religious matters. And I have always thought, as a citizen of the province of Quebec, and as a true friend, I trust, to the minority in Manitoba, that many of the discussions that were heard during the last Parliament should never have taken place. In this I do not wish to speak for only one side of politics. I hope this is the last time that this question will come before us as a political question. We have heard the hon. member for Beauharnois (Mr. Bergeron), the supposed leader of the province of Quebec on the Conservative side. But, unfortunately, his intention expressed in the end of his second, or, we may say, his third speech, is not at all in accord with the beginning of his speech, and therefore I find only one explanation of all his speeches, and of the position he has taken yesterday and today; it is, that not finding any sufficient grounds for opposing this Government on business questions, or even on this very school question, he has decided to continue

the policy of passionate appeals to prejudice, for which appeals there is no foundation. The Conservative party, in the course of its history, has very often resorted to such appeals. I do not, in speaking thus, include all the membership of the Conservative party, because I know that there were and are still men in that party who do not like that kind of appeal, or the policy that dictates them. Generally, when appeals of this kind were made, there were members of the Conservatives of Quebec wing who rode the Catholic horse, and members of the Ontario wing who rode the Protestant horse. The hon. member for Beauharnois has thought proper to ride both horses at the same time. I acknowledge that the hon. member has many of the qualities of a political clown, though he has not many qualities to assure him any other position in the political arena. But this time he has failed even in that. I suppose he was afraid that his friend and colleague the hon. member for West York would forget to ride the Protestant horse, and he would show him some movements of that animal to be practiced next time in Ontario. If anything is to be gathered from the long speech, divided into three parts, of the hon. member for Beauharnois, it was that the Liberal party has deceived the Catholic electorate of the Dominion, that they had deceived the Protestant electorate of the Dominion and that they had deceived the Pope. I do not think it is necessary to argue these points at any

length. But, as for the first, I will say for myself, as a Liberal of the province of Quebec and a Roman Catholic, I can speak for the people of Quebec as well as can the hon. member for Beauharnois—and, I think, much better—and I can say that the Catholics of Quebec have not been deceived. We do not say that the settlement achieved by the right hon. Premier and his colleagues is a full and complete settlement. When we consider that such a question as the Manitoba school question had been treated on most unsound principles for five years, had been so handled as to develop racial and religious passions, we could not expect it to be settled altogether satisfactorily in the first instance. The Government coming into power had to settle the question so as to do substantial justice to everybody, and not deceive anybody, and this has been achieved. I do not want to enter again upon the quarrels of the past. I think we have already had too many divisions between the two parties on this question. I do not pretend that all the members of the Conservative party were deceitful in their policy on this question. As to the hon. leader of the Opposition (Sir Charles Tupper), I, a young man, do not wish to be understood as having said that he had pursued a deceitful course in this matter. I believe the hon. leader of the Opposition and some members of his party were sincere. But I believe that, by reason of the elements in his own party in different provinces of the Dominion, the hon. gentleman could not possibly have settled this question. If the hon. gentleman were not still in political life, I think that he, as well as Sir Mackenzie Bowell, could tell, with regard to this question, that it was impossible for him to achieve success, because he was in the midst of a nest of traitors. Supposing even that the Conservative party had been returned to power, and had sought to carry out their policy of putting into force remedial legislation, I believe that with the elements in their own party, and with the condition of public sentiment in the country, they could not have settled the school question, even after the Remedial Bill was passed. But these are things of the past, and we must face the question as it stands to-day. The first duty of the present Government on coming into power was to calm national and religious prejudices, before they attempted to do anything else—and in that they succeeded. There was also one special question to be considered, and that was the situation of the Catholic Liberals of the province of Quebec. The leader of the Liberal party, because of his attitude upon this question, had been represented in the province of Quebec as a traitor to his race and religion. Sir, I do not intend to bring up in this Chamber difficulties that arose between the Catholic clergy and the Liberals of the province of Quebec. This is no place to discuss such questions. This is not the place

to discuss religious questions at all, and especially such religious questions as interests only the laymen and clergy of one particular faith. Sir, we have a right, as British subjects, to go where we like to settle matters of our own church. In saying that, I know I have not only the approval of Catholics but of independent Protestants in this House who wish this country to be free to everybody, of whatever creed or nationality. During long debates in this House we often boast about our country, about its size, its resources and its splendid growth. Everything we say should convince us that there is room for all kinds of people, but there is no room for national prejudices, no room for narrow views or for that kind of politics that the hon. member for West York has tried to impose on this House and this country for many years, and that, misled, I am sorry to say, by the example of the hon. member for Beauharnois, he has tried to impose on us again. The conduct of the hon. member for Beauharnois, the stand he has taken upon the question, would make me ashamed of my province, but that I know that the feelings expressed by him are not the feelings of the people in the province of Quebec.

Sir, I do not often trouble this House with the local politics of Quebec, but I think I may say that the province of Quebec is just as liberal and just as British as any other province in the Dominion of Canada, and we intend to keep her so. We say that in this matter the province of Quebec has not been deceived, and her people have given proofs of it time after time since the general elections. I will not attempt to answer the ridiculous accusation that the Catholic Liberals of the House of Commons and of the Senate have tried to deceive the Pope. The hon. member for Beauharnois spoke of the Pope in such a way as to please the member for West York (Mr. Wallace), but he must not think that the members of this House are so ignorant or so prejudiced as not to know better the character of Pope Leo XIII. Many Protestant countries are proud to entertain cordial relations with the Pope. There are good Protestants in this House, and there are also good Catholics, but I do not think there is a Protestant in this House that would accuse Bismarck, the late Iron Chancellor of Germany, of having betrayed the Protestant interests of Germany in favour of the Catholic minority of that Empire. When a dispute arose between Germany and the Kingdom of Spain upon a point of deep interest to the German people, to whom did Prince Bismarck apply to obtain a settlement of the question? He applied to Pope Leo XIII, and when judgment was rendered against Germany in favour of Spain, did you hear the official press of Germany crying out against the decision, and endeavouring to excite the feelings of the Protestants against the Holy See because the decision had been

rendered in favour of a Catholic country and against a Protestant country? No, Sir. There is sufficient breadth of mind in Germany and in many other countries; there is sufficient breadth of mind in this country to enable the Protestants to realize the beneficent effect of the Papacy in this world. I do not say that the Pope should interfere between Catholics or Protestants in civil matters, nor has he attempted to do so. Sir, one of the great statesmen of France, one of the greatest philosophers of this century, who was a devoted Protestant and at one time Prime Minister of his country, Guizot, said once that the Catholic Church was a great school of respect. Let not my Protestant fellow-countrymen fear because we Catholics desire to exercise the right of going to the head of our church to settle difficulties that may arise among ourselves. Let not our Protestant friends in this House be uneasy. The more we are attached to the Holy See as Catholics, the greater our respect for the rules of our church, the deeper will be our attachment, let me assure our Protestant friends, to the political authority of this Empire, the deeper will be our attachment to the civil rights of Canada and of Great Britain. The hon. member for East Grey (Mr. Sproule) made us a very fine offer, as he often does. Whenever we have difficulty with our priests he suggests that we should send them to jail.

Mr. SPROULE. I wish emphatically to contradict that, and I am surprised that the hon. gentleman should attempt to misrepresent what I did say. I said that in case of interference on the part of the priesthood with the political or civil rights of the people, we have laws upon our statute-book punishing such interference, and I asked why the Prime Minister did not invoke that law.

Mr. BOURASSA. Well, the hon. gentleman has explained himself much better on this occasion than he did before. He has simply said in fifty words what I made him say in ten. Sir, what is that interference which the clergy of Quebec have been accused of exercising during the last election? Certain bishops of the province of Quebec and some members of the clergy, took a certain stand in the last election, and held that Catholic voters could not vote for Liberal candidates. They based their interference upon the ground that it was the duty of Catholics to vote for remedial legislation, and that the just rights of the Catholic minority in Manitoba on the school question could not be restored to them unless some remedial legislation was passed. There was no division amongst the clergy of the province of Quebec or amongst the laymen, as to the rights of the Catholic minority, nor as to the duty of the Government to restore them in some way. There was no division upon that point then, and there is no division upon that point to-day. The only dif-

ference of opinion that existed was as to the interpretation of the constitution in regard to that question. Let me quote for the benefit of my hon. friend a letter that was addressed by Cardinal Ledochowski, Secretary of the Propaganda, to the bishops of the province of Quebec, in which he urged them not to ask the Dominion of Canada to do anything contrary to the sovereignty of the British Empire, or that would bring them into conflict in any way with their Protestant fellow-citizens.

Mr. BERGERON. Will you read the letter?

Mr. BOURASSA. I have only the French text of the letter, but I will read the paragraph, and afterwards give the translation:

Maintenant que, en vertu de la décision récente du Conseil privé de la Reine en Angleterre, le gouvernement fédéral est certainement pourvu de l'autorité requise pour traiter cette très grave question, il y a lieu d'espérer qu'elle trouvera enfin cette heureuse solution que réclament et les droits les mieux établis et le bien de la religion et de l'Etat.

Now that, in virtue of the recent decision of the Queen's Privy Council in England, the Federal Government is certainly provided with the requisite authority to treat this very important question, there is reason to hope that a solution will finally be found which will be in accordance with well-established rights, as well as with the welfare of religion and of the state.

A difference of opinion was manifested among the members of the clergy in Quebec as to the application to be given to that decision of the Privy Council. All that the Catholics of Quebec were asked to do was to vote for men who would put in force the judgment of the Privy Council. But we Liberals claimed the right to decide for ourselves as to what means should be taken to apply that judgment, and to secure to the minority the rights which we believed they had been deprived of. We claimed that liberty then, and we claim it now. I must apologize to the House if I touch upon certain points that are perhaps not interesting to all the members of the House, but I do so in order to explain what was our position. We have now the proof that our contention was good, because in the encyclical to which the member for Beauharnois has referred, it is stated in plain terms that we are at perfect liberty in respect to the means to be taken to procure a settlement of that question.

Mr. BERGERON. Is that settlement accepted by the encyclical?

Mr. BOURASSA. The hon. member for Beauharnois has treated that settlement with great severity. He has been more Catholic than the Pope. But I doubt his sincerity.

Mr. BERGERON. That is not an answer. I want to know from my hon. friend whether that settlement has been

accepted by the encyclical issued by the Papal authorities?

Mr. BOURASSA. That settlement has been termed by the Pope in almost the same spirit as was expressed a moment ago by the Prime Minister when he said that he knew the settlement was not a perfect one, but that it was a settlement as far as the intervention of this Parliament was concerned.

Mr. BERGERON. Not at all. I want to show the hon. gentleman—

Some hon. MEMBERS. Order; order.

Mr. BERGERON. The hon. gentleman allows me to interrupt him. I want to remind him that His Holiness the Pope, in the encyclical which he has just mentioned, says that the settlement which has been come to is ineffective and unacceptable.

The SOLICITOR GENERAL. He says nothing of the sort.

Mr. BOURASSA. The hon. gentleman must read the encyclical with a little more care. When he says that this settlement was inspired by the false disposition of this Government, of the Prime Minister and of the Liberals of Canada, he is flatly contradicting the words of the Pope, because the Pope says that this settlement was inspired by a spirit of justice. I do not wish to boast about my religious principles or my national attachment in this House or on the platform, but I say to the hon. member for Beauharnois that when the Roman Catholic Church is not satisfied with what has been given to her, she will be able to speak for herself and be heard as well as that hon. member. I am a firm believer in the Catholic Church and in the destiny of my race, because I know that in America under our

British rule there is freedom for every creed and freedom for every race. I am a believer in the rule of my church, and if I am a firm believer in the future of my race it is because the politics and policy affirmed by the hon. member for Beauharnois and the hon. member for West York are not the policies and politics that are going to prevail in this country. I believe firmly that this school question will be settled, and settled on account of the position taken by this Government, a position which has been met by the good-will of the Greenway Government, which has given more since this Government came into power than during the whole time when hon. gentlemen opposite were in office. I hope this is the last we shall hear of this question, not because we are afraid of it or afraid of the position that we and this Government have taken. We are able to meet hon. gentlemen opposite in the province of Quebec, and there are members from the English provinces who are able to meet the hon. member for West York and the hon. member for East Grey on their no-popey platform. I trust that so long as this party is in power questions of this kind will be met in the same way. I think hon. gentlemen opposite include men of good-will, and I know that there are hon. members sitting not far from the hon. member for Beauharnois and the hon. member for West York who are also desirous that this question should be settled in a just manner, and that cries and appeals like those made during the last day or two will never be repeated in Parliament. I thank the hon. members for the kind attention to which they have listened to my remarks; I had no intention of speaking so long, but I think I had to express the views of my fellow-countrymen in the province of Quebec on this question.

