

(October 24, 1921.)

The Separate School Question

BY ARCHBISHOP NEIL McNEIL.

Mr. President and Gentlemen.—In the first place I wish to thank the Canadian Club for this opportunity of speaking to you all about a public service which has suffered from public service, and I wish also to congratulate the Club in upholding the right to free speech in the discussion of a public question.

At the present time there are 80,000 pupils at least in attendance at the Separate Schools of Ontario and the annual expenditure has now reached at least \$2,500,000. Now that is a public service of sufficient magnitude to occupy the attention of any citizen. It is not your interest and it is not our interest that 80,000 children should pass through a branch of public service and not receive the education to which every child of Ontario has a right.

Perhaps I should emphasize the fact that they are public schools. They are not private schools at all. They are a part of the machinery of public education in the Province of Ontario. Any laws that are made for the betterment of these schools are made by the Legislature of Ontario. Any regulations under which they operate are regulations passed by the Cabinet of Ontario. Their daily administration is under the Department of Education in Queen's Park. There may possibly be a doorkeeper or a caretaker in the Department of Education who is a Catholic. I have not enquired. There may even be a stenographer, for aught I know, but of the men who have an administrative voice in the Department of Education of Ontario there is not one single Catholic. I am not complaining of that. They give us fair play. But I am pointing out to you that you have every possible safeguard as regards the general administration of the separate schools of Ontario in the fact that they are subject to the control and the daily administration of the Department of Education as it exists to-day. It is they who formulate the regulations. It is they who appoint the inspectors, who draw up courses of study, who prescribe text books, who lay down conditions under which teachers may be employed, who examine the accounts of all school boards, whether you call them public or separate. By the way, the word public school as used in On-

tario is a localism. If the official reports had preserved the word "public" in the Separate School nomenclature there would not be the confusion in the minds of many people that exists to-day. They should have been called "Public Separate Schools," and not simply Roman Catholic Separate Schools as we find it in the reports. I mean that they are a part of the public school system of the Province of Ontario.

Perhaps I have not emphasized as I should the public side of them, because I find that one of the objections raised to any consideration of the separate schools is precisely this, that they are not public schools. They are. They are not private schools. The Department lays down the course and prescribes the examinations that the teachers must undergo to become teachers. All our teachers, whether they are sisters or Christian Brothers or lay teachers, have gone through the ordinary normal schools, they all undergo the ordinary teachers' examinations. They have the same certificates as the public school teachers; the text-books used in the separate schools are the same, except in the teaching of religion, and there is a little difference in the reading text, but the reading text-books have to be submitted to the Department of Education.

Gentlemen, I think I have said enough to convince anyone that as far as public guarantee is concerned, as far as the public control is required to make them efficient, to regulate them, to control them, you have it in super-abundance.

There is another preliminary remark I think I should make. It has come to me in conversation and I have seen it in the newspapers that it is absurd for us to claim as I do claim that you must give serious consideration to this part of the Public School machinery of the country or of the Province on account of the national unity, if you please. Well, as one newspaper remarked, that seems ridiculous; instead of uniting these schools, you separate them, and how dare you talk of their promoting the national unity. Gentlemen, when we speak of national unity we generally mean one of two things. We do not mean two things at once, as a rule. But in Canada there are two aspects of national unity that we must know and consider. There is the good will and mutual confidence between individuals in the same community that is required for national well-being. That is a matter of national point of view, that we live in concord and peace and good-will in each community in Canada. Now when I say that the separate schools are an element in national unity I am not referring to that side of national unity. I am referring to this other, and it is a vital matter.

Canada, the Dominion, is made up of provinces. These provinces united voluntarily in confederation in 1867 and that confederation was sanctioned by the British Parliament. Now when we refer to national union or unity we may mean and often do mean the mutual good-will and confidence between province and province. That is just as important for national unity as the mutual good-will between individual and individual in a given community.

Well, gentlemen, at the time of Confederation separate schools were made a fundamental plank in that compact of union between Ontario and Quebec, and in that sense separate schools were made an essential condition of the union which resulted in the Dominion of Canada. I shall have to dwell on that again perhaps, but in passing I wish to point out that it is not nonsense; it is sound historical sense to assert that the separate schools and their existence in Ontario are closely connected with the national unity of Canada.

There is another preliminary remark I must make. There are different elements of permanency in the separate schools of Ontario. When a public service has functioned during 80 years continuously as the separate schools have functioned in Ontario then it is no easy matter to change them. They live now in the habits, in the convictions, and in the affections of the Catholic people of Ontario. You will find an individual here and there perhaps that will make you think, "Oh well, the Catholics are drifting away from their liking for separate schools."

Gentlemen, I know most of the Catholic people, I know what they are thinking, and I want to assure you that those schools live to-day in the affections of the Catholic people of Ontario. You may like that or you may dislike it but it is a fact, and I wish to give you some illustrations of sacrifice, of recent sacrifice which show plainly that what I said is really a fact.

Take the little town of Weston just outside Toronto. There is in it a struggling Catholic congregation. The population is growing. There has been for a long time a one-roomed separate school in the little town of Weston. Two years ago it became evident that the school was too small and would have to be enlarged. The Separate School Board of Weston could not afford to enlarge it, nor to build a new school. And the congregation stepped in last year and undertook a debt of \$25,000 without any obligation from the Separate School Board, or any expectation that the Board would ever refund

that money. The congregation undertook a debt of \$25,000 to put up a four-roomed school in Weston.

Now a similar action was taken in Collingwood, in Oshawa, in Port Dalhousie, Thorold, Niagara Falls, and I don't know how many different places in Ontario. In the town of St. Catharines there are four schools. One of these schools, a four-roomed school, was built before the war by the Catholic congregation and not by the School Board, because the Board had not the money, at an expenditure of about \$30,000 including the site. Three or four years ago it was found that the plumbing of the old separate school had to be renewed. The School Board had not the money. The parish put up \$5,000 to renew the plumbing. Last year, or the last few years, it became evident that a large number of Catholic children in the east end of St. Catharines, the children of working people, mostly foreign immigrants, were too far from the school and an additional school was needed. The School Board decided that another building would have to be put up in the east end to accommodate its children. But it had not sufficient funds. The parish put up \$30,000 to help out. That money came from the pockets of English-speaking Catholics on behalf of immigrant children from Southern and Eastern Europe.

In the City of Hamilton several years ago it was found that they would either have to raise the rate or collect money in the parishes to supplement the school rates for their growing population. You know Hamilton is a busy industrial city. They decided that they would collect the money in the parishes and not raise the rates. They made the experiment of raising the rates and then decided that the better way would be to raise the money, the supplementary money, by means of parish collections. Every year the Catholic parishes of Hamilton collected between \$14,000 and \$15,000 to supplement the school taxes that come to them in the city of Hamilton.

Gentlemen, I think that when a man gets to the age of three score and ten he should have a few weeks vacation every year. Well, I am sorry to say that I could not get even one week for more than two years. And what ties me to my desk is this—how to keep our church finances going while we are carrying the load of more than half a million dollars worth of property placed at the disposal of the separate schools.

Now, gentlemen, I have told you just a few of the facts as to the sacrifices that the Catholic people have made to uphold their schools. These are real sacrifices, heavy sacrifices, borne by poor people. The worry and the work involved in these sacrifices shortened the lives of some of our priests.

There is one priest in the hospital to-day on account of that very thing. If you look at Queen's Square you will see that there is no big new Catholic college there corresponding with the colleges of the other denominations. No. We have had to sacrifice our educational means to keep alive the separate schools, the elementary schools. We should like to devote that money to higher education. It would be better for Ontario if we did. But, gentlemen, there was one thing that priests and people were determined to conserve under any circumstances and that was the elementary Catholic schools.

Now, gentlemen, let me come to what I really came here to discuss. I am sorry I have kept you so long with these preliminary items, but it was scarcely possible to avoid it. Here is a public service which you cannot change. You cannot change it because it has been so long in existence. It exists in the affections of the people and you might tear every statute out of the statute books whether of Ontario or the British parliament and you would not thereby abolish separate schools. The alternative, you may imagine, is to have all public schools as you understand them, and then, if you abolished the laws granting us taxes for separate schools, our children would flock to the public schools. Not a bit of it! That is not the alternative at all. The alternative is really public separate schools or private parish schools.

In the United States the Catholics are expending at least \$40,000,000 a year in addition to the public school taxes in order to educate their children in parish schools in which their religion forms the atmosphere. That has been called the largest religious fact in North America to-day, but, whether it is or not, that fact would be enlarged considerably if the Catholics of Ontario had to resort to the same plan in order to preserve the religious atmosphere in the education of their children.

Now, gentlemen, with regard to the obligations of Ontario in this matter, the constitutional obligations. I wish to point out that of all the Provinces that entered into the formation of the Dominion of Canada, the one that provided most, the one that benefited most, was unquestionably Ontario. She was in the position to do it, and she did it. I lived for a number of years in Newfoundland and during that time the question of union with Canada came up frequently. And it was evident that union with Canada had no attraction for most of the people in Newfoundland. They said, look at the Maritime provinces of Canada. Are they growing in population any faster than they were? Is their level of wealth higher than ours?

Why should we link up our destiny with that of Canada?" That was the argument I often heard in Newfoundland.

Gentlemen, they cannot point to Ontario and use that argument with any plausibility. Ontario did profit enormously by confederation. Well, do you suppose that in any arrangement of that kind Ontario could enter into that union without giving and taking, and giving as well as taking. She had to take the bitter with the sweet. It was really a wee bit of bitter in a whole cargo of sweets. But she had to take it. Well, gentlemen, on that ground Ontario accepted Separate Schools. It was part of the arrangement of Confederation. The situation in Quebec was such that there was no other way out. It was either accept separate schools in Ontario or have no Dominion of Canada. So to have a Dominion of Canada Ontario accepted the separate schools as a permanent part of the machinery of public education in the Province of Ontario, and no man has a right to say or even to think that Ontario has any intention to repudiate the compact into which she entered in 1867 with the sanction of the British Parliament.

Now, gentlemen, one of the terms of that agreement was this, that the supporters of separate schools would be exempted from all school taxes or all taxes levied for the support of other schools. That is in article 14 of the separate School Act of 1863, and that Act of 1863 became part and parcel of the British North America Act of 1867 as much as if every word had been quoted and made part visibly of the Act of 1867.

Now gentlemen I have come here to tell you that, as a matter of fact through our fault largely perhaps, Ontario is not carrying out the provision of that agreement to-day. We are all, though Separate School supporters, paying to the public schools of Ontario whereas the confederation agreement is as explicit as words could make it to the effect that the separate school supporters of Ontario are to be exempted from taxes levied for the support of other schools.

Two years ago the Hydro Commission in Toronto was asked to divide the taxes of a certain property between the public schools and the separate schools. Generally speaking the Hydro does not pay taxes. But here is a property in competition with business men and it had to pay taxes on certain property in the city of Toronto. The Commission passed a resolution and notified the city council that the school taxes levied on that property were to be divided between public schools and the separate schools on a certain basis that I do

not remember. I have carefully avoided speaking of what basis they should be divided on. That is a detail that can come into the consideration of the House. We can talk about that and talk of the principle. Now the Hydro Commission made this division by resolution and notified the City Council and the matter came before the legal advisers of the City Council. And, of course, the legal adviser pointed out that there is no provision in the Assessment Act for such a division.

Of course there is not. We knew that ourselves. But, gentlemen, there is a provision in the constitution of this Dominion which gives us a constitutional right to that and if it is not in the Assessment Act it is because Ontario is not carrying out its agreement. I do not say it is Ontario's fault. We have stood back. We have really left it for 35 years untouched. We have not bothered.

I went to Sir James Whitney and other people went to other Governments, and Sir James Whitney was most desirous personally to see this thing done. But we did not go to the people and it is to the people we have to go and it is to the people I have come to-day. I point out that this Assessment Act is the thing that must carry into effect the agreement of 1867 and exempt separate school supporters from taxes levied for the support of other schools. We are paying taxes to the public schools on Hydro Commission property. We are paying taxes to the public schools through the National railways. That is a big thing. We are paying taxes to the public schools through the C.P.R. I went to see the C.P.R. people in December last on this subject down in Montreal and they were most anxious; they were most desirous, to divide taxes in Ontario between the two sets of schools. They got their legal advisers to work and they were forced to the conclusion that the law of Ontario as it stood did not allow them to divide the taxes and thousands of Catholic shareholders in the C.P.R. are paying taxes to the public schools of Ontario through the C.P.R.

Cardinal Begin in Quebec is paying taxes to the public schools of Toronto. He is! He is not paying a cent to the separate schools of Toronto. The law does not allow it. I hold some banking shares, probably in the Union Bank which originated in Quebec (founded by Catholics; as was the Royal Bank), and of course many old friends held shares in these banks. Cardinal Begin now has bank shares. The seminary in Quebec has shares, and there are thousands of them scattered over the country. The Assessment Act of Ontario does not allow

them to pay their school taxes to the Separate Schools of Ontario. Mind you, I am not saying that they forbid it in express words. What I mean is this: that the last amendments of the Assessment Act in reference to this matter date back 35 years ago when it was possible to know who were Catholics and who were Protestants in the small companies that existed at the time. To-day the shareholders are scattered all over the world. Their shares are sold in the stock exchanges every day, and it is impossible to determine the denominational relation of the shareholders because that relation cannot be known, since the shares change hands so frequently.

And what is the connection between a group of Catholic shareholders of a paper mill living in the United States and a group of Catholic children in the city of Ottawa? There is no connection. It is not a proper basis.

So, gentlemen, the economic development of the province, with the continuous flowing of individual properties to corporate properties, the increase of corporate properties in relation to the individual properties, is squeezing the taxes payable to the separate schools into ever smaller proportions.

Gentlemen, I would say more, did time permit, but what I want to impress upon you is this: that if Ontario really refused to consider our claim in this matter of taxes and the amendment of the Assessment Act, if Ontario really refuses to do that, it means—that Ontario has decided to repudiate the agreement it entered into in 1867.

Now I thank you very cordially for listening to me in saying about half of what I intended to say.