

FIELDING'S 'ELOQUENT PLEA.

For Calm Discussion and Judgment on Autonomy Bill.

DOES NOT LIKE PRINCIPLE OF SEPARATE SCHOOLS.

But There Must be Give and Take in a Country Like Canada.

WHERE POPULATION IS DIVERSIFIED IN RACE AND RELIGION.

Hon. W. S. Fielding, speaking on the Northwest Autonomy bill in the House of Commons Wednesday night, said: I do not believe the people of Canada will consent that any one of us should shelter himself behind the fence of an alleged constitutional question. This school question is a vexed question, a troublesome question. We can all say with the fullest sincerity that it was a misfortune that we have to deal with it. But once we have it here my belief is that our constituents, the people of Canada, will expect us not to evade it but to meet it fairly, boldly, and discuss it openly and discuss it in a generous spirit, and endeavor to find some solution of the difficult problem.

I do not agree with my hon. friend (Borden) that we are not called upon to discuss the question of separate schools or common schools. I believe that the people of the Dominion today are not going to have their minds engaged with an elaborate analysis of constitutional questions which nine out of ten of them will never read and which the whole ten will fail to understand.

What the people of Canada was concerned about in this bill are the clauses in regard to schools.

"Now this is a question," said Mr. Fielding, "that at any time should be approached with all possible deliberation, especially in a country like Canada, with our diversity of race and creed. He would be a rash man who would plunge into a discussion of that question without a disposition to be reasonable with regard not only to the opinions and convictions, but possibly even to the prejudices of his fellow men. We should be prepared to listen to all that may be said and to make an honest effort to meet the views of those who differ from us in opinion."

We should aim as far as possible to have a system brought about which would come as nearly as possible to our own particular views. But surely each of us must realize that if we are to carry on the government of the country we must not insist on our individual views, but must try to meet the views of those who may differ from us, and to find common ground of action.

For myself, I do not like the principle of separate schools. I regret that such a large number of my fellow citizens in Canada are obliged to take a view, conscientiously, as they say and as I believe, that they cannot support a system of free common schools.

I think it would be a great thing for our country if, in the growth that is now coming so rapidly upon us that children of all races and sections and creeds should meet from day to day and mingle together in work and play in the school room and on the playground, and if we can happily agree upon such a policy it would do much for the grander up building of the country of which we are so proud. I say unhesitatingly that if I were to have my own way only, if one could afford to insist that his opinion must prevail regardless of the wishes of his brethren, I would like to see a school law which did not call for this word "separate." But we must take things as they are. We have to recognize the fact that forty-one per cent. of the people of this dominion do not think as I think on that question, do not think as the majority of Protestants think. What then? Shall we say that they are in the minority and that therefore we shall have no regard for them? Shall we say that they are but forty-one per cent. and we are fifty-nine per cent. and therefore we will be indifferent to them?

No, Mr. Speaker, you cannot govern Canada by any such rule as that. Let us do well to remember that the Roman Catholics are not in a minority everywhere; there is one great province in which our Roman Catholic brethren are in the majority, overwhelmingly in the majority.

Suppose we are to insist upon this doctrine of provincial rights, right down to the last point as was argued tonight, what would be the condition of our Protestant brethren in the province of Quebec? Suppose that

under the sacred name of provincial rights, an effort was made to do away with the separate school system, and with the rights of the minority in the province of Quebec, what would we find? We would find the table of this house and the table of the greater house at Westminster, because the bill would have to pass the imperial parliament, we would find the table of this parliament and the table of the imperial parliament loaded down with petitions, not of the character of so many that come to us now insisting upon the doctrine of provincial rights, but with petitions demanding that the name of provincial rights should not be used for such a purpose, demanding that the majority should not have the right to control, demanding that the rights of the Protestant minority in the province of Quebec shall prevail instead of the wish of the majority.

Let us not forget that in preparing the constitution of confederation the strongest advocates of separate schools were the representatives of the Protestant minority in Quebec.

I venture to say that in the minds of the Protestants of Quebec that thought will sink deep today, and that they will be influenced by the golden rule; do unto others as you would have others do unto you.

There are three great lines of thought today on the question of public education, one held by a great many people is that the secular system of education is the only system which we should have in the public schools. There are many people, altogether Protestants I think, who claim that it is useless to introduce anything like religion into the schools. The second line of thought is that which is held by a great many advocates of what might be called national schools. These people think that with secular education you may associate to a certain degree of what may be properly called religious instruction, that you may be able to say to the teacher, thou shall not teach the "isms" of any denomination.

Then we come to the third line of thought. It is that which is held by our Roman Catholic fellow citizens, but it is also held by many Protestants, and it is: that you cannot have education and religion separated. A great writer has expressed the thought in this sentence: So natural is the union between religion and education that you may justly assume neither is where both are not.

Our Roman Catholic brethren attack more importance than our Protestant friends as a rule do, though many Protestants agree with them, to the question of religious education. They say that with them it is a matter of conscience, they say that they must have their children taught by persons of their own faith who can give instructions in their own creed, and that they would be very much pleased if we could adopt their views. They say—and we shall contend that there is not much truth in their assertion—they say that you cannot have proper religious instruction in the home. We, who form the Protestant majority, say that we cannot undertake to teach any special form of religion in the schools.

Mr. Fielding said that in continuance of the school system of the Northwest, there was no attempt to override an act of parliament, as was the case in supporting the remedial bill against Manitoba. The system of separate schools in the Northwest was a national system. Any one who would read the school ordinances would discover that.

"Let us not conceal from ourselves certain facts," said Mr. Fielding. "Let us be frank with one another. Let us say that the gravity of this situation is even more serious than we may think. If my right honorable friend the prime minister, is to retire from office as he would be obliged to do if this bill were defeated, what then? Under ordinary circumstances the retirement of a minister or the retirement of a government means very little after all. The public adapt themselves to new conditions and one government goes

out and another comes in. Party interest may suffer, but that is not the situation today. There are interests involved in this question which far outweigh any mere party consideration."

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W. T. Stead's Idea of an Endowed Theatre for Unfortunate Class—The Conditions Required.

W. T. Stead, who is 54, never saw a performance in a theatre until this winter, says a special cable despatch from London. Now he believes the theatre ought to be made an agency for the spread of culture and civilization. He favors a state endowed theatre.

The famous editor gave his impressions of the theatre, speaking as a tyro, to a club of theatregoers. He said he believed in the ideal theatre, whose success would depend upon these conditions:

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Mr. Stead appealed to four classes of theatregoers for the endowment of his ideal theatre—royalty, aristocracy, plutocracy and journalists. Arguing that the theatre is now for the classes and not the masses, Mr. Stead said:

"The theatre at present is one of the perquisites of the middle classes. It ought to be the common inheritance of the whole people. One of the signs of the advent of a new era would be that the poor would have the theatre opened to them."

"When I think of what the theatre could do as an agency of culture and civilization, and when I see this miserable derelict vessel, which might have been a veritable ark in which religion, morality and art might have found refuge, converted into a mere haunt of the selfish folk, intent solely upon 'passing the time,' my heart burns hot within me, and I could almost weep over such abominable neglect, such absolute sacrilege."

"I have not found the theatre an abominable thing. It is the good side of the theatre that makes me sad, because the better the play the more monstrously wicked it is to confine it to the handful who alone can afford to pay the modern prices."

"The poor ought to have the theatre opened to them. It is to be believed that out of our rich play-loving population there are not those with sufficient of the enthusiasm of self-sacrifice to raise whatever amount of money is necessary to establish at least one ideal experimental theatre."

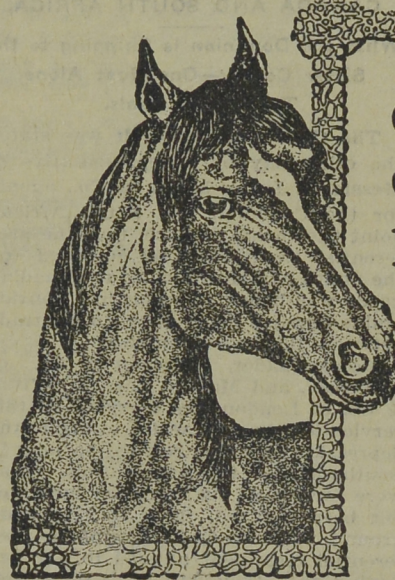
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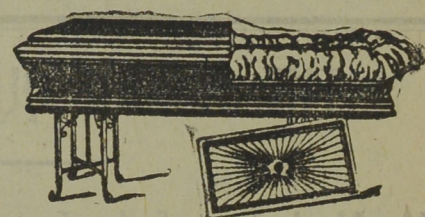
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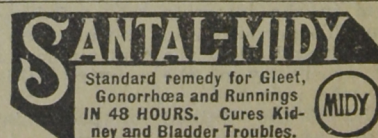
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