

Michael Francis Fallon
Bishop of London
Ontario – Canada
1909 – 1931
The Man and His Controversies

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Michael Francis Fallon, Bishop of London, Ontario, from 1909 until his death in 1931, was born in Kingston, Canada West, on 17 May, 1867. He died in London, Ontario on 22 February, 1931. Michael Fallon came into the world in the same year as the birth of the Dominion of Canada; he left this world in the year which saw the passage of the Statute of Westminster. These coincidences are worth noting because the adult life of Michael Fallon was passionately concerned with the growth of Canada, his native Province of Ontario, the larger society of the British Empire: and all of these major concerns were embraced by a deep, energetic dedication to the Roman Catholic Church.

His interest in secular affairs, although sometimes political in the broad sense, was expressed mostly in a life-long interest in education, and in a constant desire frequently expressed that his fellow-Canadians never forget their great Christian heritage. In this connexion, Fallon felt most keenly that the political unit which best approximated the Christian ideal was the association of the British Empire. Fallon's fervent imperial patriotism, which remained with him to the end of his life, gave a cast to his political and cultural thinking which was bound to bring him in conflict with those who did not share his admiration of the British Empire. He was sufficiently flexible in his attitudes, however, and sufficiently adaptable to new situations to serve with remarkable success as a priest and pastor for eight years in Buffalo, New York. The deep attachment which many Americans in Buffalo, and throughout the United States, felt for Father Fallon, not only during his residence in Buffalo, but during his episcopacy in London, Ontario, was warm testimony to Fallon's ability to attract and to work with people of varying backgrounds and varying opinions. His pro-British sentiments in no way detracted from his firm love for his Irish homeland, ancestry, and culture. He always supported Dominion status for Ireland.

Next to Fallon's staunch support of the British Empire, his greatest

concern was that of education. As a student, as a university professor, and as a promotor of education during his episcopacy, Fallon spent a life-time engaged in the pursuit and spread of knowledge. Such a constant preoccupation with learning and its accessibility to the young resulted in the building of schools and colleges, first on a limited scale in his parish in Buffalo, and then, on a much grander scale in the Diocese of London. Fallon's excellent record as an educator, however, becomes controversial when the subject of the bi-lingual schools in Ontario is introduced. Here, Fallon ran head on into an educational issue which had heavy emotional overtones made electric by cultural and linguistic loyalties. Bishop Fallon's motives throughout the disturbing and unfortunate argument were sincere and clear. Of all Fallon's controversies, and he was involved in many, the uproar caused by his public and determined opposition to the bi-lingual school system in Ontario, as it existed in the 1900-1912 period, was surely the most memorable.

At the same time that Bishop Fallon was severely criticizing what he considered to be the ineffective bi-lingual school system of Ontario, he was making strong and continual efforts to have the offensive declaration concerning Catholic doctrine which accompanied the British Coronation Oath removed. He began his agitation for this reform in 1899, as the life of Queen Victoria grew to a close. He continued his objections, in public and in private, until King George V had the offending passages removed for his coronation. Whether the cause at hand was a great Empire uniting many lands and peoples, or an offending school system, or a matter of royal protocol, or, the welfare of his beloved Church, Michael Francis Fallon was always ready to be a public champion and private advocate who gave entirely of his intellectual brilliance, his physical vigor, and his fervent soul.

MICHAEL FRANCIS FALLON

In an address to the students and faculty of the University of Ottawa on Saturday, 28 May, 1910, Bishop Fallon fresh from his consecration the month before, referred to his career as a professor and student at the University:

I do not feel one single bit different, except in thankfulness to God, but from a natural point of view I am no better, and I hope I am no worse than I was five or six months ago. I cannot take this thing as seriously as others do. It is no use; I never was serious; (laughter) my fellow students know I was never serious, but I think my fellow students know that with all my faults I tried to be fair and straightforward, and to do the right thing whether in the class room, or on the athletic field, or in the other

spheres of student life. (Cheers.)¹

Whatever might have been the judgement of various observers, Bishop Fallon consciously tried to be fair and certainly was always straightforward throughout his colorful and often stormy life.

Michael Francis Fallon was the first-born of Dominic Fallon and of Bridget Egan Fallon, who had immigrated from Ireland to settle in Kingston, Canada West. As has been noted, Michael Fallon was born on 17 May, 1867. Six more sons were born to Dominic and Bridget Fallon. Throughout their lives, the seven Fallon brothers were distinguished by an abiding attachment to their parents and to each other. The solidarity of the family was exceptionally close.

The oldest, Michael, received his elementary education from the Christian Brothers in Kingston, and, then, attended the Kingston Collegiate Institute, from which he graduated in 1883 at barely 17 years of age. He entered Queen's University for the academic year of 1883-1884 whence he proceeded to the University of Ottawa for the five-year Arts Course. Fallon graduated from this Course with the Bachelor of Arts degree, "Cum Laude," in 1889. While an undergraduate at the University of Ottawa, the six-foot, fair-haired, handsome youth from Kingston set a pace of activity which revealed the enormous reserves of energy and physical strength so characteristic of most of his life. Apart from being a brilliant student in his main love, the humanities, especially English Literature and History, young Fallon took a leading part in dramatics, literary efforts, and debating. In this connexion Fallon was one of the first editors of *The Owl*: The University of Ottawa publication which enjoyed considerable prestige for some time. Besides such academic and creative activities, Michael Fallon was a powerful and skillful member of the University rugby team. He was the kind of extraordinarily gifted student and athlete that Cecil Rhodes, then very much occupied in Southern Africa, would one day designate as the ideal for his unique scholarship.

Upon his graduation from the University of Ottawa, Michael Fallon chose to enter the Ottawa Seminary to read Philosophy with a view to Holy Orders. Three years later, in 1892, at the age of twenty-five, Fallon was accepted into the Novitiate of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. He was sent to Aachen, Holland, for his novitiate. The North European climate, however, proved too damp for the rugged physique of the athletic student from Canada. When Fallon's health began to decline and the threat of tuberculosis set in, the Oblate authorities sent Fallon to the Oblate House in Rome. Under the sun-lit skies of Rome, Fallon's health recovered rapidly; with this happy development, he was enrolled in the Gregorian College where in 1894, at 27

¹ *London Free Press*, Saturday, 28 May, 1910, col. 2.

years of age, he received his Doctor of Divinity degree. In the same year, he was ordained in Rome to the priesthood.

After his ordination, Fallon's Oblate superiors sent him back to the University of Ottawa to occupy the Chair of English Literature. Two years later, at 29 years of age, in 1896, he was made, in addition, Vice-Rector of the University of Ottawa. At this period, Fallon managed to combine academic and administrative duties with those of coach to the University rugby team. With a coach who possessed an astonishing talent for commanding the loyalty and affection of his team, the University of Ottawa rugby team climbed from one victory after another to achieve the reputation of one of the greatest Canadian rugby teams of the time. During Fallon's tenure as coach, the University rugby team remained undefeated.

After four years at the University, in 1898, Fallon had added to his other duties the pastorate of St. Joseph's Church, just across from the University. As Pastor, he proved the approachable servant of his people, and from the pulpit gave them a leadership inspired by his eloquence, intelligence and fearlessness. Long after he had left Ottawa, his reputation as a speaker and debater remained as a legend.

His days in Ottawa came to an end in 1901, when the Oblate Generalate appointed him to be Parish Priest of Holy Angels Church in Buffalo, New York. In 1904, Fallon's Oblate Superiors set up an American Province of the Oblate Order, with Father Michael Fallon as the first Provincial. While serving the people of Holy Angels Parish in Buffalo, Fallon worked with the same unyielding energy, exercised the same affable charm, and preached with the same power as had given him such fame at St. Joseph's in Ottawa. Apart from a vivid memory in the minds of his American Parishioners, and his many American friends, Fallon left as a memorial a fine parochial school, named, Holy Angels.²

When Father Fallon was appointed to Buffalo in 1901, *The Hamilton Herald*, had a tone of deep regret:

The removal of the Rev. Dr. Fallon from Ottawa to Buffalo is a loss not only to the people of St. Joseph's Parish in Ottawa and to Ottawa University; it is a loss to the Dominion. Dr. Fallon is one of the most promising of the younger Canadian priests of the Roman Catholic Church ...

After several more like laudatory remarks, *The Hamilton Herald* continued with a ring of prophecy:

² "Who Was Who," 1929-1940, Adam and Charles Black, London, 1941, Vol. III, p. 430 (source of biographical details).

Perhaps he is not permanently lost to Canada. He will not be lost sight of by Canadian Catholics, and the time may not be far distant when they will have the opportunity to bring influence to bear with a view of having him back in the country, not as a parish priest or university professor, but as Bishop Fallon.³

The hopes expressed by this Hamilton newspaper were realized on 14 December, 1909, when the Holy See named Michael Francis Fallon to the See of London, Ontario. Bishop Fallon was consecrated in St. Peter's Cathedral in London, Ontario, on 25 April, 1910. Bishop Fallon was consecrated by his predecessor in the Diocese of London, Right Reverend Fergus P. McEvay, then Archbishop of Toronto, and whose translation to Toronto had left vacant the See of London. A number of illustrious members of the hierarchy attended the consecration: Archbishop McCarthy of Halifax; Archbishop Quigley of Chicago; Archbishop Charles H. Gauthier of Kingston, Archbishop Bruchési of Montreal, and Archbishop Langevin of St. Boniface.

Representatives of the different levels of Government were no less distinguished: the Dominion Government sent Sir R. W. Scott, former Secretary of State, and the Honorable Charles Murphy, Secretary of State; while the Provincial Government had as delegates, Judge R. F. Sutherland of the Ontario Supreme Court, and former Judge C. J. Doherty. Senator Thomas Coffey gave the address of loyalty to Bishop Fallon in French and English on behalf of the laity of the Diocese.

A consecration full of stately pageantry and attended by leaders in Church and State and a few thousands of the Bishop's new spiritual subjects launched an episcopal career which was to touch all echelons of Government from that of Westminster to Ottawa to Toronto and London, Ontario, itself, which was to cause considerable attention in Rome; and which was to be deeply involved in all the major issues of Canadian life of the first quarter of the twentieth century.

CROWN AND MITRE

Michael Francis Fallon was a tireless supporter of the British Empire. To individuals who did not know the Bishop well, such imperial ardor flowing from an Irish-Canadian, whose immigrant mother and father had been evicted from their homes in Ireland in the mid-Victorian period when the landlords of Ireland enjoyed a last brutal resurgence, seemed a paradox defying belief. Bishop Fallon was used to such confusion, and did not let an opportunity pass to provide a profound explanation. Fallon was the first to admit that the

³ *The Hamilton Herald, 1898* (no other dates; see Fallon Scrapbook).

English treatment of Ireland and the Irish, especially from the Reformation era onwards, was the saddest page in English history, and, certainly, the most agonizing in Irish history. The confrontation of the tribal, Celtic peoples with the relatively well-organized and politically centralized Anglo-Saxon people had resulted in the collapse of the Celtic way of life. The dreary effects of this collapse had projected themselves into the young lives of Fallon's own parents and relations, and, consequently, by tradition into the childhood life of Michael Fallon, himself. He was no stranger to the Anglo-Irish tragedy.

Fallon, however, combined a great breadth of feeling with an insight which allowed him to a farther vision and deeper intuitions about his times than was given to many of his contemporaries, and, indeed, even to many of their successors. By the time Fallon was a young man, the Irish question was one of the liveliest issues in British politics with Gladstone and the Liberal Party as the great champions of Irish Home Rule. With reasonable good fortune, Ireland's long "love-hate" relationship with England might be turned through constitutional means into an autonomous and dignified partnership, united in loyalty to a common Crown. The solution of Dominion status, as in Canada's case, seemed to Fallon the ideal answer to Ireland's ancient problems. To the end of his days, he believed this was the proper solution, but had to accept the type of partial arrangement which came about in the early 1920's, as better than no autonomy at all.

With the Irish situation being slowly transformed, as Fallon thought, by attention from Westminster, he foresaw the global conflicts of 1914 and of 1939. He made no effort to predict actual dates, but he saw the militaristic regimes of Japan and Germany propelling themselves and the world towards dangerous rivalries which likely would result in a terrible carnage. Bishop Fallon not only was worried about the possibility of global war, he was especially concerned about the grave setback these struggles would bring upon mankind's painful groping towards international law and peaceful progress. Comparing systems of international relations, of political government, and of moral idealism, Fallon concluded that the British Empire with its British institutions of Crown, Parliament, Common Law, and a respect for traditional Christianity, was the best hope for the moral and material progress of the members of this international family, and of its neighbors.⁴

Fallon's firm faith in the imperial ideal as found in the Second British Empire and the emerging Commonwealth was eloquently presented in a sermon preached in 1897 on a rather remarkable occasion. The Countess of Aberdeen, wife of Canada's Governor-General, had a narrow escape from drowning when her carriage was swept into the Ottawa River at Gatineau Point. Three men of the village saved the Countess of Aberdeen from the swift

⁴ T. R. Elliott, "An Imperialist Irishman," *McLean's Magazine*, Vol. XLII, no. 19, 1 October, 1929, pp. 10, 86, 87.

currents of the river. In gratitude for such heroism, the Earl and Countess of Aberdeen presented a bell, suitably inscribed, to the Roman Catholic Church at Gatineau Point in thanksgiving for the dramatic rescue. At the ceremony of the presentation and blessing of the bell in the Gatineau Point Church, in the presence of Their Excellencies, Archbishop Duhamel of Ottawa, and a number of distinguished clergy and laity from the Capital, Dr. Fallon preached a lengthy and profound sermon which contained this credo regarding the Empire:

It is an important declaration that in this most important colony of the British possessions – just as in every other portion of the worldwide British Empire – the Kingship of God is acknowledged, and His supreme dominion is no idle phrase but a living reality ... It teaches the lesson to the world that here in Canada, we believe religion to be a necessary and indispensable element in all national greatness ... I bear willing and joyful testimony to my strong conviction that deep down in the heart of the British people, there is a profoundly reverent and religious sentiment, that the national conscience would quickly and unmistakably condemn the slightest attempt to eliminate God from the councils of the Empire. And in this sense, beloved brethren, I regard the British Empire as the last and greatest human barrier against the spread of vicious and dangerous doctrines concerning social order and international polity; as the most powerful human influence to lead men upwards and onwards in the path of human progress, and in the development for future ages of the untold possibilities hidden in the great mysterious darkness of the speechless days that shall be.⁵

His year in Aachen, where he was surrounded by German students from the aristocratic, middle and peasant classes, awoke Michael Fallon to the serious devotion of many Germans to dreams of European domination, and, possibly, in time, of world domination. He constantly heard “*der Tag*” as the fervent toast of these students from the German Empire. Along with their militant toast, these same students had no hesitation in revealing to Fallon the expansionist ambitions of their country, since Fallon, although a British subject, was of Irish extraction. Fallon with an amused astuteness cheerfully allowed his German colleagues to persist in their assumption that every Irishman was anti-British, and, therefore, pro-German. When Fallon departed from Aachen for Rome, he had no illusions about German plans for the future. In Rome, where he rubbed shoulders with students and clergy from all over the world, his growing suspicions about German intentions were added to a grave concern over Japanese political and military designs. This was a decade

⁵ *Ottawa Citizen*, 1897 (no other dates; see Fallon Scrapbook).

before the Russo-Japanese War.

In 1910, shortly after his consecration, Bishop Fallon was invited to preach at a Church Parade in St. Peter's Cathedral of the men of the Seventh Fusilliers of London, Ontario. The burden of Bishop Fallon's message was straight to the point:

If you gentlemen think you are just playing at soldiers, I beg you to give the matter a little more consideration. Whether it will be Germany or Japan first, I do not know, for I am no prophet, but you will fight one of them before you are many years older.⁶

Delivered in the peaceful, prosperous and glamorous years of the Edwardian era, the sermon had an air of unreality in provincial London, Ontario. The sermon, nonetheless, created a sensation. Sam Hughes sent to His Lordship for a copy of the manuscript, had it reproduced, and, then, sent copies to all officers of the Canadian Militia.⁷

Fallon continued speaking his mind on international affairs in another remarkable address, this time given to the Canadian Club of London, Ontario, on 5 January, 1911. The title of the address was, "International Peace"; amongst his hearers were the Honorable W. L. MacKenzie King, Federal Minister of Labor, Sir George Gibbons, and the Honorable Clifford Sifton, Chairman of the Federal Conservation Commission. Fallon once again advanced the premise that it was imperative to support the British Empire, "I am an imperialist. And it is in no restricted, national sense, either. There is freedom where the old flag flies, and it is the only nation that to the fullest degree knows the meaning of civil and religious liberty ..."⁸ He went on to remind his audience that the German Imperial Army had a peace footing of 750,000 men, and that in time of war, that same army could command 5,000,000 men. The Austro-Hungarian Empire could muster 4,000,000 soldiers; with Italy assisting, the Triple Alliance could throw 10,000,000 soldiers into a military campaign. Lest his audience had any scepticism about Fallon's views on these developments, the Bishop said bluntly, "It is my deliberate conviction that Germany intends to try to take command of the world's affairs."⁹

The only ray of hope in this grave situation that Fallon could see was the firm resolve and ability of Great Britain and the Empire to answer the

⁶ T. R. Elliott, op. cit. p. 86.

⁷ *Idem*, p. 87. Fallon's relationship with Hughes originated in Kingston, and was especially close during the War (1914-1917). (From Msgr. A. P. Mahoney, D.P., Vicar-General in Fallon's latter years.)

⁸ *The Border City Star*, Monday, 23 February, 1931.

⁹ *Idem*.

challenge of German aggression by taking, if necessary, to the battlefield. Only in such courageous fashion could the peoples of the Empire continue, “the blessed gift of spreading to the world human liberty, the brotherhood of man, the blessings of prosperity and religious liberty.” Although Bishop Fallon disclaimed being a prophet, he never hesitated to prophesy. Should a power like Germany bring the British to their knees, Fallon predicted dire results, “More misery, more sorrow, more suffering would result by the destruction of British credit than has resulted in any way since Napoleon held the world in the hollow of his hand.”¹⁰ Almost sixty years after this opinion was expressed in the presence of a future Prime Minister of Canada, there are many who would conclude that the Bishop's fears had proved all too true.

Fallon ended his apocalyptic address by an urgent plea for the leaders of Canada not to ignore the spiritual principles which underlay Canada's foundation, and without which the nation could not have a truly great future:

The temple must be built from the foundation upward. Man must be taught the love of justice, the difference between what is mine and thine, not to be so ready to take what belongs to him, as to be ready to give the other man his own, to be fair, to be just, to be honest, to respect authority, to be noble. The child must be taught to respect and revere father and mother, the man must regard with respect the municipality, the citizen must respect and revere the nation, and all men must respect and revere their country and their God. When each individual does that, you will have a pillar for the temple of international peace.¹¹

In a much starker fashion, the Jesuit writer, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin in his *Future of Man*, written thirty to forty years after Fallon's speech, warns the human race of today that unless man's motivation turns radically towards love in its true unselfish sense, the growing technology of our age may trap humankind in a merciless, scientific, totalitarian prison. Fallon's fears for the future were not unfounded, were forcefully expressed, and showed a vision of uncommon clarity.

THE BRITISH CORONATION OATH

Along with Fallon's concern for the future of Canada, and the wider circle of the human community, went a fundamental dedication to his Church. His younger years were lived at a time when the British Roman Catholic Church was enjoying a Second Spring. Amongst various distinguished clergy, the revived English Roman Catholic Church could boast a series of remarkable

¹⁰ *Idem.* 11

¹¹ *Idem.*

Cardinals: Wiseman, Newman, Manning, and, by the turn of the century, Cardinal Vaughan, Archbishop of Westminster. New dioceses, new parishes, a striking resurgence of British monasticism, the opening of new schools and colleges, a host of converts from the aristocracy, through the gentry, broadening through the population at large, with intellectuals and celebrities brightening the path to Rome, all proclaimed a radiant new day for the ancient Church which had been part of British History since England was a Roman Province. To dramatize the new dawn of British Catholicism, the neo-Byzantine splendor of Westminster Cathedral was already on the drawing board, and before Fallon would depart this life, the great campanella of the Cathedral would loom over the royal park of St. James's and nearby Buckingham Palace. The new status and dynamism of English-speaking Catholicism was felt throughout the entire British Empire. As a ceremonial recognition of the new greatness of the Catholic Church within the community of the Empire, Fallon demanded the Declaration Against Transubstantiation accompanying the Coronation Oath be abolished.

When James II, last of the Stuart Kings, and last Roman Catholic Monarch of Great Britain, was deposed in 1688, to be succeeded by his nephew, William of Orange, and his older daughter, Mary, the aristocratic and mercantile clique which engineered the change, were determined that never again would a Catholic Stuart ascend the Throne of the British Isles. To ensure the Protestant orthodoxy of the occupant of the Throne, a formula denying transubstantiation was specially composed, and used for the Coronation of Queen Anne and subsequent coronations. The anti-Jacobite legislation required the Sovereign in this Coronation Oath publicly and explicitly to abjure any belief in the "superstitious and idolatrous" practice of the Mass, the devotion to the Virgin Mary, and the doctrine of transubstantiation. The Oath continued on in tedious detail with a number of clauses designed to make it plain to the Sovereign that he or she must be a thorough Protestant and a staunch defender of the Reformed Church as established by law.¹² It was the triumph of the campaign to exclude Roman Catholics from British public life begun by the so-called Whigs in the reign of Charles II. As the generations proceeded, and the position of the Catholic Church and of Catholics in Great Britain so radically altered such a declaration had become obsolete and insulting. With the impending death of Queen Victoria, the issue was a real one.

Rather significantly, Fallon as a Canadian priest and educator, fired the heaviest opening salvos against the declaration in the Capital of the country which by virtue of the Quebec Act of 1774 had freedom for Catholics four

¹² C. Grant Robertson, *Select Statutes, Cases and Documents, To Illustrate English Constitutional History, 1660-1832*, Methuen and Co., London, 1904, p. 82.

years before even a modest amount came, at least in law, to British Catholics. On Thursday evening, 16 February, 1899, Dr. Fallon addressed a fascinated audience in the Academic Hall of Ottawa University on the iniquities of the Declaration accompanying the Coronation Oath. The Honorable R. W. Scott, Secretary of State in the Dominion Government, was present, as well as Fallon's Provincial, Father Jodoin from Montreal, and, of course, his own Rector, Dr. Constantineau. Fallon's attack on the Whiggish Oath was learned powerful, and entirely logical. The kernel of his argument was contained in this premise, "The Sovereign of the British Empire rules a mixed people, and no offensive word should pass the royal lips regarding the humblest and most insignificant subject."¹³ At the end of the address, the Catholic Truth Society of St. Joseph's Church, under whose auspices the meeting was held, passed a resolution requesting that the declaration be removed to suit the sensibilities of Her Majesty's Roman Catholic subjects.

Fallon had launched a campaign which was taken up by *The Tablet* in London, England, and carried on by different leading clergy and laity in the British Isles and throughout the Empire. Fallon's sentiments were published in a pamphlet which was widely read;¹⁴ and he aired the matter constantly until the campaign met success with the Coronation of King George V and Queen Mary in 1911. Edward VII no doubt would have preferred to have co-operated in the matter; but his Coronation was beset by so many more pressing problems: the King's own poor health at the time; the challenge of organizing a Coronation when the last one was in 1838; and the age and delicate health of the Archbishop of Canterbury. King George V, however, was able to express a genuine personal feeling when he expunged from the Oath the offending passages.¹⁵

The whole incident illustrated, perhaps better than any other in Michael Fallon's life, the complex, consistent, threads of his several unswerving loyalties to his Church, his Crown and his people. Until his goal was accomplished all his powers of reason, oratory and persuasion would be exercised with every means at his command at every useful occasion and without fear of any kind of opposition.

THE BI-LINGUAL SCHOOLS OF ONTARIO

Having stirred the waves of agitation which would presently influence royal events in the Abbey of Westminster, Michael Fallon, newly consecrated

¹³ *Ottawa Journal*, 17 February, 1899.

¹⁴ M. F. Fallon, *A Declaration Against Catholic Doctrine Which Accompanies The Coronation Oath of the British Sovereign*.

¹⁵ *Catholic Record*, London, Canada, 1936 (no other date; see Fallon Scrapbook).

Bishop of London, Ontario, turned his attention to the bi-lingual schools of Ontario. The use of French as an instrument of education in the area which became known as the Province of Ontario is as old as the history of European settlement in that Province. Preceding the arrival of settlers by many years, Father Joseph de la Roche Dallion, the last of the Recollet friars to engage in missionary work in New France, in 1626 explored the land around the present Penetanguishene. Accompanied by two other Frenchmen, he set out on 18 October, 1626 to carry the Gospel to the Attiwindarons in what is now the south-western part of Southern Ontario.

Father de la Roche Dallion's efforts had no lasting result. His work was succeeded by the Jesuits, Brébeuf and De Noue in Huronia in the 1640's. This attempt at Christianizing the Hurons ended largely in failure. Yet, the survivors of these Jesuit missions could be found in 1672 settled around the Straits of Mackinac. It was the descendants of these refugees that the Jesuit priest, Father Armand de la Richardie brought first to Isle de Bois Blanc in 1728, and later, in 1747 to land along the Detroit River near Pointe de Montréal, where the mission of the Assumption was founded. This grew into Assumption Parish at Sandwich, now part of Windsor, Ontario. Across the River was the settlement and Fort of Pont Chartrain at Detroit founded by Cadillac in June, 1701. This far-flung outpost of New France cradled the oldest continuous French community east of Fort Cataragui. The use of the French language in Church and school survived in Upper Canada and in Ontario one way or another in the Sandwich area until our own time. As the nineteenth century proceeded, and settlement from Québec became common in the Ottawa Valley area and in Eastern Ontario, the same use of French in the churches and schools of the French communities could be found. Where there were historic French settlements, the use of French as a language of instruction in Ontario in private and public schools, usually Catholic Separate Schools, was not a novelty. Once the Common School System of Canada West was rather firmly established in 1850, a goodly toleration existed regarding the language of instruction used in different areas of the Province. French, German and English were accepted as teaching languages wherever the ethnic character of the community warranted the use of French or German in addition to whatever English might be practical.¹⁶

This carefree state of affairs showed signs of being threatened in September, 1885, when the Department of Education in Toronto issued general instructions to the teachers in the public and separate schools that English should be taught in all such schools. This had little effect in the German-speaking areas of the Province, notably in the Berlin-Waterloo section, since in the 1860's there began a gradual voluntary change to English

¹⁶ C. B. Sissons, *Bi-Lingual Schools in Canada*, Toronto, J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1917, pp. 16-23.

as the main teaching language. By 1885, only a few isolated rural schools still preferred German as their principal language. The burden of the 1885 instructions was that English Reading, Spelling, Composition and Grammar should be studied two hours a day in the first and second forms, and four hours a day in the third and fourth forms. This regulation applied to all schools, but would be much more disturbing in the French-speaking schools. These instructions were either implemented in the bi-lingual schools in a lukewarm fashion or ignored. Through the 1880's and 1890's, the whole Separate School System, and especially, the French or bi-lingual separate schools, became the target of different militant Protestant groups and politicians.¹⁷ By 1910, when Bishop Fallon assumed command of the Diocese of London, the whole question was already an issue, but it remained for the new Bishop to ignite it.

Bishop Fallon, of course, was a hard-working advocate of the Roman Catholic Separate School system. He had, however, very strong objections to the Ontario bi-lingual schools. On 22 May, 1910, barely a month after his consecration, Bishop Fallon paid his first visit to Sarnia. In the course of this, through Father Kennedy, the Parish Priest, Bishop Fallon requested the Honorable W. J. Hanna, Provincial Secretary, and Mrs. Hanna to meet him. The essence of this meeting in Sarnia on 22 May, 1910, between the new Bishop and the Provincial Secretary was communicated in a letter written the following day by Mr. Hanna to the Honorable Dr. R. Q. Pyne, Minister of Education in Toronto. Several months later in October, 1910, this letter was released to the press, the French-Canadian press first, who were then imitated by the English language press. An investigation conducted later upon the personal orders of the Prime Minister of Ontario, Sir James Whitney, revealed that Mr. H. C. A. Maisonville, private secretary to the Honorable Dr. Reaume, Minister of Public Works, was guilty of securing and then releasing to the press the letter from Mr. Hanna to Dr. Pyne.¹⁸

This famous letter which thrust the problem of the Ontario bilingual schools into the public arena, contained this passage which summed up briefly Bishop Fallon's reason for his disapproval of these schools:

He (Bishop Fallon) has not reached this conclusion at once, but he has resolved so far as it is in his power, to cause to disappear every trace of bi-lingual teaching in the public schools of his diocese. The interests of the children, boys and girls, demand that bi-lingual teaching should be disapproved and prohibited. He says that he is assured that there are today children going to the public schools in certain parts of Essex (Essex County, Ontario) who are unable to speak English ... We belong

¹⁷ *Idem.*, pp. 35-68.

¹⁸ *Idem.*, 73.

to a Province of English-speaking people, part of an English-speaking continent, where all children leaving school to engage in the battle of life must first of all be armed with the English language, cost what it may.¹⁹

Bishop Fallon, in this newspaper version of the letter, went on to say that knowledge of a second and more languages was an excellent asset, but that the realities of life in North America demanded a satisfactory knowledge of English. Bishop Fallon answered the comment aroused by the publication of Mr. Hanna's letter by one of his own, which appeared in *The Ottawa Citizen*, on 17 October, 1910. In this lengthy statement, Fallon agreed that Mr. Hanna had repeated accurately the Bishop's opinions and worries regarding the bi-lingual schools in Ontario. He made it clear, too, that his feelings towards these schools were no secret to those who knew him, and that, indeed, he had discussed his misgivings about the bi-lingual education to his assembled clergy at their annual retreat in July, 1910. He denied emphatically, however, that his conclusions were related in any way to a prejudice against the French language, French Culture or French-Canadians, themselves. His hostility was directed against a type of education which would not and could not prepare the French Catholics of Ontario for economic and social progress in the North America of the twentieth century. Fallon put it this way, "The alleged bi-lingual system, as it prevails in the province of Ontario, is absolutely futile as concerning the teaching of either French or English, and is utterly hostile to the best interests of the children, both English and French."²⁰

In the same letter, Bishop Fallon stated that he would favor the "establishment of purely French schools for the purpose of assuring to such children as desired it, a thorough education in the French language."²¹ As a conclusion to this strong and ringing declaration, the Bishop gave some figures regarding the dismal educational performance of children attending bi-lingual schools in Kent and Essex Counties, secured, according to the Bishop, over the signatures of the parish priests concerned. This forceful and carefully worked out letter made clear Bishop Fallon's stand on bi-lingual education in Ontario: nothing occurred to alter the Bishop's views for the rest of his days.

The reaction of the Ontario Government was to appoint the respected Dr. F. W. Merchant, an official of the Department of Education, to examine and report upon the Ontario bi-lingual schools, both those which were part of the separate school system and those which were supported as public schools. Dr.

¹⁹ *The Globe*, 12 October, 1910.

²⁰ *The Ottawa Citizen*, 17 October, 1910.

²¹ *Idem.*, 17 October, 1910.

Merchant began his inquiry on 2 November, 1910, and signed his completed report on 24 February, 1912. The Merchant Report was a remarkably fair document devoid of emotional and partisan feeling. Although Dr. Merchant found two main problems connected with the bi-lingual schools which lowered their efficiency, he did not condemn the idea of bi-lingual education. He found that in some of these schools the qualifications of the teachers were not adequate for their duties, and a further serious difficulty was the irregular attendance of the pupils in some of the schools examined. On the other hand, Dr. Merchant did find bi-lingual schools where the quality of students and teachers compared favorably with their counterparts in the better uni-lingual public schools. Dr. Merchant reported in a very fair spirit defects where he found them; and did not hesitate to praise and document good performances where he found the evidence. And best of all, Dr. Merchant refused to see bi-lingual education within the narrow confines of Ontario, but referred frequently to the findings of the Imperial Education Conference and its section on Bi-Lingualism. In this context, bi-lingual education in Ontario shared fundamental problems with similar schools in Wales, Ireland, Scotland, India, South Africa, etc. As such, then, bi-lingual schools were a valid form of education which answered the needs of minority groups in many areas of the global British Empire.

Dr. Merchant had three positive suggestions for the improvement of Ontario's bi-lingual schools:

- a) the English-French Schools should be more closely integrated with the High School System;
- b) the qualifications of the teachers in the English-French Schools should be raised, possibly through Summer School Courses;
- c) the inspection of the bi-lingual schools should be considerably improved.²²

The rather negative solution adopted by the Ontario Government on 17 June, 1912, was Regulation 17, published by the Department of Education. Regulation 17, although it did not abolish the bi-lingual schools, was much more inspired by the enemies of the bi-lingual schools than it was by the detached and scholarly Merchant Report. What the Regulation enforced was a severe curtailment of instruction in French. The Year 1912-1913 would be a year of grace in which French-speaking children could still be educated in their maternal tongue. After 1913, the use of French as a medium of instruction would be phased out and English substituted; even in cases where the children were entirely French-speaking, the use of French in the classroom

²² F. W. Merchant, *Report on The Condition of English-French Schools in the Province of Ontario*, King's Printer, 1912, Toronto.

was not to continue beyond Form I. The study of French as an academic subject, and not used as the language of instruction, could be continued in the bi-lingual schools for the year 1912-1913 where the parents of the pupils requested such teaching, but there was no guarantee that this favour would continue beyond 1913.²³

Professor C. B. Sissons, while Professor of Victoria College, University of Toronto, in 1917, wrote a small but valuable study, entitled *Bi-Lingual Schools in Canada*. He later wrote in 1959, on the relations between Church and State in Canadian Education. In his first work, Professor Sissons concluded with a refreshing breadth of view regarding this delicate subject:

The French language we shall always have with us. It were good patriotism for Canadians of other origins more generally to adopt means to make themselves familiar with its idiom and literature. No citizen will find it a burden but rather it will prove a door to wider opportunity in and clearer knowledge of one's own country. As language barriers are broken down, as mutual acquaintance progresses, the mythical nature of many of those supposedly irreconcilable differences of character will be manifest, and those differences which remain will appear as necessary to a perfect national symphony.²⁴

In spite of such an enlightened view from an eminent academic, the whole Ontario bi-lingual school crisis persisted until the Ontario Government realized it could not enforce educational policies unacceptable to an important minority. Finally in 1927, Dr. Merchant was once more called upon, this time by Prime Minister G. H. Ferguson, to head another inquiry into the problems of the bi-lingual schools. A more intelligent solution was arrived at this time with the establishment of a bi-lingual Normal School under the auspices of the University of Ottawa, and the appointment at Queen's Park in Toronto of a special Committee within the Department of Education to oversee the bi-lingual schools, composed of a Chief Inspector, a Director of English Instruction and a Director of French Instruction.²⁵

Bishop Fallon's role in this unhappy struggle was to fight unflinchingly against a school system which he honestly felt was a serious obstacle to the progress of his Catholic people into the "speechless days that shall be," which so haunted him when he preached before the Earl and Countess of Aberdeen in 1897. Essentially, Michael Fallon, as a prelate of Irish extraction, in the Ontario bi-lingual school crisis, was involved in a kind of civil war in

²³ C. B. Sisson, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-108.

²⁴ *Idem.*, p. 214.

²⁵ C. B. Sissons, *Church and State in Canadian Education*, pp. 92-93.

which the historic tensions between the French and Celtic branches of the Canadian Roman Catholic Church were exposed to public view in a manner unparalleled before or since. Bishop Fallon had an excellent command of written and spoken French; indeed, he also had some ability in Italian, and possessed a scholar's knowledge of Latin and Greek. Whenever the Bishop was with French-speaking people, he preached, prayed and conversed in flawless French. His opposition to the bi-lingual schools was not on cultural or linguistic grounds.

Ironically, Bishop Fallon, himself, came from a people who had lost their own language and much of their traditional culture through foreign conquest. With the brutal suppression of Ireland by the armies of Oliver Cromwell in the mid-seventeenth century, and the continuation of this oppression in less bloody form from 1689 to 1760, the ancient Gaelic Order lay in ruins, while a stunned people sought a new destiny. As the Irish people recuperated from two harrowing centuries, they conformed to reality, and accepted English as the working language of the British world, even if they continued to speak Irish amongst themselves. The Celtic Church in Canada, therefore, was an English-speaking Church. This linguistic difference was bound to create some tension within the Canadian Catholic Church, where the French-Canadian was concerned with *survivance* and the Irish-Canadian was concerned with the same desire to survive, but within the framework of the larger English-speaking community.

The Union, a Catholic Weekly published in Ottawa, in 1901, the year that Fallon was transferred from the University of Ottawa to Buffalo, published an editorial, which suggested in no uncertain terms that French-Canadians were usurping the place of the English-speaking Irish amongst the faculty and administration of the University:

In plain, blunt English, we can regard the faculty of the University of Ottawa, as just a collection of French-speaking professors, all no doubt most accomplished but still French-speaking scholars, endeavoring, let it charitably be said, to do for the English-speaking Catholics of the Province of Ontario what the professors of Laval are doing for the French-speaking people of the Province of Quebec ...

It is notorious that the University of Ottawa has continually and systematically been denuded of its best and most capable talent in English-speaking priests ...

And now, unfortunately, the Rev. Dr. Fallon, the distinguished and revered pastor of St. Joseph's Church, has been added to the list.²⁶

Dr. Merchant and Professor Sissons could observe the bilingual schools

²⁶ *The Union*, 1901, p. 8.

with detachment and praiseworthy fairness partly because the question had no personal or emotional overtones for them. To Bishop Fallon, however, along with his genuine concern for the progressive education of his people, his Ottawa background may have given edge to the whole problem.

NUNC DIMITTIS SERVUM TUUM

Michael Francis Fallon died on the night of 22 February, 1931, in London, Ontario. His life and episcopacy had been a full one marked by a personality which no one could ignore. Friend and foe alike admitted his brilliance, vigor, and ability to lead. To his friends, and they were legion, he was a highly positive person who, wherever he went, built materially and spiritually with an eye to the distant future, undaunted by any obstacles; to his foes, and he was not lacking in them, he was egoistical, tyrannical and implacably stubborn. In the balance, however, his contemporaries seemed to feel that his essential greatness outshone his fondness for firing salvos of artillery at his opponents. The Apostolic Delegate, Monsignor Andrea Cassulo, presided at Bishop Fallon's funeral in St. Peter's Cathedral, London, Ontario, which was held in the presence of a large number of the hierarchy from Canada and the United States, senior representatives of all levels of Government, and an overflow congregation. The Canadian and American Press were full of numerous and lengthy biographies and eulogies. All agreed that Michael Fallon was a man of stature, honesty, and of formidable accomplishments.

Sir Robert Borden on 1 March, 1931, wrote a letter of condolence to the late Bishop's brother, Joseph J. Fallon of Cornwall, Ontario, in which he said:

May I be permitted to convey to you and to your brothers my very deep sympathy in the bereavement you have sustained in the death of the late Bishop Fallon, for whom I felt the greatest respect and admiration from the time I first had the privilege of knowing him? It always seemed to me that Bishop Fallon was endowed with the essential qualities of greatness. His passing is, indeed, an undoubted loss to the national life of our country.

I remain yours faithfully,
Robert Laird Borden (signed)²⁷

²⁷ Letter from Sir Robert Borden to Joseph Fallon, 1 March, 1931 (see Fallon Scrapbook).