

April 10.

School Bill Makes History in House

Review of Nineteenth Session Takes Com- plexion From Epoch- Marking Measure

THE Legislature is being epochal and isn't liking it.

It isn't often the Legislative Assembly of Ontario is sure that it is making history. In the welter of oratory, crossfire, personal careers, and the natural M.P.P. complex to be one week ahead of your constituents, it isn't always easy to pick out the history in the journals of the Assembly.

But when Premier Hepburn brought down the School Act last Friday the "honorable members" knew they were making Ontario history—and they don't like it.

Making Political History.

That school bill was going to be recorded in the 1980 history texts—and maybe in the next election's ballot boxes. It was going to be in the Ontario annals, and the old text says something about "blessed is the nation whose annals are few."

And, being ordinary human beings, M.P.P.'s would prefer a long, serene political life to any number of "annals."

"The bill" has made Queen's Park a solemn place. "The bill" is no shadow-boxing about the Waterways and Ditches Act, the licensing of rose fanciers, or bulls. There's no facetiousness about it. A Legislature is doing what British democracy evolved it to do—to decide a conflict of opinion by ballots and instead of bullets—and the M.P.P.'s are in the direct line of ballot-fire.

A score of Protestant and Catholic members feel very deeply about the school law. Every other member of the House knows that it is double-edged, double-distilled political poison, and that makes any M.P.P. feel deeply.

The 1934 sitting went down as the "beer and milk" session; last year's was labelled the "thunder, lightning and power" sitting; but no one is volunteering a facetious title for this sitting.

Aside from the school bill, it was still too warm to be comfortable. The Tory leadership convention and the possibility of the Premier's retirement took care of that. Nobody talked very much about such events in the House, but an M.P.P. thinks a lot of things that he doesn't say.

The Legislature took one week to pass the income tax. It also passed the bill to revamp the Northern timber limits. The rest of the legislation program was lengthy—and that about covers it.

There were amendments to the Assessment Act, the Municipal Act, the Local Improvement Act, the Election Act, the Highways Traffic Act, the Apprenticeship Act, and respecting the Corporation of the Township of the Front of Leeds and Lansdowne.

Old-gold dealers and tourist outfitters were advised that they might be required to get a license before opening an old-gold shop or taking a shot at a moose in the morning. There was the annual protest against "all this licensing."

P. M. Dewan of Oxford said the things about lawyers that the average man wants to say but doesn't dare to. (Cf. Mr. Pickwick when he called on the solicitors' firm.) The lawyer members, who knew that their profession had managed to stay on top for the last few centuries said nothing. They were just "biding their time."

"But the Administration is getting awfully hard on lawyers," one Toronto barrister complained privately.

More personal vitriol, veteran Queen's Parkites said, was thrown across the floor of the House than in any one year since 1903.

Modern Premier.

It's all due to the last election. Young Tories who came up in the Ferguson reign were freed from restraints as Government back-benchers. A young Premier and a young Cabinet came in. Some men who had borne Cabinet responsibilities got a lot more youthful. The Legislature hasn't been exactly a forum, but it's been a bonnie battleground.

The new day shows itself in the speechmaking. The Premier is classed as the best speaker in the House. He never made an artificial gesture, rolled out an oratorical period, or stopped purposefully to drink a glass of water, in his career.

Frankness in the House also betrayed the modern touch. If he didn't believe in the fairness of the people, Premier Hepburn said when he brought down the school bill, he would say, "We, about to die, salute you." The Legislature appreciated the Premier's honesty.

Frankest Minister was David Croll—"best loved man in the House, and he isn't even a Christian," Premier Hepburn called him. When the Tories tackled estimates and put all the necessary fire and more on travelling expense items, they queried Mr. Croll about the travelling expenses of his Municipal Affairs offices.

"Just another junker," grinned the Minister.

And in the midst of it all, the session got middle-aged, and old, and is ready to quit. "All Governments start dying the day they're born," Tory veterans reminded Premier Hepburn from time to time.

The Premier just grinned and brought down the school bill; so that, if his Government dies, his Government dies fighting.