

as the language question has been raised in this Parliament and especially to-day in this House.

Right Hon. Mr. MEIGHEN: Hear, hear.

Hon. T. CHAPAI (Translation): Honourable members of the Senate, I must first beg the indulgence of my honourable English-speaking colleagues for my use of the French language. I thought, perhaps, in a debate where the question of the rights of the French language arose, it was quite proper to make use of my maternal tongue.

My first word must be one of congratulation to my honourable friend, the leader of the opposition (Hon. Mr. Dandurand). The last part of his speech, where he referred so eloquently to the French language, where he recalled so many historical memories and set before our eyes the great figure of Jacques Cartier, was, indeed, a justification of the bill under consideration, because such a measure, as I hope to demonstrate, is an undeniable recognition of the rights of our language in this country.

The section of the bill under consideration, section 24, raises the whole question of the "status" of the French language in Canada. If such be the case, it is perhaps not out of place to establish first on what foundation is based the right of this language to be recognized as an official language in the Canadian Confederation.

The right to our French language is primordial, first and last, above all constitutions and statutes, an historical right. The French language is official in Canada because for one hundred and fifty years our country was a French country. We referred, a moment ago, to the name of Jacques Cartier, the fearless navigator of St. Malo who, four centuries ago, took possession of this country on behalf of Christian and French civilization. After a lapse of three-quarters of a century, in 1608, another Frenchman by the name of Champlain founded Quebec. Again, a little later, in 1642, another Frenchman by the name of Maisonneuve founded Montreal. And during one century and a half this country of ours was evangelized, enriched, colonized, civilized by a galaxy of men and women of the French race and language, pioneers, apostles, warriors, administrators and educators: Laval, Talon, Frontenac, Marie de l'Incarnation, Marguerite Bourgeois; and those undaunted explorers, Joliette, Marquette, La Salle, La Vérendrye, who pushed their prodigious explorations to the south, north and west, beyond the Great Lakes, as far as the first spurs of the Rocky Mountains. Yes, for one hundred and fifty

years this soil was a French country, a country speaking the French language, bearing and handing down to history the beautiful name of New France.

Then came the events of 1760, the change of regime, the great tragic split which divided in two halves our national history. Canada passed under the English Crown. Our forebears accepted with fortitude and loyalty the providential decree which made them British subjects. They were loyal to their new allegiance. However, they neither abdicated their traditions, their creed nor their language.

Their language! The official use of their language was not guaranteed, at first, by any written text. Such a right, as I have stated, was an historical right. Our first constitution under the new regime embodied no provisions relating to the French language. The Quebec Act, in 1774, made no mention of it; neither did the Constitutional Act of 1791. However, in practice, common sense prevailed, and our public documents were printed in both languages.

We come to a gloomy period. The events of 1837 and 1838 obscured our horizon. Our language suffered a sad setback. The Act of Union in 1840, by virtue of section 41, prohibited the use of the French language as an official language. Fortunately, this eclipse did not last long. In 1848, an Act of the Imperial Parliament cancelled this prohibitive section of 1840. And, at the opening of the 1849 session, Lord Elgin, one of the most illustrious of our British governors, delivered the speech from the Throne in French and English.

Finally, in 1867, our country entered a new historical epoch. A new constitution creating a Canadian Confederation was worked out by our most outstanding statesmen. And the constitutional recognition of the French language received a memorable consecration. Section 133 of the British North America Act read as follows:

Either the English or the French Language may be used by any Person in the Debates of the Houses of Parliament of Canada and of the Houses of the Parliament of Quebec; and both those Languages shall be used in the respective Records and Journals of those Houses; and either of those Languages may be used by any Person or in any Pleading or Process in or issuing from any Court of Canada established under this Act, and in or from all or any of the Courts of Quebec.

The Acts of the Parliament of Canada and of the Legislature of Quebec shall be printed and published in both those Languages.

Thus under the new constitution, under the constitution which is our Canadian Charta, the two languages have been placed on a perfectly equal footing. In the Quebec Legis-