

assume a neutral position in a war between Great Britain and any other country. Therefore I entirely agree with the statements made this afternoon by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Lapointe) so far as I understood them from his oral utterances, as to the impossibility of Canada deliberately adopting a status of neutrality in any war in which the United Kingdom is engaged, without at the same time severing our connection with the United Kingdom and forswearing our allegiance to the crown.

The occurrence of this debate seems to me to be a very solemn occasion. We are going to the very fundamentals not only of Canada's constitution but of the constitution of the empire, of which we form a part. Therefore my own position is clear. I cannot add very much to what I have said. I am an imperialist, the papers say; and, in the sense in which I have stated the case, I am. I am absolutely in favour of carrying out to the extent of our ability the solemn engagements into which our government has entered with the other governments of the commonwealth. And when there is a state of war existing between the crown and any foreign nation, with all the energy and all the faculties I possess I will support the crown. Questions may arise as to the extent to which the governments of the dominions should be consulted. Personally I should like to see a somewhat closer consultation than perhaps has been carried on by this government or even by its predecessor. I believe that our very existence as a dominion depends upon close cooperation, which must be founded upon consultation, frequent consultation, as well as upon the official information received from time to time with respect to the development of international affairs.

Therefore as far I am concerned I stand by and support the attitude taken this afternoon by the Minister of Justice. I could go on and say many things in support of his suggestion that at the time of the outbreak of the last war the province of Quebec and the people of the French-Canadian race were placed in a very difficult position indeed. But I could write a book to show, I think, that the great body of sentiment in that province was in favour of cooperation; but it resisted coercion at a time when coercion was not necessary.

I saw many pathetic instances, of which perhaps I may be permitted to relate one. My own boy had his spine shattered by an explosive shell at Courcellette, and I went to see him. He said, "Father, I wish you would go and see another boy from Canada who is in the next room." They were in a part of

[Mr. Cahon.]

the hospital reserved for young officers. I went into the next room and met a young French-Canadian who spoke English with difficulty; but when I told him I was from Canada and that I was the father of the young man in the next room he was very glad indeed to see me. His father called upon me subsequently in Canada to thank me for having visited the lad. I said to the young man, "My dear boy, how did you come into this fight?" "Well," he said, "my father is in charge of a lighthouse on the coast of Quebec. Father is a stern man, and when the war broke out and I saw how things were progressing I wanted to enlist voluntarily, but I did not like to bring this up in conversation with father. So I went to the mainland and interviewed the parish priest, and asked him to consult with my father and to recommend that I be allowed to enlist. But the parish priest told me it was not a matter in which he should interfere, that it was something which should be settled between my father and myself." Then he went on, "That night—it was in October—sitting before an open grate fire in the lighthouse building I told him what I thought I ought to do." The young man said the tears came into his father's eyes and ran down his cheeks. He was of the old Norman stock, and he said, "Thank God, my son, that you have decided to this voluntarily. I have been anxious that you should make that decision, but I would not place myself in the position of seeming to influence or coerce you to do so." So the boy said, "I went and enlisted in the ranks." At the time he was wounded he had risen to be a lieutenant.

As an English-speaking Canadian, of English descent, few men know certain parts of Quebec better than I do. I know, for instance, that in a certain Laurentian village seven or eight boys got together and decided to enlist, which they did after obtaining the consent of their parents. They came to Montreal and enlisted, and were all put in a regiment in which not a single officer spoke the French language, while none of these boys spoke English except to an extremely limited extent. So they were drilled and kicked and cuffed about until finally they were sent to Valcartier. Again at Valcartier these young men, some of the finest ever produced by the Norman race in Canada, simply because they did not speak English fluently, were kicked and cuffed about in another English regiment, until finally they were all sent back to the village from which they came, with a certificate stating that they were so stupid they could not understand the drill. So we lost six or eight men who would have been among the most splendid volunteers we could

have had for service in a country like France. I know one of my own boys, who was brought up to speak French fairly well, told me that he was up at the front arranging for quarters for his regiment, and when some of the women in the homes, just behind the front lines, found a boy from Canada who could speak French, they put their arms round him, kissed him on both cheeks and said, "Thank God you have come. We have suffered so much and waited so long."

That, after all, is the spirit of the French people; but you must treat them with the consideration, respect and esteem which they deserve and which we often fail to give. If that is done, and it comes to another great conflict, if it comes under this government I am sure other methods, more conciliatory, will be followed; and if they are followed, you will find the young men of the French-Canadian race—I know them better in the country districts, perhaps, than in the cities—ready and anxious to play their part and do their share of service alongside their Canadian fellow subjects. Coercion will not be necessary in Quebec if you exercise conciliation and respect the mentality and traditions of the great people who founded that race, particularly—and I hope this will not be offensive to any person—those of the Norman race to which so many of us actually belong. I can make that statement with some pride, because my grandmother on one side came from the Huguenots and had strong French sympathies.

This great decision, if it has to be made, may have to be made suddenly. If so, the whole matter of Canada's active participation in war must be decided by the Canadian parliament and, through parliament, by the Canadian people. But if that issue is raised, if my fellow Canadians in the province of Quebec realize that the question of neutrality involves the severance of Canada from the British empire and from the British crown, I have no doubt as to the decision that the thoughtful people will make.

I sometimes talk to the leading clergy of Quebec and to those men who lead public opinion on various sides of politics in Quebec, and I am persuaded that the thoughtful and intelligent men of that province believe that the preservation of those religious and racial rights, which they hold sacred, depends upon Canada remaining a part of the British empire, because in no other state in Europe or in America is there the same freedom of religious opinion and of religious worship as is to be found throughout the British empire under the crown.

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Mr. A. J. LAPOINTE (Metapedia-Matane): Mr. Speaker, I have often had occasion to address this house in French, but because of a wish expressed by some of my English-speaking colleagues, I desire at this time to express myself in their language. We are living through a period filled with worry and anguish. It is perhaps more troublous than any the world has ever before seen. The peoples of the world seem to be expecting some terrible catastrophe. Nothing will serve as a clearer indication of the nervousness of the individual than the avidity with which everyone reads the newspapers. Motor car accidents and tragedies of all sorts daily cost the lives of hundreds of people, yet they are passed over as simple news items. The dangerous events taking place in Europe, the international situation and the threat of a conflict which might spread to the four corners of the universe, bringing about the ruin of our civilization, are the subjects which captivate our attention. Indeed, when one considers the almost diabolic ardour with which certain nations, especially during the last few years, have bent their efforts toward perfecting engines of destruction, it is natural to fear that the next conflict may be even more murderous than one can imagine.

The world has not yet ceased to suffer from the wounds inflicted during the conflict which started in 1914. Already certain madmen, swollen with pride, are ready to assume before history the responsibility of a crime as monstrous as war. It is barely twenty years since the signing of the armistice ended the horrible tragedy which accumulated such heaps of ruins during the four years which it lasted. Can we possibly have forgotten the price we paid in bitterness, suffering and human life? To-day we stand once more on the brink of the abyss, the terrible lesson having taught us nothing. What causes brought about such a situation? The first is the fact that at the end of the last war the peace was ill prepared. Those who drafted the treaties, instead of drawing their inspiration from principles of charity and justice allowed themselves to be mastered by a spirit of rancour, selfishness and greed. If the same real Christian sense which once inspired such high ideals among the nations had governed the redrawing of the map of the world, we would not have to face to-day such an alarming state of affairs. But the statesmen who gathered at Versailles thought they alone could settle the arduous problems which they had to solve in order to lay the foundations of a lasting peace. In their pride they refused to