

When I was young, I used, with much feeling, to recite Louis Fréchet's poem "Le Drapeau" (The Flag), of which I shall now quote a few verses:

Regarde, mon enfant, ce chiffon souverain

Qui mêle—avec l'azur du firmament serene—

Dans l'éclat radieux de son pli tricolore,
Aux rougeurs du couchant les blancheurs
de l'aurore.

Ces trois couleurs, drapant de leurs pures clartés

Trois principes féconds dans un seul reflétés,

C'est insigne éternel de toute indépendance.

—Chapeau bas, mon enfant!—le drapeau
de la France.

Incline-toi devant ses lambeaux vénérés,
Avec amour baise ses plis sacrés;

Car ce drapeau, digne des chants d'Homère,

Ce drapeau, mon enfant, c'est celui de ta mère!

Et toi, mon fils, toujours français comme ton père,

...si la bannière auguste

Devait cesser de luire au soleil canadien,
Sois son appui suprême et son dernier gardien!

For my compatriots of French Canada, as for me, the French flag is not our flag anymore. We still respect it but we are full-fledged Canadians and we expect as much from the English Canadians. We want to preserve and even develop our intellectual ties with France but we are quite different from the French people, as we like to say.

In 1763, the flag of our last king "folded its white wing and crossed the seas again". We had to wait for more than 150 years to see the fleur-de-lis fly again in Quebec and on the Peace tower. It includes as you know, a white cross on a blue background with white fleur-de-lis at the four corners.

Nova Scotia has had its own flag for more than 200 years. The Acadians too had their national banner: the tricolour with a star, if I remember well.

But it is high time that Canada should have her own distinctive flag. That is what this eminent statesman that I am proud to have as chief, the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson, has thoroughly understood. He realized that the vast majority of people

of this country, as a whole, felt an imperative and immediate need for a truly Canadian flag. This symbol is most essential to the full development of our national unity. The Liberal party has strongly committed itself to the national flag issue during the last election campaign and the people, through their vote, have accepted it.

True to his commitment, courageously, patiently, tenaciously, Mr. Pearson and his distinguished colleagues have overcome the obstacles that stood in their way. The representatives elected by the people have adopted by a strong majority the flag proposed and recommended by a great majority of the members of a special committee of the House of Commons. Honourable colleagues, the only thing left for the Senate to do is to reject the dilatory amendment so eloquently moved by the honourable Senator Grattan O'Leary. Personally I intend to support the resolution so brilliantly moved by the Government Leader in the Senate.

This red maple leaf on a white background with two red vertical bands is not the standard of one party; it is truly the free and conscious choice of the representatives elected by the people. It is this choice that we are asked to confirm right now. As for me, it is with joy, emotion and tenderness that I will accomplish this historical gesture giving Canada, "my country, my love", its own truly Canadian flag. The maple has always been for our Canadian land the symbolic tree of our country. No other Canadian symbol has such a sacrosanct meaning to us. A poet of our own, a great historian, wrote an inspired poem wonderfully bringing to light the mystic role played for us by "La leçon des érables". I will use as a peroration the poem thus entitled. Its prodigiously talented author, Canon Groulx, has already given his heart to the fleur-de-lis. I do not know what are his sentiments with respect to the flag we are discussing. But, "La leçon des érables" proves that it is pre-eminently for us the national tree and that history establishes the maple leaf as our most distinctive symbol. Here now is part of the lines of this inspired poem:

La leçon des Érables

Hier que dans les bois et les bruyères
roses,

Me promenant rêveur et mâchonnant des
vers.

J'écoutais le réveil et la chanson des
choses

Voici ce que m'ont dit les grands érables
verts.

Si notre front là-haut si fièrement s'étale;