

of fairness of the majority, claimed equal rights for the two great Canadian nationalities; but his efforts were in vain, and the French language was done away with. So, then, we are in a position to know what are the feelings towards us of the English-speaking majority in the west; and if we are anxious to perpetuate in these provinces the conditions of the compact of 1867, if we are anxious to carry on the work of the makers of the Manitoba constitution, if we are anxious to maintain the constitutional basis which I have referred to, let us introduce in the Bills submitted to us a clause guaranteeing the rights of the minority against any interference similar to that of which the English majority has been guilty in 1892. Instead of seeking in our past experience an excuse for our present inactivity, I find therein a lesson which should induce us to define clearly the rights of the minority and safeguard them by means of a precise and unmistakable enactment. Let us not delude ourselves in the matter! If the House rejects my proposal and that of the hon. member for Jacques Cartier, then let us give up all hope as to the rights of the French language in the west. French Canadian members who are fighting us are making for the downfall of our nationality; and should parliament reject our amendment, I say an essential principle of our constitution is being violated.

Let each one of us consult his conscience and realize what responsibility he is assuming just now. As for me, I refuse to take a hand in this unpatriotic work.

The Prime Minister recalls the obligations which parliament has assumed towards the Canadian Pacific Railway company. He does not hesitate to go counter to the letter and spirit of the constitution in order to secure the rights of that powerful corporation; and in this connection he has the support of the whole House; the agreement is considered sacred; and all enactments, all constitutions are bound to disappear in order to secure its full carrying out. Why, then, should the no less sacred obligations which parliament and the Canadian people have assumed towards the French people of the west be violated? Is it because that powerful Canadian Pacific Railway Company commands a greater number of votes than the French minority in the west? I refuse to measure or weigh by such a standard my moral responsibilities and obligations. I give my support to the government when they wish to compel the western provinces to respect the rights of the Canadian Pacific Railway Company; but I regard as still more sacred the rights of my fellow-countrymen; and that is why I am moving in this House a provision which guarantees those rights still more completely than the amendment introduced by the member for Jacques Cartier. I wish to

Mr. BOURASSA.

blot out the wrong committed by the legislators of 1890, and to revert to the constitutional basis laid down by parliament in 1870.

I therefore move, seconded by Mr. Lavergne, member for Montmagny, that the amendment introduced by the member for Jacques Cartier be amended by striking out the last clause beginning by the word 'provided.'

The Right Hon. Sir WILFRID LAURIER. (Translation.) The hon. member for Labelle, knows that there is a principle which all Liberals, and particularly French-speaking Liberals have always held sacred, and that is the absolute right of the provinces to make their own laws. It is an historical fact, well known to all, that if we have today a federal, instead of a legislative union, that is due to the persistent efforts of the French Canadians, who, in order to secure self-government, in order to be in a position to legislate for themselves, and to settle all questions of internal economy have insisted on having that division of powers implied in a federal union. Well, among the rights embodied in section 92 of the constitution, there are some which are perhaps more important than all others; I mean property and civil rights. The language question is one of civil rights.

I deny the statement which has just been made by the hon. member for Labelle, that, under the constitution enacted in 1867—I am mistaken, to which we freely gave our assent in 1867—the French language was put on an equal footing in the various provinces.

Mr. BOURASSA. (Translation.) I think the right hon. Prime Minister is mistaken; that is not what I said. I said that each of the original provinces had preserved its rights; but that the French language had been put on an equal footing with the English in the Dominion parliament, and that I considered we should do the same as regards the new provinces.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. (Translation.) I am very much pleased to hear that statement; in the heat of the debate the hon. member seems to have gone beyond what he intended to say. At any rate, if, in this House, we have the right to use both languages, it is not simply a theoretical right. It is because the great majority of the province of Quebec send French Canadian representatives to parliament.

I am now coming to the principle expressed by the hon. member for Labelle—and I trust he will recognize it as I do on all occasions—and that is that the rights of the provinces are absolute within the limits of the constitution, and that among these rights there is the freedom to legislate as regards the language to be used in the courts and the legislative assembly.

Now, if the House agreed to that amendment, as desired by the hon. member for Labelle, and if we inserted it in the consti-