

DEBATES

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

OF THE

## DOMINION OF CANADA.

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T. J. RICHARDSON AND G. B. BRADLEY,

*Editors and Chief Reporters.*

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FIFTH SESSION—THIRD PARLIAMENT.

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41 VICTORIA, 1878.

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COMPRISING THE PERIOD FROM THE SEVENTH DAY OF FEBRUARY, 1878  
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FIRST VOLUME OF THE SESSION.

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1878.

## MEAT IMPORTATIONS FROM THE UNITED STATES.

## MOTION FOR RETURN.

Mr. McQUADE moved for returns of the value of meat, green, dried, cured or potted, imported into Canada from the United States, and the duty collected on such from 1st January, 1877, to 1st January, 1878.

Motion agreed to.

## BETTER TRANSLATION OF THE BRITISH NORTH AMERICA ACT.

## MOTION FOR SELECT COMMITTEE.

Mr. FRÉCHETTE moved for a Select Committee to enquire as to the best means of securing a better French translation of the British North America Act, 1867. He said he asked to be permitted to make a few remarks in French, with reference to this motion. At the opening of the present Session, he had heard the hon. member for Terrebonne make some very judicious observations with respect to the subject of the translation into French of the debates of the House; and, in this respect, he concurred with the hon. gentleman. He thought that if the country devoted a considerable sum of money towards securing the translation of these debates, this work ought to be done in the best possible manner. What was worthy of being done, was also worthy of being well done. He thought this English proverb—What was worth doing at all, was worth doing well—was a favourite one, he considered, with the French translators of the House, if he could judge of it by the efforts they made every day to effect the disappearance of those vicious expressions and those deplorable anglicisms which for a long time had existed in the official language in French. The motion, which he now proposed, had no reference whatever to politics. It was purely proposed from a literary, or rather lexicological point of view. Despite the well-meant exertions and undeniable ability and knowledge of the translators, there had slipped into the translations, not only of the debates of the House, but also into those of the public documents of this country, many faults of language, for they met every day

MR. MACKENZIE.

with an almost insurmountable difficulty, and that was the official translation of the British North America Act of 1867. In the first place, he held that the French translators were not responsible for this translation; it was not theirs; and in the second place, he did not intend to accuse the author of this translation of ignorance with respect to the French language. This gentleman had probably sinned owing to too great national pride in translating "Dominion" by *Puissance*, and for the remainder, by too great a respect for the incorrect and vicious phrases which existed in the old Statutes. He believed that neither the respect which we ought to have for the science and knowledge of our ancestors, nor the legitimate ambition of desiring to see our country some day take rank among the great powers (*Puissances*) of Europe, were of a nature to pardon absurd boasting, which could not give to strangers a very fair idea of their notions of the French language of which the French-Canadians were so proud, and which, in the language used by one of their great poets, was one of the finest jewels in the heritage which had been transmitted to them by their ancestors. As to the propriety of the motion which he now made, he believed that he could establish it, at least in the eyes of the hon. members who spoke French, by citing a few of the vicious phrases and faults of language which were to be met with in the translation of the British North America Act. He did not speak for the moment of the translation of the word "Dominion" by the word *Puissance*; he would, at present, set this defect aside, and refer, in the first place, to Clause 10 in the provisions of this Act, with regard to the Governor-General. The phrase—"To the Governor-General for the time being of Canada, or other the Chief Executive Officer or Administrator for the time being,"—was thus translated: "*Au Gouverneur-Général du Canada, ou à tout autre chef exécutif ou administrateur pour le temps d'alors.*" in place of saying *alors en exercice*. This was a most vicious locution which should certainly be made to disappear in a careful translation. It would probably take up too much

time to refer to each clause in detail: he therefore only asked permission to point out a few of these defects, and show what, from his point of view, was out of place.

MR. MASSON: Go on, and slowly.

MR. FRÉCHETTE: Well, in clause 53, the word *appropriation* was used for the English word "appropriation," and it ought to be replaced by the word *emploi*. Another barbarism was contained in the same clause, the word *originer*, which was not a French word, and the phrase "Bills for appropriating any part of the public revenue," was thus translated: *Tout bill ayant pour but l'appropriation d'une portion quelconque du revenu public*. But this was not French. The locution which, in his opinion, ought to be used was, *Tout bill affectant*, etc. He had no objection to the word, "bill," because it had really been adopted into their language; and he would say, moreover, that this adoption was a necessity. But he did object to the phrase, *bill pour l'appropriation d'une portion quelconque du revenu public*, because it was not in conformity with the spirit of the French language. They ought to say, *un bill* or *des bills affectant une partie quelconque du revenu public*. In the 60th clause they found that these words, "The salaries of the Lieutenant-Governors" had been translated by the words, *les salaires des Lieutenants-Gouverneurs*, etc. The word *salaires* was incorrectly employed in reference to high dignitaries, and could be used only in reference to ordinary labourers.

MR. MASSON: How would you translate the word "salary?"

MR. FRÉCHETTE: By the word *traitement*. This was the proper word. Unfortunately, this fault appeared in different places in the same translation. In the 90th clause, they had the words: "The following provisions of this Act respecting the Parliament of Canada, namely, the provisions relating to Appropriation and Tax Bills," translated by, *Les dispositions suivantes du présent acte, concernant le parlement du Canada, savoir: les dispositions relatives aux bills d'appropriation et*

*d'impôt*. He had strong objection to the translation of the words, "the provisions relating to Appropriation and Tax Bills," by the words *les dispositions relatives aux bills d'appropriation et d'impôt*. There was not a single man having the least knowledge of the French language, who would not admit that this phrase was extremely incorrect. They ought to say *bill concernant l'emploi des deniers publics et de l'établissement d'impôt*. In the 97th clause, paragraph 15, he found the words, "Banking, incorporation of banks and the issue of paper money," translated by, *les banques, l'incorporation des banques, et l'émission du papier-monnaie*. This word *incorporation* was a vicious expression, and it did not belong to the French language. The word "incorporation" ought, in his opinion, to be translated by the words *la constitution* or *l'organisation en corporation*. He would now refer to the 93rd clause. The very title of it was given in faulty French; the word "education" having been translated by *education*. In this acceptance, this word was very improperly employed. The expression, *instruction publique*, was that which ought to be used in French documents in order to convey the idea in question. But, moreover, in the same clause, the word "education" appeared in another sense, and again the same word, *education* was employed. The words, "laws in relation to education," ought to be translated by the words, *des lois relative à l'enseignement*. In the 102nd clause they had translated, "power of appropriation" by *pouvoir d'approprier*. This again was a most vicious expression. The phrase, "power of appropriation" should be translated *pouvoir de disposer*. In the same clause, and at the end of it, the word "appropriated" was translated by the word *approprié*, in place of *affecté*. The same remark applied to the word "appropriated," found at the end of clause 106. Further, to use the word *qualification*, for the translation of the English word "qualification," was a very incorrect expression. It should be translated *qualités requises*. All this, probably, was enough to justify his present motion; but he would go further, and say that all these expressions and all these locutions,

however defective they were with regard to correctness of translation, were not binding by law; they were not official, and, in consequence, the translators were at liberty not to use them. But what was still more absurd, and what was considered as having force of law, was the translation of the very name of this country into French—the translation of the word “Dominion” by the word *Puissance*. In the first place, was this a translation at all? He humbly submitted that the word *Puissance* was not at all the translation of the word “Dominion.” The word *puissance* suggests the idea of power of active domination; whilst the word Dominion, on the contrary was employed in the sense of passive domination, of something which was dominated. This idea was perfectly communicated formerly in the appellation of *Possessions Anglaises*. In consequence, as a translation, the word was utterly incorrect. On the other hand, if he considered the position of the country, it was not more admissible. He could not accustom himself to the idea that this country, which was still a colony, ought to be called a *Puissance*, when this word all over the world was only applied to countries possessing sovereign power. They could properly say, “the *Puissances* of Europe,” or “the United States is a first-class *Puissance*,” etc.; but it had never entered into the mind of any one to say, the *Puissance* of India, the *Puissance* of Australia, although this last country was almost a continent by itself. It was then an absurdity, in his opinion, to employ this word, *Puissance*, for the name of the country, when, in point of fact, this was not a sovereign power. Now, from the lingual point of view the thing was still more absurd, as he had remarked only a moment previously; the word *Puissance* implied a state of sovereignty. They might consult Bescherelle, or Littré, or Larousse, or the dictionary of the Academy, and all that was written on the subject, and they would find that the opinions of lexicographers were unanimous upon this point. This word *Puissance*, when applied to a sovereign state, was only used in a general way with regard

to the relations of a country with other people in diplomatic language; for instance, it was used when speaking of the comparative importance of different peoples, viz: The representatives of the foreign *puissances*; the *puissances* of the first, second or third order.

MR. LAURIER: How then would you translate the word “Dominion”?

MR. FRÉCHETTE said the hon. the Minister of the Inland Revenue asked him how he would translate the word “Dominion.” This was not the question to be solved at the present moment, and he would reply in the words of a person, who said, when asked how he would replace something he proposed to destroy as useless and dangerous, “If I met a wild beast in my way, I would destroy it first and then look about to see how it was to be replaced.” The question now before them was whether the word *Puissance* was a good translation of the word “Dominion.” He maintained that this was a bad translation, and that it ought to be made to disappear, and, after this was done, they would seek for a word by which to replace it. He asked for a Committee to arrange for a better translation of the British North America Act, as he thought the present translation was most defective. It would never come into the head of any Frenchman, for instance, in speaking of France, to say: “*Les armées de la puissance française, les ministres de la puissance française, les chemins de fer de la puissance française,*” in place of saying the armies, the ministers, the railroads of the Republic or Kingdom or Empire of France; and France had far more right than this country to assume the title of *puissance*. Nevertheless, they observed in the public documents, such extraordinary phrases as the following: “*Les canaux de la puissance,*” “*Les chemins de fer de la puissance,*” “*Le revenu de la puissance.*” These expressions did not sound very badly to their ears, because they were accustomed to their use; but, in order to obtain a proper idea of them, they had only to re-translate such phrases into English. The phrase, *puissances d'Europe* was translated by “powers of Europe,” in

MR. FRÉCHETTE.

English, and what would they say of those who spoke of our canals, railroads and revenue, as being the revenue of the Power, the railroads of the Power, the canals of the Power? The absurdity then became quite apparent. The French of this country ought to be as proud of their language as the English were of theirs, and avoid as much as possible falling into such absurdities. These were important matters. Quite recently it was reported that one of the Consuls who represented France in this country—he believed it was the Consul at Quebec—said he dared not send our public documents to France for fear of turning them into ridicule, because, in the very titles of these documents, appeared the word *Puissance*, not only a defective translation, but also defective French, and a logical error, which was still worse. He believed that the time had come when they should endeavour to remedy this state of things for the sake of their national honour, and for their own satisfaction. They were proud of the French language, and they were proud of their right to use it in the counsels of the nation; and they would be untrue to the past and the universal spirit of their population if they abandoned the use of the beautiful French language which they all prized so highly. He believed that the need for reform in the direction he proposed was pressing, in view of the approaching Exhibition of 1878. He feared, lest, in the buildings of the Exposition at Paris, there should appear on placards such expressions as the following: *Objets exposés par la puissance du Canada*, etc., which would appear extremely out of place, and above all, out of harmony with the surroundings in the French capital, to the astonishment of the Parisians. He humbly submitted that this was a question which he was sure those members of the House who spoke French would consider important, and worthy of being discussed before a Committee especially chosen for this object. He would repeat that this was not a political matter at all; nor did he blame the author of the translation of the British North America Act. This was only a question concerning common sense, propriety of language and lexicography.

Mr. BABY said he did not rise to oppose the motion, but only to offer certain remarks. There was certainly ground for saying that the translation of our laws and of our public documents was faulty, to some extent; nevertheless, it was necessary to add that many of the incorrect expressions in question had slipped into the public documents in some sort of necessity. Each country and language had expressions which were particular to it—adopted by the nation and adopted by the country—and which could not be properly rendered in any other language. It was true, as the hon. member for Lévis (Mr. Fréchette) had observed, that many of these phrases were what might be called *anglicisms*; but certainly it was but right to add that they all recognized several of them as being the locutions which, although not elegant, expressed the ideas they meant to convey. They were to be found all through our Statutes, and should not be removed without some care being taken as to what would be their substitutes, otherwise great confusion would ensue. The hon. gentleman proposed the appointment of a Committee to consider these matters, and to adopt the means requisite to ensure the disappearance of these defects; above all, with reference to the Confederation Act. He thought, however, that the hon. gentleman might, perhaps, have taken another course, in order to attain the end proposed. He considered that, if they found in the Confederation Act, and even in the letter of the law, these errors pointed out by him, it was necessary to remove these defective phrases, to replace them by others which were correct, and, to ensure the disappearance of these vicious locutions, it was requisite to amend the law. They should then propose that law be amended by the substitution of correct words and phrases for incorrect ones. He hardly thought that a Committee could see to this matter; he would rather see the hon. gentleman make a proposition in the direction he indicated; he would certainly give him his cordial support, and ask of the Government permission to replace certain expressions which were not considered to be couched in pure