

*Elections Act*

we bestowed citizenship, whether upon men or upon women.

That, Sir, is the intent of my resolution. I hope that it may have the support of my friends on this side of the House. I believe it will have the support of the Progressive members; I know it will of some of them. I hope that the leader of the official Opposition will see his way clear to assist now in granting that final instalment of justice to women—a right that should never have been withheld.

Hon. HUGH GUTHRIE (South Wellington): Mr. Speaker, I think I can say that my hon. friend from North Waterloo (Mr. Euler) has been very consistent during the past three sessions of Parliament and very assiduous in pressing upon the House the view which he has just expressed. I have no objection to offer to the manner in which he has presented the question historically upon the present occasion. It is just possible that the reasons which existed two or three years ago were more pointed in those days in support of legislation such as that mentioned by my hon. friend and such as that to be found in section 29 of the Dominion Elections Act, than they are to-day. But I submit that when the act was passed in 1920 there was real, substantial ground for the enactment. The object of that section of the statute was to place the male voter and the female voter upon the same plane and to surround each with the same conditions in respect to the franchise. The naturalized male subject was entitled under the Franchise Act to vote, but before being naturalized he had to meet the requirements of our naturalization law. Under the Naturalization Act, a woman married to a naturalized British subject became by operation of law a British subject, but no examination was required of her. There was a discrimination, apparently, as between the male and female voter at that time, and the object was to surround the right to use the Canadian franchise with every reasonable precaution. We had done so in regard to men who became naturalized, and we desired to do the same thing in regard to female voters.

My hon. friend, I think, confounds two entirely different things, namely, citizenship on the one hand, and the right to exercise the franchise on the other. There are thousands—yes, tens of thousands—of British subjects in this country who cannot vote. The judges of our country cannot vote. There are a number of requirements in addition to British citizenship which must be fulfilled in order that a man may

[Mr. Euler.]

be entitled to vote. The fact that a man is a British subject does not necessarily confer on him a vote. Until recently, indeed a property qualification was necessary in some of our provinces. I do not know that it is necessary now, but the mere fact that a man is a British subject has never been taken as tantamount to saying he is a voter. We in our wisdom in this Parliament did say that the chief qualification in regard to the franchise should be British citizenship. In 1920, when this law was enacted, there is no doubt that there was considerable unrest in Canada; various sets of opinion prevailed throughout the country. With regard to male voters who were not British subjects by birth, we had insisted on safeguards before they attained naturalization; we did not so insist in regard to women voters. When section 29 was placed in our election law it was merely an attempt on the part of Parliament to safeguard the right to the franchise in the case of women just as we had done in the case of men.

Now, we did make exceptions. We made an exception in regard to women who were born on the North American continent. Was not that a reasonable exception? The woman of the United States who became the wife of a Canadian citizen, should not, I think—on a superficial glance at the case, at all events—have been required to undergo the same critical examination as that applying to women coming from, say, Central Europe. Living conditions in the United States; the mode of government in the United States; the practice and enforcement of law in that country, and the language of its citizens—these are all similar to what we enjoy in this country. A woman born and living in the United States until her marriage would be brought up under conditions almost identical with those which a woman would enjoy in Canada. She would be presumed to know the institutions of this country as she would know those of her own. But not so with the citizens of Central Europe; many of them knew nothing of Canada, of our laws, of our language, or of our institutions. A man, in order to gain naturalization, had to appear before a judge and be able to pass a fairly critical examination, but the woman from Central Europe could marry the naturalized British subject and, without any examination or the imposition of any conditions whatever, would become a British subject and be entitled to vote merely by reason of her marriage, simply by operation of law. It was to guard against that condition of affairs that section 29 was placed in the statute of 1920.