

mend to higher authority the cases for exemption; the higher authority then has to pass upon them. According to this clause the tribunal has a perfect right to grant exemptions and the grounds set out are so very wide that a tribunal, if it were so minded, could grant exemption to almost any one. The old Militia Act exempts the only son upon whom a widow is dependent. I think that is a provision that should be put in this Act; the only son of a widow should be specially exempted, just as clergymen are. This provision has been in the Militia Act from time immemorial; in all countries where there is conscription a similar provision is made.

An hon. MEMBER: Why exempt the clergy?

Mr. CURRIE: The clergy are not exempt in France, but they are in other countries. They have been exempt in all our Militia Acts during the last couple of hundred years. The clergy and the only sons of widows have been exempted. I think the committee would do well to introduce an amendment to this clause to the effect that the tribunals in the first instance should do nothing more than recommend the exemption to a higher tribunal or court of appeal. That does away with the question of whether or not a man shall be exempt though what we call the legal moral risk. As a commanding officer at Valcartier I had applications from sisters, cousins, aunts and sweethearts of soldiers for the exemption of men in whom they were interested upon grounds of domestic position, business obligations, and that sort of thing. To my mind, this clause is too wide in its provisions. I would suggest that the Solicitor General narrow it down a little bit more, because it is a dangerous clause.

All over the country people are saying that there are clauses in this Bill under which the rich will be exempted, or at least favoured. If one member of a local tribunal happens to have a cousin or some other relative brought before him the chances are that he will exempt that man. Further than that, a tribunal in one county may be very lax, and the tribunal in the next county very firm, and I see nothing in the Bill to prevent a young man from appearing before the lax tribunal even though it is not in his county.

Mr. MEIGHEN: That is provided against in the Bill.

Mr. CURRIE: I think the clause as to exemptions should be made absolutely

[Mr. Currie.]

clear. Ill health or infirmity is given in the Bill as one ground for granting exemption. A man might be infirm for a few weeks with a bad cold, and he could claim exemption on that ground, though in two weeks he would be quite all right again. Or a certificate from a doctor would give him an "infirmity" at once. My experience teaches me that men can develop various forms of infirmity when they do not want to go into the trenches, and I think that will be the case here. In certain cases a certificate of exemption should only be conditional. A man suffering from varicose veins, for instance, after three weeks in a hospital, is just as good as any soldier in the ranks, but under this infirmity clause he could claim exemption and get off altogether. I think this clause should be given a great deal of consideration by the committee, because if many young men are exempted on the ground of ill health or infirmity we shall have to take the classes higher up, perhaps up to 40 years of age. No one who has not been in the army has any conception of the reasons that doctors will give in order to get a man off. At Valcartier every man was examined, of course, by a board of medical officers, and if a man had a cigarette eye—and one man out of every four in Canada has a cigarette eye; that is the eye he blows the smoke on—if one eye was only two degrees stronger than the other, and many men are born with this defect, the man was rejected. His other eye may be perfectly good, but although a soldier needs only one eye to shoot with the man is rejected, although he is just as good in other respects as any other man in the ranks. A slight limp will also disqualify a man. A man with a dropped arch is also rejected, although he may be able to drive a team just as well as a man with an arch like a Highlander. One man out of every four is rejected for defects that do not interfere in the slightest degree with his usefulness in the trenches. A great deal has been said about the age of the soldier. Now, a man of 40 or 45 may be just as strong and healthy, and able to stand the trenches just as well as a man of 25, and sometimes better. I know lots of men over 60 who went over with the first contingent and are in the trenches to-day, going strong, and they claim that they will kill off all the young men in the trenches before they get through. For the reason that this House should make a strong effort to prevent any fraud being perpetrated on these tribunals, I think this clause should be discussed further. I think,