

*Elections Act*

have it apply only to those cases where you could not possibly argue against its application. We did eliminate all the women born in the North American continent, which in effect meant the women born in the United States.

Mr. JACOBS: Why did you not say so?

Mr. MEIGHEN: It is better legislation, and my hon. friend knows it just as well as I do, not to mention countries in any act. We mentioned the district and got the desired result. I know that the theoretical argument can be advanced, that these women, who are admitted to the right of citizenship by marriage, are foreigners just the same as the women of Central Europe. That is true. But they were born under institutions and conditions, and brought up to a character of citizenship, very much akin to our own. Consequently we felt, in our desire to make the restriction just the least that it could possibly be made, that we could safely eliminate those women; and we felt as well that, as respects those women whose very near relatives had fought for us in the war, there was no cause for restriction. That is why we brought in the amendment.

Mr. JACOBS: What about France?

Mr. MEIGHEN: It was felt to be part of wisdom not to name countries; but if hon. gentlemen want to get down to these fine points, they know as well as we do that we really have no immigration from France. The immigration that we have is, as a matter of practical fact, from Central Europe. That is the immigration of non-English speaking people, who certainly cannot be presumed, upon one week's or one month's residence in this country, to be of that character and qualification which this Parliament, as all Parliaments, has felt to be necessary in granting the status of citizenship. That was the object we sought by the legislation. Now, we did not disfranchise any one, in the first place. The statute itself admits the women to the franchise. That was the first admission, and this is a restriction placed upon it for the reasons I have given. And hon. gentlemen are free to attach to those reasons just what weight they think fit. I gave them because they were sincere reasons that actuated the Government, reasons that were strong then and are strong to-day. But we did not make the restriction absolute. We said this: As regards those women who have been naturalized by act of marriage, or, as it is sometimes

[Mr. Meighen.]

put, constructively naturalized, those who have not undergone any test at all, all we ask is that they shall do what the men had to do, namely, go before a court and show that, if they had not been naturalized by marriage at all, they could qualify anyway. We asked that they should prove just what the men had to prove, and then the franchise would become theirs. Is that autocratic legislation? Is such a woman put under any hardship in being required to do precisely what the man had to do in order to attain the same goal she is seeking to reach? There is no hardship whatever. Hon. gentlemen say that they did not go. I do not know whether they did or not. I do not know of any reason why they should not, any more than the men, to attain the same ends, go and get their qualification established under the imprimatur of the court itself.

If hon. gentlemen have a simpler way to suggest by which this qualification can be established—and it is undoubtedly a sane and reasonable qualification—then I shall be only too happy to accept the simpler method, so long as there are fair safeguards. I do not even use the word "fair", but I say the same safeguards that heretofore have always existed in the case of men. If there is any foundation in the world for the attitude of mind—for that is about the best, or at least the most dignified expression I can use, and I do not refer in these words to the hon. member for North Waterloo, who did fairly argue the question—if there is any foundation for the attitude of mind displayed by those who make speeches of the character delivered by the hon. member for George Etienne Cartier, the best that can be said in respect of them is that they have determined that absolute equality of suffrage shall prevail. I defy hon. gentlemen opposite, nay, I do not defy them, I invite them, to consider the question of absolute equality of suffrage. It will be before them for consideration. They are now the responsible government, and they will have the question to face. If they are going to take this action and decide upon absolute equality of suffrage, then it will carry them to lengths which perhaps they do not contemplate just now. There is no absolute equality in suffrage to-day, aside altogether from this question. I did not hear the hon. member for North Waterloo make a plea for it, though possibly he might; but I have an idea that there are some hon. gentlemen opposite who would not. Those people coming from the oriental coun-