

altitude which of course is unknown in peace times.

As I look at the history of this war it seems to me that nothing has occurred to show that the principles of the British system of constitutional Government should be discarded in war time, and put in cold storage, to be taken back after the restoration of peace. None of the many attempts which have been made in England to join discordant elements under the name of Union on the ground that the winning of the war would thus be facilitated, have succeeded in creating a Government which could do better or more than its predecessor. If the principles of the British system of Government are sound and efficient in peace, they are equally sound and efficient in war. If there is a feature of the British system of Government which makes for superiority, it is that the system is not complete unless there is in the face of the Government a strongly organized Opposition—an Opposition organized not for the purpose, as is too often supposed, of always opposing, but to supervise, to criticise, to support, as the public welfare may require criticism or support. Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty, and the universal testimony of history is that unless there is eternal vigilance on the part of a strong and resolute Opposition, encroachments upon freedom and abuses in office will creep in, just as surely and just as certainly as weeds and tares will invade and choke the crops of the husbandman if he is not constantly on the watch. Nay, more; I think I can invoke also the testimony of the history of British institutions to show that if at any time there is on the part of some section of the Opposition a relaxation in vigilance, weeds and tares at once appear in luxurious growth. Already we have evidence of this, and the evidence is that to-day this Parliament of Canada meets in violation of what is left of the electoral law of Canada.

Sir, last session those who sat in the House were divided on the question of conscription. There were members of the Liberal party who favoured conscription; others opposed it. Upon this point I as the recognized leader of the Opposition, did not interfere with the conscience of any man. Strong reasons were brought forward in support of each view, but there was no divergence of opinion on this side with regard to the outrageous measure; known as the War-time Elections Act, or,

[Sir Wilfrid Laurier.]

to call it by its popular name—or unpopular name, rather—the Franchise Act. Among members of the Opposition there was no divergence of opinion; they were unanimously opposed to it. Every feature of that law was an outrage, an odious violation of the very foundation of our system of democratic government. The creating of a special electorate in view of an impending election; the granting of the franchise to some and the withholding of it from others; the opening wide of the door to fraud which enabled the Government or its officers to ostracize some classes of His Majesty's subjects and to include others whom they did not dare ignore—all these were features of the Act which could not be accepted by any man who desired to uphold the principles of Liberalism. The measure was accepted by Liberal members who entered the Government under the argument of war necessity. Nothing, Sir, is more certain than that one illegality will lead to another; that, as a logical consequence, wrong will be followed by wrong. I repeat that this Parliament is assembled in direct violation of what is left of the electoral law after the passing of the War-time Elections Act.

Last year we passed legislation to take the votes of the soldiers who were in the trenches. We had a civilian vote as well as a military vote to record. So far as the civilian vote was concerned, there was not much alteration in the Act. The only alteration of which I was aware was that section 211, which prescribed the duties of the returning officer under the old Act, was somewhat interfered with. I need not refer hon. gentlemen to the fact that under our system all elections are carried out under the writ of the King, which is issued to officers specially selected in every riding to take the vote of the people and to report it to an officer known as the Clerk of the Crown in Chancery. Section 211 provides that after the votes have been counted the returning officer will transmit to the Clerk of the Crown in Chancery his return that the candidate having the largest number of votes has been duly elected. It is the duty, therefore, of the returning officer to count the votes and then to make his return that the man having the majority of votes is the elected representative. That portion of the Act was amended to this extent: The return to be made is not a direct return; a certificate is to be issued by the special returning officer to an officer known as the general returning officer, stating the number of votes received on each side. The Act