

privileges, and are enabled to exercise them to exert a control over the destinies of our defenders overseas.

Very briefly stated those are the main facts of the situation that confronts us, and they are sufficient, I think, to bring home to the mind of every member of this House the certain truth that on the franchise as it stands to-day, on what may be described as a peace franchise, a very grave and a very gross injustice will be done to those men. The injustice is done not only to them but it is brought home to Canada. The injustice really is done to the Canadian nation, should an election take place on the franchise as it stands to-day, eliminating the influence of these men, eliminating entirely the voice of those who have fallen and are prisoners, eliminating entirely the voice of those who fight in the Allied forces but were formerly citizens of this country, stripping entirely those men of the personal force which they should of right exert.

It is mainly to meet those conditions that the Bill, which I now have the honour to move to introduce, is brought before this House. The measure constitutes an attempt to repair, so far as Parliament can repair, the injustice which I have described as falling under present legislation on our overseas forces, and ultimately on Canada herself. The only method of reaching a result that may be said best to represent or to re-echo the voice of our soldiers abroad is to reach their representatives at home. If the direct vote cannot be obtained, if the direct influence cannot be obtained, then the best way to repair that injustice, at all events the only way that seems available, is to reach such of their kin at home who can best be said to be likely to vote in such a way and to influence the electors in such a way as they themselves would do were they upon our shores. Consequently, this Bill provides a measure of woman enfranchisement which endeavours to attain that end.

It will be remembered that earlier in this session the Prime Minister intimated to the House that there would be a measure of woman suffrage should an election appear in sight, a measure of woman suffrage granted under such conditions and limitations as Parliament might provide. Parliament is now facing the necessity of providing those limitations. In this connection hon. members should keep especially in mind the fact that a very substantial portion of the women of this country who are now British subjects, and who, under any general scheme of enfranchisement

[Mr. Meighen.]

would be entitled to vote, have become British subjects by a process of constructive naturalization, by the naturalization of a parent, or by marriage. Remembering this, it seems very plain, indeed, that it would be unfair and unreasonable at this time, and under the shadow of this war, that an unlimited woman suffrage should be granted. The necessity, then, of drawing a line is at once upon us, and it has been decided, and it is embodied in this Bill, that the line so to be drawn shall be the line of service. Not only do those who are nearest of kin to the overseas forces more likely represent in sentiment and in purpose the voice and will of those who are fighting for us, but also those whose sons, whose brothers, and whose husbands have gone to the battlefield, have given a service and made a sacrifice in this war of a character higher and greater than that which any other person is able to give or to make. Consequently, on the ground not only of their representative capacity, but of the service and sacrifice which they have rendered, it is not unjust or unfair that those nearest of kin to our soldiers overseas should be given special recognition at this time.

The Bill, therefore, provides that the wives, the widows, the mothers, the sisters, and the daughters of the members past or present of the actual overseas force shall have the right to vote in the war-time election. This privilege does not extend to such relatives of those of our expeditionary forces as have not gone overseas. They are still with us, and the same reasoning does not apply to them. They, of course, can vote, but their relatives are not enfranchised.

The Bill has another aspect which I shall now explain. In this country we have a substantial portion of our population who are of alien enemy birth, or alien enemy blood, or near extraction. Many of these people have been citizens of Canada for a great number of years; many of them have become accustomed to our institutions, and as years have gone by they doubtless have been more and more divorced in sympathy from the land of their nativity. But, on the other hand, there are a large number who are comparatively recent arrivals in this country, and who consequently have not the same sense of Canadian and British nationality as have we, and who cannot be expected to have wholly separated themselves from the sympathies and predispositions which governed them in the land