

*Elections Act*

question that we are discussing now; it is the very heart of it. There is not equality in the admission to citizenship. Were there equality in the admission to citizenship, there would be no reason in the world for inequality in the admission to suffrage. The man must undergo examination; he must live up to those tests. But not so with the woman. The women come to this country, perhaps from Central Europe, but, at all events, from a country in which a different language from our own is spoken, a country in which the people live under different customs. No one is saying anything about their living under different moral conditions or anything about moral customs. Those were only words put by the hon. member for George Etienne Cartier into the mouth of the hon. member for South Wellington (Mr. Guthrie), indicating, no doubt, the practices that the former indulged in during the election. Our contention is that, perhaps, the woman comes from a country in which the people live under conditions which would justify the presumption that she would know little of our institutions, of the obligations of our citizenship; in a word, from a country in which there would be no presumption that she was fitted to be admitted to all the rights of citizenship in our country. But she comes to Canada. Possibly within the first week in which she arrives in this country, the first day, for there are many such cases; or the first year, she marries a naturalized subject; perhaps she marries a citizen by birth. Let us take the case where she marries a naturalized subject—it does not matter which case we take—that moment she is a British citizen; that moment she is a Canadian citizen, and she has reached that status without having met any of the tests whatever which this country has placed around the admittance to that status of naturalization, and without having shown any qualification of any character whatsoever for citizenship.

Mr. JACOBS: If she came from Mexico, what would be the situation?

Mr. MEIGHEN: We will come to that in a minute. They do not come from Mexico. The assumptions of the hon. gentleman are just about as far-fetched as his arguments and, indeed, his assertions of fact. I wonder how many of the five or six thousand who put the hon. gentleman in this House were from Mexico.

[Mr. Meighen.]

Mr. JACOBS: They were intelligent enough to vote against the right hon. gentleman and his government.

Mr. MEIGHEN: The further away they came from, the less they would be likely to know, and the more likely they would be to vote for the hon. gentleman. I am endeavouring to make clear to the House the reasons for the distinction. I am not particularly concerned as to what weight those reasons are given; but I am concerned that the reasons which actuated myself and those with whom I work, shall be known and shall be in a position to be weighed and given such weight as hon. gentlemen ought to give them. I have explained the distinction that has always existed in this country, as everywhere, in the admission to citizenship. Can any hon. gentleman tell me a reason why there should be discrimination in the qualifications for citizenship and no discrimination in the qualifications for suffrage?

Mr. EULER: Is the right hon. gentleman not aware that that discrimination which now exists in the granting of citizenship to man and woman respectively is because of the action of the government of which he was a member, in removing from the Naturalization Act of 1919 the right which married women had to become naturalized? That is a fact.

Mr. MEIGHEN: The hon. gentleman has missed the point altogether. That difference has existed all the time in this country; it exists in every country. Does the hon. gentleman know a country in the world where a woman, upon marriage, does not become of the citizenship of the man?

Mr. EULER: I am saying that by the Act of 1919, when a new naturalization law was passed, the married women of this country had a right to obtain personal naturalization, and that the government of 1920 dropped that clause from the amended act.

Mr. MEIGHEN: That matter is not pertinent at all, but I do not think the hon. gentleman is right in fact. I have asked the hon. member for South Wellington (Mr. Guthrie), and his opinion is the same as mine. It may be that we should have a law which would prevent women from becoming citizens except by process of naturalization.

Mr. EULER: We had it.