Sarah Wollaston (Totnes, Conservative)

Our sexuality is fundamental to who we are. Surely the crux of the debate is the question of whether we accord equal rights, respect and esteem to people regardless of their sexuality.

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Sarah Wollaston (Totnes, Conservative) Click here to watch Sarah speak

There is a Bill before the other House to pardon Alan Turing. We probably would not be here debating in freedom today without his genius at Bletchley park, yet this remarkable individual—the father of modern computing—was driven to suicide as a result of his shameful chemical castration enforced by the state as an alternative to prison. I hope that the Bill in the other place is successful.

If anybody feels, however, that this is some historical footnote, they should think again. They should consider the number of homophobic crimes that happen every year, and perhaps they should look at an MP's postbag. I receive hateful correspondence, some of which suggests treatment for homosexuality. I can tell the people who write those things that homosexuality needs no treatment. Our sexuality is fundamental to who we are. We will all know people who have been forced to live a lie, bringing immeasurable unhappiness to themselves and those around them. Such marriages were not marriages— they were a sham enforced by society and the state.

I am very proud that we in this House will shortly sweep away one of the last statutory discriminations against people with mental illness. Words matter. The word "marriage" matters to me. My understanding of marriage as somebody with no faith is no less valid than that of Members who speak passionately from their religious perspective. I would say that when this measure has passed, as I hope that it does, we will look back in five years' time and wonder what the fuss was about.

I well remember talking to a senior military figure at around the time we were about to introduce the ability for people to be openly gay within our armed forces. He spoke about the collapse of discipline and moral decay, but none of that happened; in fact, the forces became a much more open and pleasant place to work. In a few years' time, will the marriage of any Member here feel any different? any less valuable? because we have extended that right to those who perhaps have different views from ourselves? This measure is long overdue.

I ask hon. Members to remember that when Alan Turing took his own life, it is thought that he laced an apple with cyanide, an apple being the symbol of forbidden love. Homosexuality is not forbidden love, and it is time that this House recognised that, and recognised that people cannot be a little bit equal. We have heard hon. Members and colleagues telling us that this matters to them. If it matters to one person in this House that we recognise the
validity of their relationship, then it is time for us to move on. Tonight I shall be thinking of Alan Turing and all those people who have had to live a lie over the centuries, all those people around the world today for whom being homosexual is still a death sentence, and the message that we send around the world if we do not accept and celebrate people who are homosexual and vote for love and equality.

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