

VOTES FOR WOMEN

EDITED BY FREDERICK AND EMMELINE PETHICK LAWRENCE.

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Price 1d. Weekly (Post Free.)

THE BABE AND THE WOOD—NEW VERSION.



THE WICKED UNCLE: I have sworn to protect our little Wilhelmina, but if you like to take her and lose her in yonder Referendum Wood I sha'n't do anything to prevent it.

[Speaking in Sunderland Sir Edward Grey said that it would be contrary to the pledges of the Government if they insisted on a Referendum on Woman Suffrage, but if the House of Commons decided upon this course that was another matter.]

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Prime Minister, and we called attention to the fact that others, including the *Daily News* and the *Manchester Guardian*, held a similar view.

Subtleties of the "Westminster Gazette."

The *Westminster Gazette* on the other hand has published two articles to prove that though it would not be honourable for the Cabinet itself to insist upon a Referendum, there is nothing to prevent the House of Commons from deciding upon this course. The Cabinet, it argues, have undertaken to leave the question of amendments relating to Woman Suffrage to the discretion of the House; if the House decides to insert into a Woman Suffrage amendment words requiring a Referendum to be taken, the Government would not merely be justified in allowing such words to be voted on freely, but would even be acting contrary to their pledges if they took a different view!

Views of Sir Edward Grey.

We should have been quite prepared to allow this sophistry to pass as beneath contempt, had it not been that it has received support in an unexpected quarter. On Saturday last Sir Edward Grey, after speaking in North Sunderland, was interrogated by Miss Laura Ainsworth of the W.S.P.U. as to the policy of the Government on this particular question. His reply was as follows:—

The Referendum is a question I personally have not considered much. It does not rest with the Government but with the majority of the House of Commons to put women's suffrage into the Government Bill. The Government will certainly not be entitled, after all they have said, to say there must be a Referendum. If the House of Commons insist upon the Referendum, that is another matter.

From this answer it will be seen that the proposition

put forward by the *Westminster Gazette* is being seriously considered in high quarters.

How a Referendum would be Set Up.

In order that our readers may understand clearly the nature of this proposition it is necessary first to consider what a Referendum is, and how it is to be carried out. Firstly, certain highly controversial questions have to be decided. Who are to vote? In what form shall the question be submitted? Shall a bare majority decide the issue, or must there be, as in Lord Balfour's Bill, a surplusage if a change is to be carried? Shall the voting be by ballot? If bribery is not to be permitted, how shall it be punished? Secondly, a special machinery for taking the Referendum has to be calling into being. Thirdly, provision has to be made for finding out of the National Exchequer the funds necessary for the purpose. Now, even supposing it to be conceivable that the answers to all the questions mentioned under the first head could be included in a clause in a Franchise Bill, it is quite inconceivable that the necessary machinery for a Referendum or the funds for the purpose could be found except in a separate Bill, and such a Bill could only be carried by the express volition of the Government acting as a whole. Unless directed so to do by the Government, the House of Commons can no more bring about a Referendum on Woman Suffrage than it can carry and put into operation a Home Rule Bill or a new system of taxes.

Alternatives for the Cabinet.

The Cabinet cannot, therefore, divest itself of responsibility in the matter and remain neutral. It has to make up its mind whether it is going to be *for*, or *against*. If it is against the employment of the Refer-

To the brave women who to-day are fighting for freedom: to the noble women who all down the ages kept the flag flying and looked forward to this day without seeing it: to all women all over the world, of whatever race, or creed, or calling, whether they be with us or against us in this fight, we dedicate this paper.

THE OUTLOOK.

In our issue last week we gave the details of two proposals put forward by Liberal papers with the object of getting the Cabinet out of its difficulty with regard to Votes for Women. The first and most prominently advertised of these proposals was the suggestion that Woman Suffrage should be submitted to a special Referendum. We characterised this proposal as a direct breach of the pledges given by the

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