

396.11(41-5)

MOTTO:

FREEDOM TO SERVE

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Irishwomen's  
Suffrage Federation

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Non-Militant

Non-Party . . .

The great Non-Militant Suffrage Society of Ireland

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COLOURS:

BLUE AND SILVER

List of Societies in the Federation.

NORTHERN COMMITTEE

Belfast, Bushmills, Ballymoney, Coleraine, Derry,  
Holywood, Lisburn, Larne, Newry, Portrush,  
Warrenpoint, Whitehead.

LEINSTER COMMITTEE

Irishwomen's Reform League (Dublin), Birr,  
Kilkenny, Roscrea.

MUNSTER WOMEN'S FRANCHISE  
LEAGUE

Cork, Limerick, Nenagh, Skibbereen, Tralee,  
Waterford, Valencia Island.

CONNAUGHT WOMEN'S FRANCHISE  
LEAGUE

Galway, Sligo.

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The President's Open Letter to the  
Members of the Irishwomen's  
Suffrage Federation.

I THANK you for the honour you have done me and for the confidence you have placed in me by electing me to be your President. To tell you what a surprise it was when it was first suggested to me and how unsuited I felt for the post would serve no useful purpose. I can only say that I shall try to serve each member and the Federation as a whole as much as I can.

The following are a few thoughts which I had hoped to have had an opportunity of putting before you for your consideration at our Annual Meeting.

Destruction must ever be followed by construction. A magnificent opportunity to serve our country now lies around us. We must awaken to it, welcome it, spend a few minutes each day in dwelling on it, in listening to what it has to say to us, and then we shall unite the share of light which has come to each of us, in that silence, and translate it into deeds.

The thought that comes to me is **Unity**. Artificial fences and limitations are melting and vanishing. That which separates us is disappearing. Our individual work is to strengthen that which unites us and to sink our differences—namely, that which separates us. For are we not all aware that our separation consists only in our different ways of looking at Truth, which is ever the same and unchanging? Many thoughts come into our mind. Each is an imperfect facet of Truth. And it is only as we recognise the incompleteness and imperfection of our personal views or perceptions, and are willing to rectify them, that we become tolerant of the imperfect vision of others.

Another thought that we might consider is our **Citizenship**. We must learn to recognise that we are all citizens, whether we have the Parliamentary vote or not. Nothing alters the fact that we have been born into a nation, and that we are therefore part of that nation with definite responsibilities towards it. Whether we wrap our talents in a napkin or not we are responsible for their use, for the use of the opportunities and capabilities we have. And this responsibility includes our duties as citizens.

To-day, whether Ireland gets or keeps Home Rule (for those of us who are not politicians it matters little what a Bill is called), some of us believe that Ireland will get some measure of autonomy, giving to the citizens the power of expressing their wishes and of showing the talents that are in them. But let us see clearly that no grouping together of males is, or ever can be, a nation. A nation consists of mothers, and fathers, sons and daughter, and *each* of these sections has a right to free expression, to growth and to happiness. Will the Federation stand for this ideal? Will it include all who are willing to serve their nation and their empire? For let us not be parochial. A modern authority tells us that Ireland was inhabited by Firbolgs\* before the Celts came, and that this mixed population then intermarried with those who came at various times to these shores—Danes, Normans, Spaniards, Saxons, ~~French~~. Whatever we are now or have been in the past, the blood of many races courses in our veins, and poor-spirited would we indeed be if we limited our relationship to one only of these mighty strains, these branches of the great human family. So let us claim our empire—the empire which is our birthright. Irishmen have fought for it, Irishwomen have worked and suffered for it. It belongs to each one of us as much as it belongs to any Englishman or any Englishwoman, or Welshman or Welshwoman, or Scotchman or Scotchwoman. The Union Jack, the great flag which unites the flags of our three saints, St. Patrick, St. Andrew, and St. George, waves over

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\* The Firbolgs were Ivernians, of the same race as the modern Basques. They were a small dark race, quite different from the fair-haired Celts. The newest theory is that the main body of Irish are not Celts at all.

this empire. It is a noble empire to be one with—Australia, Canada, New Zealand, India, Africa! And, as our knowledge of one another and our consciousness expands, we shall desire to love and serve not only our own town, our own country, our own Empire, but our sympathies will go out also towards the men and women of all nations, be they Russians, Germans, French, Japanese, or Armenians, until we form one happy family as fellow-citizens of this little planet which is called the earth.

Meanwhile, let our Federation take its part in working towards this ideal, by including in its union all men and women who are eager to serve their country and their empire. There will be work for all of us according to our desires and capabilities. For every citizen there are various and beautiful activities. We are all citizens, and our motto as citizens is—“What injures one injures all.” Therefore, we must see to it that no fellow-citizen of ours is injured or cramped. This must take time. But we can continue to work towards such an end, remembering Mrs. Perkins Gilman's words:—

“Perhaps the entrance of the non-competitive sex upon the business of the world may of itself show us the way to better conditions. Women are pouring forward to take a hand in the world's work because the world needs them and they need it; because such normal social industry develops the woman and enriches the world. It is a question of human beings, not males and females; of contribution, not competition.”

And now I propose that we enrol unofficially as citizens in our Federation all those who will give us their help in any capacity, whether they are suffragists or not. For all citizens thus enrolled the only distinction will be one of their own making to which no one can reasonably object. If they think that a vote is an undesirable, or a useless thing, we shall not distress them by giving them a vote in the Federation. Nor will subscriptions be exacted from them on the penalty of ceasing to belong to the Federation. Their welcome assistance will be entirely voluntary.

If the branches of the Federation adopt this suggestion and find that it has been a source of growth, vitality or pleasure, it will be possible to vote on it at our next Annual Meeting and to add a rule embodying the plan in our constitution.

There is much for us to do and to think of at this time. As the year goes by I hope to hear of the formation of numerous new branches, of great increase in membership in all our branches, and of the organisation of many civic activities. But to-day it is enough to carry away the thought of Unity and the desire to co-operate with all men and women who hold the ideal expressed in the American Declaration of Independence :—

“ We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men [people] are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights Governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”

And Mazzini has defined for us an ideal of country :—

“ Your country is the token of the mission which God has given to you to fulfil to humanity. Your country should be your temple, God at the summit and a people of equals at the base. A country is not a mere territory; the particular territory is only its foundation, the country is the idea which rises on that foundation, the sentiment of love and fellowship which binds together all sons and daughters of that territory.”

*December, 1914.*

## **Name—Irishwomen's Suffrage Federation**

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### **What is the IRISHWOMEN'S SUFFRAGE FEDERATION ?**

It is the largest Suffrage organization in Ireland. It includes 26 Societies all over Ireland.

### **What does the IRISHWOMEN'S SUFFRAGE FEDERATION work for ?**

The vote for Irishwomen on the same terms as it is or may be granted to Irishmen.

### **What will the IRISHWOMEN'S SUFFRAGE FEDERATION do when the vote has been granted ?**

It will work through the power of the vote for the welfare of Irishmen and Irishwomen.

### **What are the methods of the IRISHWOMEN'S SUFFRAGE FEDERATION ?**

Meetings are held to explain why the vote is wanted. Deputations wait on public bodies all over the country and on politicians of all parties.

Work for the prevention and relief of distress during the War has been carried on by the societies in the Federation.

Workrooms have been organized, a Red Cross Motor Ambulance supplied, a bed provided in the Dublin Castle Red Cross Hospital, and women and children have been cared for.

### **What does membership of the IRISHWOMEN'S SUFFRAGE FEDERATION involve ?**

Recognition that women's interests in matters of State are as great as those of men.

Belief that the vote is required to safeguard those interests.

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Join the IRISHWOMEN'S SUFFRAGE FEDERATION and so help the peaceful agitation for the Vote.

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Central Office—29 South Anne Street, Dublin.

*[Faint, illegible text, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.]*