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WOMEN'S FRANCHISE LEAGUE.

REPORT

OF

PROCEEDINGS

AT THE

INAUGURAL MEETING:

LONDON, JULY 25th, 1889.

LONDON:
THE HANSARD PUBLISHING UNION, LIMITED,
GREAT QUEEN STREET, LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS, W.C.

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THE CHAIRMAN (Mrs. M'Ilquham): Ladies and Gentlemen, it is with great diffidence, and with a very great sense of responsibility, that I find myself in the chair this afternoon, for though we do not appear to be a numerically very strong party, I am quite certain that the principles which we are forming ourselves into a Society to carry out will, in the end, be victorious. I had hoped that the chair would have been far more worthily and honourably filled by one whom, in all love and reverence I have heard named, not the mother, but the grandmother, not only of the Women's Suffrage movement, but of almost every other movement of modern times, that has had for its object the amelioration of the condition of women. I mean, Ladies and Gentlemen, Mrs. P. A. Taylor, the wife of the late member for Leicester. (Applause.)

I regard it as a very great honour indeed to have been asked to take the chair this afternoon. I will tell you why I so regard it. It is because I believe that for the first time in England a Society is about to be established, having for its object the Parliamentary Franchise for Women, on a sound, a straightforward, and an honourable basis. (Applause.)

I will say a word or two in regard to the aims and objects of the Women's Franchise League, which we to-day inaugurate.

Our objects are two,—first, to extend to women, whether unmarried, married, or widowed, the right to vote at Parliamentary, Municipal, Local, and other elections, on the same conditions which qualify men"; and, second, "to establish for all women equal civil and political rights with men." Now, by the very breadth of our second object, we, of course, include our first; but I have no hesitation in saying, that we are wise in thus widening the scope of our aims and work beyond that of merely asking for the Parliamentary Franchise for women, for I think it is quite apparent that an immense side-help has been given to the Suffrage cause in England by the passing of the several Married Women's Property Acts, the Guardianship of Infants Act, the Maintenance of Wives Act, and other measures which have dignified and ennobled the position of women. The League, I am thankful to know, will throw in its weight and sympathies with every effort to establish for women equal civil and political rights with men.

Before I leave this part of the subject, I should like to allude to the immense help which I think the Suffrage cause has received within the last twelve months by the work of the Society for returning women as County Councillors, and here I may point out the different basis on which the Women's Franchise League will stand compared with the other Women's Suffrage Societies.

At the end of last year, when the Society for returning women as County Councillors was being formed, the work and object of that Society were discredited in the *Women's Suffrage Journal.* But, Ladies and Gentlemen, by the adoption of our second object, "to establish for all women equal civil and political rights with men," we have made it impossible for us to seek to discredit or damage any effort for the political or municipal advancement of women. With this wide work before us, I feel sure that every year will bring us some success which will rouse and cheer our spirits. We shall work and never weary, but go on from strength to strength, till in the end I trust and hope we shall succeed in passing some final Act of Parliament, which shall establish for all women equal civil and political rights with men. (Applause.)

I now wish to say a few words as to the reasons which called

this League into existence. It was impossible but that such a League should be formed, unless we were prepared to stand by and see *positive injury* done to the position of married women. For many years past, the literature issued by the Women's Suffrage Societies has led their friends and supporters to suppose that they were asking for the Parliamentary Franchise for women on exactly the same terms as it was granted to men.

I have here a *Women's Suffrage Journal* of just ten years ago. It says, "the following is the form of declaration which, it is hoped, will become a record of permanent historical and political value. We, the undersigned, possessing the qualifications which would entitle us, if we were men, to vote in the elections for members of Parliament, declare that we consider our exclusion from the suffrage on the ground of sex, an infraction of the principle that taxation and representation should go together, and we hereby express our desire for an alteration in the laws which shall enable all women,"—*all* women, mind,—"possessing the qualifications now enabling men to vote, to exercise the Parliamentary Franchise if they desire to do so."

You will please notice that in that declaration, "The Women Householders' Declaration," I think it is, no word whatever is said of any disability of "coverture." But since that time the Women's Suffrage Societies must have shifted their position. *When*, I am not in a position to say, because I have never been on the Executive of those societies; but at some time or other they must have shifted their position, and given their assent to the admission of the "coverture" clause, which now stands part of Mr. Woodall's Bill. Therefore, whilst the Suffrage Societies were, on one hand, asking for the Parliamentary Franchise to be conferred on one class of women, they were, on the other, doing positive injury to another class, and that class, I do not hesitate to say, quite as much in need as the other class of women of the protection of the Parliamentary vote, as is shown by the fact that it has been necessary to secure for this class, of late years, a very great deal of remedial legislation. The result of that mischievous "coverture" clause would be that by no possibility could any married

woman exercise the Parliamentary Franchise. Now, I consider that the admission of that clause is nothing better than a pandering to barbarism ; it is a mark of sympathy with antiquated ideas and notions; I think I might say that the sympathies of the Suffrage Societies seem to me to be very much with antiquated and barbarous ideas, for they seek, as it were, to propitiate our legislative gods by a sacrifice. They say in effect, "Confer the franchise on single women and widows, and we are prepared to assist you in riveting a fetter on the neck of every married woman in England."

Well, Ladies and Gentlemen, I, for one, object to the adoption of any such clause on my behalf. It is a very serious thing for any society in this nineteenth century to seek to rivet disabilities upon any class of women. I very much doubt if it would be possible for the most able lawyer in the kingdom to say off-hand what are the common law disabilities of married women in regard to any of the existing franchises. For my own part, I can say that I have for many years past voted at parish meetings in two parishes, and have done so without let or hindrance. I have helped to form a quorum at those meetings; I have nominated and seconded various parochial officers, and no one has raised any objection to my so doing. Further than that, when the Local Government Board was appealed to, to annul my election as Poor Law Guardian on the ground that I was a married woman, what did the Local Government Board do? Did they so annul my election? Certainly not. They instituted a strict and searching inquiry into the *bona fides* of my property qualification, and when they found that that property qualification was really independent of my husband, there was an end to the inquiry. I think this action of the Local Government Board bears out the contention of many of us, that the various Married Women's Property Acts, particularly the Act of 1882, gave to married women all the rights and privileges of property and contract, and that, as a natural consequence, we possess the same rights and privileges as single women (in respect of franchises based upon property or ratepaying qualifications).

But even if we admit, for the sake of argument, that there exists a common law disability which, when the Suffrage was

granted to women, would prevent married women from voting, then I ask you, Ladies and Gentlemen, was it honourable or was it right for the Suffrage Societies to seek to clinch a disability on any class of women? It was not right and it was not honourable.

I hope that I have justified, if you think that it needed justification, our action in forming this Society.

Every year an increasing number of educated and cultivated women enter our various professions and businesses. They marry, and many of them continue to carry on those businesses and professions; and every year sees an increase in the number of married women traders. Many of the latter class especially are forced by sheer necessity to become the bread-winners of their families. And they are certainly the last class of women that any of the Women's Suffrage Societies should seek to make into political pariahs.

In conclusion, I wish to say that we do not propose, as a Society, merely to fight the "coverture" clause of Mr. Woodall's Bill. We propose ourselves to go to Parliament with a Bill to extend to women, whether unmarried, married, or widowed, the right to vote at Parliamentary, Municipal, Local, and other elections, on the same terms which qualify men, and I would submit further that our second and larger object is quite as worthy of your support as this first and more limited object, which will be accomplished by the passing of our proposed Bill. By our second object we accept it as our duty as a Society to use every means "to establish for all women equal civil and political rights with men." (Applause.)

Mrs. Wolstenholme Elmy then read letters expressing sympathy with the movement and regret for the absence of the writers from Mrs. P. A. Taylor, Miss Sara S. Hennell, Mrs. Fenwick Miller, the Rev. J. Page Hopps, Mrs. Spence Watson, and others.

Mrs. Scatcherd : Mrs. M'Ilquham, Ladies, and Gentlemen, I have the honour to move the first resolution, which is, "That in view of the principle of the equal rights of men and women on which the League is founded, this meeting urges its

members and friends to give their earnest and energetic support to the following measures of proposed legislation :—

First : the Electoral Franchises of Women Bill, which extends the Suffrage to all duly qualified women, whether married or unmarried ;

Second : the Divorce Amendment Bill, which proposes to amend the unjust law of England with regard to Divorce, by assimilating it to the more equitable law of Scotland ; and

Third : the Devolution of Estates Bill, which remedies the flagrant injustices suffered by women under the law of intestacy."

I move that resolution not only with deep satisfaction, but also, as our chairman said, with a sense of great responsibility ; and with the determination on my part, and I hope on yours also, to do our utmost to put it into force.

Professor Seeley, in that charming book of his, "The Expansion of England," has said that events are not to be judged by the emphasis with which they announce themselves to the public, or with which the public receives them, but that they are to be judged by their pregnancy; let us see if they are pregnant with great events to come. I feel sure that this meeting is full of promise of great things for the future. For what purpose are we here ? We are here really to claim for the first time full and absolute and complete freedom for women. I, for one, am perfectly tired of joining societies which fight only for a little bit, a little shred, a little fragment of freedom. It is a waste of power and a waste of organisation when we form societies to obtain just a little shred of justice for women. We are here this afternoon to say that we have nailed our flag to the mast, and to announce that our desire is to obtain full and equal justice for women with men.

I think it is a great advantage to have a society which will show who are in favour of complete justice for women. Any measures that are for partial justice for women, if they do not hurt other women, we shall be glad to help on; but we announce from this day forward that we are in favour of full justice for women, and we invite those who are in favour of that to come and range themselves on our side, and work with us.

It seems to me that there are only two great questions at present really before the public. These are the labour question and the women's question. And, when we come to consider, these questions really are united; for it is largely on the economic condition of woman that her freedom in the future will depend. Women have had in the past a great deal of so-called protection. Men have got up agitations to frame or enact fresh laws to nominally protect women ; and I think that in time those laws will prove useless, and that a fresh crop of evils will come up simply because "protection" does not answer. What is wanted is freedom for women.

In an American magazine an article has recently appeared by Mr. Grant Allen. I have only seen part of that article, but I think I am right in saying that he denied that women were even one half of the human race. He claimed that the race were really men, and that the women were only those who "produced" the human race. I remember a small meeting in Yorkshire where a man got up and said the very same thing to me—it was a Suffrage meeting. He said we had better take such justice as men would give us, because, he contended, we were not half the human race, and were only here to produce the human race—that to man was confided the freedom, the full career, and the management of life,—not to women. Now we find Mr. Grant Allen saying the same thing. Well, I am one of those who contend that motherhood and the bearing of children, and the rearing and training of them, is one of the most important services which could possibly be rendered to the world, and that instead of women being placed in a dependent position, or a position of subjection because of their motherhood, they ought to be placed certainly on quite an equality with men, and that that service which they render to the race should entitle them to full freedom and justice, and to the vote, and any other freedom that we desire; whereas, as it is, the fact of motherhood is often used and urged against women to place them in subjection to man.

I should like here to say one word of thanks to Miss Rachel Chapman for her article in the *Westminster Review*, in the autumn of last year, in which she deprecated the Marriage Service of the Church of England, in terms not one whit too

strong. I maintain that that Service does much to keep up the subjection of women in our land. It lends the sanction of religion to much that is degrading and wrong in married life. (Applause.) I, for one, can never sanction that Service by my presence, and I trust that all here may feel likewise on the subject, and that when you refuse to attend a wedding which is held where that Service is read you will not content yourself with saying you cannot go, but bravely give the reason why you could not do so. I have given the reason that I consider that Service—that so-called religious Service—to be degrading and indecent and immoral. (Hear, hear.) When I see bishops and clergy holding meetings upon the question of social purity, it makes me wonder whether it has never struck them that their laws for purity can have very little effect unless they advocate morality in marriage as well as morality out of marriage.

Whatever we may be according to Mr. Grant Allen's opinion, of one thing we can assure him,—that revolt has set in among the "producers of the human race." (Laughter.) We do not revolt against serving our race; we do not revolt against any service which will be for the good of society; but what we do revolt against is complete self-effacement, or that lesson which an authoress ("Ouida") has so sedulously taught in a recent novel,—the complete abnegation of self.

Our League has to undertake great work. First of all there is reference made in the resolution to the Electoral Franchises of Women Bill. Here I should like to answer an objection which is sometimes urged that we women who have been fighting so long for the franchise are now found opposing Mr. Woodall's Bill. I am often asked how this is. Well, we were offered one good thing together with another very bad thing, and told that if we took the one we must swallow the two. To that we objected, and I think that the bad thing—which was the clause against married women—completely outweighed the good which would be accomplished if single women obtained the suffrage. I think that it would push back freedom for married women certainly twenty or five-and-twenty years, just at a time when public opinion is being educated towards a greater freedom for married women.

The work of the League too as regards the Divorce Bill is very important indeed. The law of England on this point is, as you know, very unfair to the wife. The law of Scotland is equal between wife and husband, and we want to make it so here. Also the law of Scotland grants a divorce for four years' desertion by either spouse without reasonable cause. We wish to assimilate the English law to the Scotch law. That is as far as we deem it wise and prudent to go.

The task of our League will perhaps not always be an easy task; but I think it is very clear that we have almost been forced into the formation of this Society, and that the time is ripe for it. We may each and all take heart of grace one from another, and make up our minds that we are going to do our utmost to further the aims of this Society, even the youngest woman in this room among her friends, by word, by voice, by pen, and, above all, by example.

I have very great pleasure in moving the resolution. (Applause.)

Dr. Pankhurst: Mrs. M'Ilquham, Ladies and Gentlemen, I rise with much pleasure to second the resolution which Mrs. Scatcherd has moved so ably, and in such comprehensive terms.

We are all highly gratified by the way in which you from the chair have stated the great principle which forms the basis of this Society. Unquestionably if we look back 25 years,—and some of us can as having been active in this cause,—it is clear that during all those years some of the most earnest and energetic of those in the movement have always had at heart the great principle which constitutes the life of this Women's Franchise League—the equal participation of men and women in political and social rights and duties. That principle has kept their enthusiasm alive and sustained them in the long struggle. Whatever reasons there were for that principle 25 years ago, those reasons are immensely greater now. We see how necessary to a great people public virtue, public spirit, public enthusiasm are; and we know that any excluded class is injured in itself and is a loss to the State. No excluded class is safe in its rights, nor is it ever equal to its duties. Every class must come into the political system, both to get

justice and to do justice. Therefore we may formulate our principle on the political side by saying: we demand the equal citizenship of all—men and women alike. Equality of citizenship,—that is one great maxim of modern politics.

Now we know how by slow degrees the cause of the political enfranchisement of women has won its way down to our time. When we first began the movement under the auspices of Mr. Mill we entered it with a full conviction, and I say a just conviction, that according to the old constitution of this realm there was no intrinsic disability from exercising public functions laid upon women. We could go back in the history of our country, and could find many good and ancient and sound precedents for the exercise both of Parliamentary and of public functions by women. We knew that those precedents were precedents of good times, when liberty was high, and the nation a proud and free people. We knew, therefore, that according to the old constitutional maxim, good precedents, nay, one good precedent of a good time established a constitutional principle. Therefore we were warranted in our firm and settled conviction that under the constitution of the realm, women were not under any intrinsic disability from exercising public functions.

Now, we were warranted in that further by this, that there had never been a declaration in point of principle that women were not entitled to exercise Parliamentary and public functions,—there had never been a resolution of the House of Commons declaring that they were not so entitled,—there had never been a decision of the Law Courts; while, on the other hand, there had been precedents of the exercise of that right. The only thing that existed historically down to 1868 was an arbitrary and unsupported dictum of Lord Coke, who said that women were not entitled to exercise the Parliamentary right. That remained, therefore, the only point adverse to the high claim of women that they were entitled under the constitution to Parliamentary rights and functions.

Then came the great change in the law brought about by "The Representation of the People Act, 1867." Mr. Mill was in Parliament during the discussion on the Bill, and he wanted to put on record the express direct statutory grant of the

Suffrage to women. He set down an amendment that instead of the word "man," the word "person" should be introduced as the term granting the suffrages under that Act. That was not carried, but the word "man" remained; an amendment substituting "male person" being rejected. Accordingly, the Suffrage societies in 1868 wisely resolved to claim the Suffrage under the new Act, and they made two claims; one on behalf of a woman occupier in a town, and one on behalf of a woman freeholder in a county. Those came before the then Court of Common Pleas and were argued, and in the result the Judges declared (Chorlton *v.* Lings, Chorlton *v.* Kessler) that a woman was not entitled to exercise the Parliamentary franchise,—that she stood under a constitutional disability in that behalf,—and that therefore she was not entitled to exercise the Parliamentary franchise, although the word "man" might in other cases be held large enough to comprehend "woman."

Now, what I put to you is this: that this was the first time in the history of England when any Court ever presumed to say that women were not entitled to the Suffrage. That was an evil state of things for the cause of liberty, for I venture to affirm that there was no just warrant for that harsh, and hard, and arbitrary conclusion. But so the decision stood, and so it stands.

After 1868 there came the agitation for the grant of the Municipal franchise to women. According to the peculiar practice of our country, we are always ready to give either something that is not asked, or something that is not wanted, or at least that is wanted as little as possible. (Laughter.) There were high men in Parliament who would have scouted the notion of giving the Parliamentary franchise to women, but they did not take much part in Municipal affairs themselves, and, therefore, they decided that it would not perhaps be too much to give the Municipal franchise to women. Very well: then came the Act of Parliament of 1869, under which women became entitled to the franchise in Municipal matters. The terms in which that franchise was given have been the subject of much public and judicial consideration and criticism. The terms in which it was given were substantially

these: to make the grant in terms that referred to the vote only. That was, it has been said, the sole object. The Courts would not consider the question that would naturally attach in the case of a man. *Primâ facie* if a man has a right to vote at an election, he has a right to be elected. It is a part of common sense where men are concerned; if they are competent to choose, they are fit to be chosen; and so in the great majority of instances where elections are concerned, that is the common-place and the common-sense of the case. But when Parliament was proceeding with women it, as has been asserted, cut this doctrine into two parts, and stipulated that the vote should be given and no more. Accordingly as lawyers argue on these things, they said, "If you express a grant of the one thing it is virtually an exclusion of the other"; and they came to the conclusion that as the grant was given to vote and no more, therefore no right to be elected was granted.

Now that, of course, was not much contested while the question related to Municipal elections. Whether it was that the Women's Suffrage societies were not as vigilant as they might have been, and perhaps they were not, but from the time of the grant of the Municipal franchise to women down to the recent County Council elections, no attempt was made to go forward and say by way of claim, that as women have got the right to vote therefore they have the right to be chosen and to be voted for. That question was never raised until we came to the case of this year of Beresford Hope *v.* Lady Sandhurst. I do think it is a warning to us to see how if we have constitutional rights, it is such a supreme duty to keep them bright and in action. (Hear, hear.) In old days there was no doubt whatever that women voted in the election of Parliament, but for generations they allowed the right to die out and to be unused. Then Judges seized on that and said, "Why, how can you say they have ever had the right to vote at Parliamentary elections, when for generations it has never been used?"

Now when they came to this very case of Beresford Hope *v.* Lady Sandhurst, they said the same thing. The Judges said, "How can you contend that because a woman may vote for a County Councillor she may be elected upon the ground

that the right to vote has been given to her, when you know what has occurred in reference to the Municipal franchise? That was granted a good many years ago, and yet we have never heard of a woman being a member of a Municipal Council." Now, if as soon as the right to vote had been given under the Municipal Acts to women, there had been a bold attempt to elect a woman to some Municipal Council, then that argument at least would have been denied to the law courts, and one of the reasons why it was held that Lady Sandhurst could not sit on the County Councils would have been withdrawn from the Court. I refer to that case for this reason: that when it was decided in the Court of Appeal, the Master of the Rolls pronounced a dictum which I believe to be unsound and bad in principle, and not justified by precedent. He says this,—"I take it that by neither the Common law nor the Constitution of this country from the beginning of the Common law until now, can a woman be entitled to exercise any public function." Well, I may point out to you that no other Judge followed on that line. The other Judges very warily took their stand on the very words of the Acts applicable to the case, and did not commit themselves to this enormous declaration of disability against the women of England. Is it not a matter for very serious consideration that we who have for twenty-five years maintained that under the Constitution of this country women have a right to exercise public functions, should have this dictum declared, in this bald, direct way, by the Master of the Rolls?* However, in the result we find that with regard to the Municipal franchise and the County Council franchise, which are interlaced and to a large extent identical in their terms, it has now been held by the Court of Appeal that the

* It should be noted that Bovill, C. J., in his adverse judgment in Chorlton *v.* Lings, was obliged to admit that "a few instances have been brought before us, where, in ancient times, viz., in the reigns of Henry IV., Henry V., and Edward VI., women appear to have been parties to the return of Members to Parliament; and possibly other instances may be found in early times not only of women having voted, but also of their having assisted in the deliberations of the Legislature. Indeed, it is mentioned by Selden in his *England's Epinomis*, c. 2, s. 19, that they did so." Is not this evidence of a constitutional right?

law has granted a woman the right to vote, and has denied her the right to be voted for.

You observe that we, on the other hand, went on this principle :—As women are not under a Constitutional disability they have a right to exercise public functions unless they are directly declared not to have them. The Judges have turned that round, and they say, "No woman is entitled to exercise any public function unless it is expressly granted: here it is not expressly granted, and therefore she is not entitled to exercise it." Those are the two views competing historically in our own country, and I venture to say, even in the face of these decisions, that the Constitution of the country is this—that disability is not to be presumed—disability is not to be taken for granted,—ability is to be presumed, and only disability admitted if it is declared and expressed.

We now, therefore, find ourselves to have passed through two stages: first, our Constitutional view of the original right of women to participate in public functions with men; and, secondly, the course of litigation and judicial decision which has brought us down in this year 1889 to the principle of the decision set forth in Beresford Hope *v.* Lady Sandhurst. Those are the two stages,—the Constitutional position and the Judicial position. Now we are come to the third, the Legislative position.

It is clear, it seems to me, that we have got here a very serious duty to perform. I might venture to point out what is going on in the Constitution of our country, and going on at a great rate,—a process of importance I would venture to put in these terms. Until the last few years we have always thought we lived under a Constitution of this sort,—that there were certain large general principles which bound both Parliament and people, great original rights which preceded Parliament in their existence, which operated through all the centuries, and which were binding alike on Parliament and Crown and People. On the whole, our view of our English liberties was that they were constitutional and inherent; that Parliament had no doubt, on direct mandate of the people, the power from time to time to take any of those liberties and cut them down or enlarge them. What Parliament had under any such

mandate principally to do, therefore, was to find out these great Constitutional principles, and deal with them by statutory enactments in limitation or extension, or otherwise. That is the view which was entertained by the American people prior to their setting up their written Constitution, and it has always been the theory of the Government of this country till quite recently.

Now has come in another view, which at the moment is a difficulty in the way of liberty, though it may ultimately operate perhaps very beneficially to the whole people, and that is this,—namely, a special view of the supremacy of Parliament. Under this new view, what you do not find within the statutes or within the actual decision of the Courts, you must take for nothing, and Parliament will come in and shape all as Parliament may think fit. That is what you might call the exaggerated idea of the supremacy of Parliament. We all admit the supremacy of Parliament in the true sense as to matters of ordinary legislation, as when we make an election and send our representatives to the House of Commons, and get the House of Lords together, and Bills are passed through Parliament and become Acts. But this exaggerated notion of the supremacy of Parliament sets aside the fundamental maxims of the Constitution. Well, if we are now shut up to the judicial decisions which have culminated in the last case of Beresford Hope *v.* Lady Sandhurst, and if we have now no other resource but Parliament, with what claim are we going to appear before Parliament?

That brings us, as a society, to the real reason of our existence; because, not only are we going to Parliament, but other Suffrage Societies are going to Parliament also. Our question therefore is this,—With what claims are we going there? We say, "We will not go to Parliament except to claim the principle of equal rights for all, justice to all." We will have no new sex or other disability created in our remedial and extending legislation. Some other societies say, Put it at their best, they cannot get it higher than this, "We will go to Parliament and get as much as we can; and we shall say to you who want more,—If you do not agree with us you are postponing the cause of liberty." Our answer to that is very simple: We

will not take a piece of justice if thereby we prejudice and injure all the rest. (Applause.) Now that is a very well-known piece of high prudence. Taking the two classes,—the statesman and the people; the true statesman and the real people always know that, and they say, "Never let us compromise our principle for a momentary and an immediate success."

The reason of our existence is therefore this: We have tried the Law Courts, and we find no redress there; we have consequently no way of making our cause triumphant except to appeal to Parliament. That being so, we have got a crop of legislative measures presented to Parliament. These measures are a clear declaration that we are on the eve of practical legislation. It is certain that there must be a concession to the cause of the enfranchisement of women. Parties will try to profit by that, and sects will try to profit; but we desire that principle shall profit, and that principle shall succeed. (Hear, hear.) We are also sensible of this, that standing on our principle we can unite the enthusiasm and the activities of the whole people. Nothing has struck me more forcibly than this. I have been on many platforms when the cause of women has been advocated; but I say there would never have been a meeting of any enthusiasm at all if it had been said that all married women are to be excluded from this triumph. It is certain that those meetings would have been shorn of all their power, and that the cause would never have triumphed to the extent we now see. That is evidenced, if I may venture to say so, by what fell from Mrs. M'Ilquham, who quoted earlier parts of the history in this agitation, which showed that no such limited measure had then come into view. Therefore those who go to Parliament with a limited measure are profiting by the large enthusiasm created by our principle, and we apparently are to be sacrificed to their expediencies.

I turn now to the measures themselves. As we know, there are three measures that either have been in Parliament or will immediately be in Parliament for the enfranchisement of women.

First of all,—though not in order of date, in order of operation,—is that which was introduced by Mr. W. S. B. McLaren.

I take that first in order to illustrate what the state of the law is. Suppose we turn to the enacting words of this Bill. They are these: "For all purposes connected with and having reference to the right to vote at Parliamentary elections, the words in the Representation of the People Acts importing the masculine gender shall include women." Now those words are drawn in substance, and to a large extent in form, from the Municipal Corporations Act of 1882, which was founded on the earlier Act of 1869 The history of those Acts I have ventured to lay before you. They were Acts which now, by the last decisions, have been declared to be Acts which only give the right to vote. The right to vote is given by this Bill in direct terms, and, therefore, if this Act were passed any woman within the purview of that section would only have the right to vote; she could not be voted for. We see, therefore, that this is, as it were, the application to the Parliamentary franchise of the right to vote which has already been given to women in the Municipal franchise. That is how it stands in point of form. Then, I ask, how does it stand in point of operation and of law? Now, we say two things. We assume from the judicial decisions that a woman could not now vote at Parliamentary elections, but she will be entitled to vote under this section of this Bill; then, secondly, if such a woman standing on the roll of Parliamentary electors were, at the time she was put on, married, or after she was put on were to be married, what would be the effect of that change in her status upon her right to vote granted to her by this section of this Bill? This is so important in my view that I venture to press it upon you. It is of supreme importance in assessing the real meaning of what is called the disability of coverture. That is a very vague phrase, and it has been arrived at after much question as to the appropriate expression; but taking now the fit legal expression to be "disability of coverture," the question as to what is the present disability of coverture is of the greatest historic and public importance. There was a decision not long ago under the Municipal Franchise Act; we are all familiar with it now, it was the case of *Reg. v.* Harrold. That case laid down this: True it is that under the Municipal Franchise Act a woman may vote in Municipal elections; but here we

have the case of a woman who has got married since she was put on the roll,—what is the effect of that? First of all, the decision I refer to was prior to 1882,—that is an important date,—it was prior to 1882; prior to the Married Women's Property Act, 1882. The Court held this:—although there was the Municipal Act which gave her the right to vote; although she was on the roll; yet, being married, she could not vote,—she was under the disability of coverture. Then we ask: "Now, what precisely do you mean by that?" I say, dicta and suggestions notwithstanding, that so far as the exercise of the vote was concerned in that case, the disability of coverture consisted in her not having any independent property right. She had no independent property right, and having no independent property right she did not possess intrinsically, and in the law the actual qualification which a man would have, because there is annexed to the Municipal vote a definite qualification, which qualification, in virtue of her being married, she then did not possess. Therefore, *Reg. v.* Harrold stood, and stands, on its own facts, and on the state of the law existing when it was passed.

Now we come to the great Act of 1882, the Married Women's Property Act 1882, which did for women this: it gave them property, and it gave them the right to contract exactly as a man. So far, therefore, as property is concerned and contract is concerned, any married woman is as free, as completely exempt from all disability as a man. Then I say, if that be so, if *quâ* property and *quâ* contract a woman is as free as a man,—under the Municipal Act, and under the Act for the Parliamentary Franchise which this Bill would give, a married woman would be just as entitled to vote as an unmarried woman. Well, but,—I will put it tentatively,—if there is a presumption that she is entitled, who is there will kill that presumption,—who is there that will take away that possibility of freedom by decision of the Courts? No, we say this: as the law is settled by the Act of 1882, whether under the Municipal Franchise as now constituted, or under the Parliamentary Franchise as it would be constituted by this Bill, in our judgment a woman will be just as entitled to vote as a man. Well, that is a very hopeful view to take, and

certainly it is a sort of view that all people who agitate for liberty would be glad to see upheld and maintained,—fought through the Law Courts with eagerness, right away to the Court of Appeal. At all events, we will not give that up without a struggle. Is there anybody who is going to give up this chance of liberty without a fight? Yes; Mr. Woodall's Bill will do it. (Laughter.) Mr. Woodall's Bill will stop this rising hope—this more than hope—this almost certainty.

It will do more. I will read it. First of all take clause 2:— "For all purposes of and incidental to the vote for Members to serve in Parliament women shall have the same rights as men, and all enactments relating to or concerning any such elections shall be construed accordingly. *Provided that nothing in this Act contained shall enable women under coverture to be registered to vote at such elections.*" What does that proviso do? It does three things. First, in our view it repeals the relieving and liberty-giving power of the Married Women's Property Act of 1882; secondly, it turns a common law disability, so far as now existing, into a statutory disability; and, thirdly, it prevents us from saying, as we are now prepared to say under the Municipal Franchise Act as now constituted, and under the Parliamentary Act as Mr. McLaren's Bill would constitute it, married women have—we assert—the vote, and we will go to the Courts to have it so declared. That is surely sufficient to us to hold that as a piece of legislative re-action it is about the most deplorable we ever heard of. (Hear, hear.) It takes our movement out of the path of liberty and promise, and endungeons it in a statutory disability which may last we know not how long, because it will be a new enactment against liberty. Surely we should have a most terrible difficulty to go for freedom next year, if our opponents could point to an Act of Parliament last year which directly took it away! But, of course, it goes deeper, and is much graver in its tendency and meaning. In your presence, who know so thoroughly all this question, and have spent so many valuable years in agitating it, I do not venture to set out in prolonged and elaborate terms the terrible wrong which is done to every married woman by expressly excluding her from the beneficia and enlarging functions of public life; not only that, but

virtually declaring that while almost every section of the State, while every part of the people is needed for the public service, it is just married women that are not needed. Why, the enormous implications of this grievous wrong done to the cause of justice and right it is impossible to exaggerate, and it is certainly almost impossible to express. The grave momentous lasting wrong that would be done to women through this disability put on married women would be one of the greatest disgraces of our modern civilisation. (Applause.)

I know no language in which it is possible to express the vehement indignation at this proviso that should rise in the heart of every woman in the realm. It injures in its tendency every man and woman and child in the country, and I am utterly unable to understand the hardihood that ventures to come before Parliament with this terrible stigma put upon married women. Undoubtedly, there could not be a meeting held in all the land where such a thing could be thoroughly expounded without raising a storm of fiercest indignation and contempt. Are we not then justified in standing up for one of the plainest, noblest, and most fruitful principles—equal justice to all—no disability to any? That principle we stand up for not only because we think it right, but because also we know it is necessary for every class to be within the Constitution, and we know this further, that in a great country like this, groaning and sighing and moving with the deepest coming questions, we cannot afford to be deprived of the eager, active, glad services of any portion of the people. Shall we say in this supreme and sovereign hour of public need in the land we are prepared not only to do without the Parliamentary and public services of married women, but we are actually prepared to put upon them one of the most odious disabilities of history?

Therefore, I take it, that not only is our principle justified, but that we are called upon by the highest claims of our consciences, and from the deepest sense of public right and duty, to found a society grounded on this grand principle of the equal citizenship of all. This *Women's Franchise League* has accordingly been established. By it is promoted the third of the three measures to which I referred—"The Women's Elec-

toral Franchises Bill, 1889." This measure, in granting the vote to women in parliamentary, municipal, local, and other elections, directly, and in express terms, declares that "*no woman shall be subject to legal incapacity from voting at such elections by reason of marriage.*" *

Here we have the great principle of full equality firmly and openly pronounced. This is the only right and wise course. On this principle the League is founded, and upon it the League takes its unalterable stand. This measure owes its existence at the moment mainly to one to whom the cause of woman in all its various branches is deeply indebted. Indeed, both this measure and the League itself are largely due to the untiring energy of Mrs. Wolstenholme Elmy. To her services I cannot refer at length. In the enfranchisement of women, she has won a historic place. Mrs. M'Ilquham and Mrs. Scatcherd, too, have laid us and the League under lasting obligations.

Now, therefore, we have chosen our path. This measure of equal justice is our answer in the name of principle to those measures of mere expediency. We know perfectly that when we go out before the people with this great principle of equal justice in our hands and in our hearts, if there is to be any enfranchising movement that is to be good and valuable, it must be on our principle, and though success may be adjourned for a short time, the victory, when it comes, will be most thorough; and it will be more permanent and more

* It is most gratifying to be able to add here that this measure in an extended form as "*The Women's Disabilities Removal Bill*, 1889," has just been laid before Parliament by Mr. Haldane, in conjunction with Sir Edward Grey and Mr. Thomas Ellis. This Bill (see Appendix) contains an important and comprehensive clause declaring that "No person shall be disqualified from being elected or appointed to, or from filling or holding, any office or position, merely by reason that such person is a woman, or, being a woman, is under coverture." (Sect. 3.) Mr. Haldane, by his prompt and decisive action has rendered great, and greatly appreciated, service. Grounded as this Bill is on full and equal justice to men and women, it asserts in express terms the principle of the Women's Franchise League. In this Bill, therefore, the League and its friends have now before Parliament a measure worthy of the cause; for which they ought to fight, and for which they will fight, till the day of complete victory.

valuable because grounded on this supreme sense of right and justice. (Loud applause.)

The resolution was carried unanimously.

The CHAIRMAN: I have now the greatest pleasure, a pleasure you will all share with me, when you hear the names of the proposer and seconder of the second resolution. I give you the name of the proposer first. It shows how much sympathy is extended between nation and nation when we have such representatives of our Transatlantic cousins. Mrs. Stanton Blatch will move the second resolution.

(For resolution, see Appendix.)

Mrs. STANTON BLATCH said: The first thing I want to do is to make a little personal declaration, that is, that for the first time in a Suffrage meeting in England I feel at home. When I was transplanted from America to England, seven years ago, I cannot tell you what a feeling it gave me to come among the men and women here and find you talking upon such narrow lines. It was especially brought home to me by the experience of my mother, Mrs. Elizabeth Cady Stanton (Applause), who was often asked to speak, but then was always warned: "Now, Mrs. Stanton, please do not speak on the Bible question, and please do not touch the matter of Divorce, and, above all things, do not touch this question of Married Women's Suffrage." Well, my mother said that at last she felt, with her crown of white hair, like the Jungfrau, rising cold and frigid into the sky, never allowed to melt and show her real heart.

I did not expect to speak when I came here this afternoon. This was a mine sprung upon me; but while the others have been speaking I have jotted down one or two things. I mean only to give you the headings, for I see that time is short. One little thing that I jotted down was the educating effect of a broad basis to any movement. I believe that general freedom must precede political freedom, and I think it a more important thing. I find that although you in England are ahead of us as to political freedom for women, you are clearly behind us as to general freedom. Women in the United States have far more liberty than women here, and I lay it exactly to the door of your Women's Suffrage movement, which has been so narrow. We have had a great education in America by the Anti-slavery movement (hear, hear), and by the Women's Suffrage movement. They have been placed upon the broad basis of the brotherhood of all mankind. (Applause.)

I was greatly impressed by this very fact of the educating effect of a movement when in Germany last year. I was visiting one of their great High Schools for Girls. As I felt not very strong in the German language, I asked to see classes in which I felt thoroughly up in the subject. The principal of the school at Dantzig, where there are six hundred pupils, said that he would have any class that my friend and I desired, and we chose chemistry and Euclid, because we felt conversant enough with the subjects to allow of our language being rather shaky. In the Euclid class we had a rather amusing experience. A pyramid was brought out and the young women began to solve the solid contents of this pyramid. Before they had been at it long my brain was simply whirling with the multiplications they got through in their heads. If you get me beyond twelve-times-twelve without a lead pencil and paper I am lost (laughter), but they were dealing with hundreds and thousands with the greatest ease. In the solution of the pyramid, as you know, all depends upon your understanding the proposition in Euclid, that in a right-angled triangle the square of the hypothenuse is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides: so I said I should like to see them demonstrate this on the board. The brightest girl of the class was at last drawn out, but it was perfectly evident she knew nothing about it, and was utterly unable to demonstrate it. They can multiply hundreds by hundreds and thousands by thousands, but they take it for granted that the square of the hypothenuse is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides. They have been told so; they drink it in from the masculine mind. Well, afterwards I asked the Professor, in some surprise, about this. He said, "I quite agree with your way of thinking, but it is impossible. In Germany our whole basis of education for girls is that they are lacking in the reasoning faculty, that they have no logic." I tried to point out to him the extraordinary

character of such education, to find pupils lacking in a thing and yet not try to educate them in that very line. In Germany they have no general movement for the raising of womanhood, so their whole education is based upon the idea that there is a great difference between the minds of men and women. I come back to England and I find something very like it in your Board Schools. I wonder if you all know that in every Board School in England the arithmetic cards are printed on two sides, easy examples headed "For Girls" on one side and difficult examples headed "For Boys" on the other. (Laughter.) Your Women's Suffrage movement wants to be broadened, ladies and gentlemen. You do not want the idea creeping out from you into your education that there is a difference between the minds of boys and the minds of girls. I think it very hard lines upon the girls, for I find in some of your Board Schools, where you have a go-ahead mistress, that she actually makes the girls work all the examples of the boys' sides. They do all the labour and then have to bear the insult.

The object of a movement is not always to win the little bit of legislation one is after. The object is oftener to educate. Now you will be met with the cry, "Oh! policy! compromise." Well, some people are ahead, and they see a broader truth; others just behind them see less of the truth; they are greater in numbers; still further back they see yet less of the truth, and they are still greater in numbers. Now, ladies and gentlemen, do not begin to compromise; do not begin to talk policy. There are people behind you that are just at that stage, and they can speak from their hearts, because it is no compromise, no policy for them; they are saying the truth that is in them. Let each one of us speak out the truth that we feel and see. (Hear, hear.)

Now, I feel so very much at home that I am going to tell a very naughty story perhaps. It is about a negro who was asked if he believed in the power of prayer. He said that whether his prayer was answered or not depended upon the way that he worded it. (Laughter.) He said he had always found that "if he prayed to de Lord to send him a turkey, de turkey never come; but if he prayed to de Lord to send

him after de turkey, de turkey arribed before daylight." (Laughter.)

Now, ladies and gentlemen, we can apply that just here. If we keep on praying that men may give us the right to vote, may grant it to us, it will probably never come; but if we pray for grit, for the determination to show others that we mean business, the vote will come, and in very quick order. (Loud applause.)

The Chairman: I will now call upon a gentleman bearing a name deeply reverenced in every English household, Mr. William Lloyd Garrison, to second the resolution.

Mr. Wm. Lloyd Garrison: Mrs. M'Ilquham, in seconding the motion, I will say but a few words; indeed, I hardly want to break the silence after the beautiful remarks to which we have just listened.

It is not for the purpose of widening differences among sincere workers in the same great cause that I have ventured to speak briefly on this occasion. In all reforms which necessarily attract strong individualities, independent minds will differ on methods of action to be pursued, and the wisdom of plans proposed. Such differences should, of course, be minimised in the interest of the object which all aim at. Where the variance is on principles, cohesion is, of course, impossible. It seems to me that much trouble comes from a confusion of the reformer's function with that of the politician. A reformer sees an evil that is to be uprooted; he contemplates nothing short of its total abolition, which he desires with earnestness. No matter whether people will bear or whether they will forbear; in season or out of season it is for him to urge the iniquity of the wrong and ask for its immediate rectification. The enemy, always alert and shrewd, is most dangerous when urging delay on the ground of policy. The opposition of the slave-holders in America, openly frank and brutal, was nothing in comparison to that of professed anti-slavery friends, who were always trying to temper zeal, weaken testimony, decry strong language, and apologise for the wrong-doer. The Abolitionists, in refusing to abate their vigour of action, to use soft words instead of the strongest that the English language affords, showed consummate wisdom. Time and time again

they were implored not to imperil partial legislation or drive away from the cause friends who were shocked by the naked truth, but their only response was "immediate and unconditional emancipation." They knew full well that the moral force of their uncompromising advocacy would mould legislation more powerfully than temporising and wire-pulling to accomplish partial Acts. In other words, they looked to principles, and left results to that Providence which ordains that the tree shall bring forth fruit after its kind. The reformer who uses the political method is necessarily confined to present possibilities and the count of votes. He must abate his full demand if only half can be obtained, and the popular estimate of statesmanship gives the palm to him who knows just when to yield and when to be firm. Now, in a moral cause appealing to the sense of justice and fair play, a handful of earnest men and women may have the force of an army with banners, on the principle that "one with God is a majority." They have no personal ends to serve, and no results to fear from the full declaration of their principles and purposes. To my mind such an attitude is infinitely stronger than the political one which naturally grows out of it; one supplements the other, but each has its separate and distinct function.

As I understand the purpose of this meeting, it is to organise a society based on moral force, and, regardless whether this measure or that is possible in Parliament, to declare the whole gospel of suffrage without let or hindrance. Of course, it will hail with delight every onward step in legislation, however small; but it will never cease demanding the whole; it will never consent to support an Act which, though granting further rights, is to succeed only by promising a limitation of the franchise,—purchasing a vote for single women and widows at the expense of the married women. In this spirit I am glad to be with you this afternoon, and wish you that success in touching the feelings and consciences of the people which shall duly crystallise into statutes. I need not add that your progress affects us powerfully in America, where we are fighting in the same great cause, and with odds no less than yours, remembering that "in the gain or loss of one race all the rest have equal claim." (Applause.)

The resolution was carried unanimously.

Dr. Kate Mitchell: Ladies and Gentlemen,—I have to propose for your acceptance the following resolution.* I do not think that these names need the recommendation of any words of mine. They are very well known to all of you, and I have a great deal of pleasure in asking the meeting to vote upon the names which I have read out.

I quite agree with Mrs. Stanton Blatch that we ought to put our movement on a broader basis than we have done in the past. I go so far as to say we cannot possibly make that basis too broad, because there are always people in the world, especially in the political world, who will try to narrow it up for us.

I am sure that, after hearing Mrs. Stanton Blatch, you will agree with me that the Americans are certainly in advance of us in their broad views on these questions. They have a far more thorough and comprehensive way of looking at things than we have. I do not know whether it is because their country is a very extensive one, and that they cannot help taking a larger view of things, whilst our country being limited by the sea all round, we are narrowed in our horizon. But such is the fact, and I think we could not do better than send Mrs. Stanton Blatch round the country to rouse the people in every town in England from their lethargy and sloth on these great social questions. There is just one thing I wish to refer to, and that is the stigma which Mr. Woodall's proviso would lay upon marriage. Not only is this a great wrong to married women, but it is also a great wrong and injustice to unmarried women. I would ask you this question, and would like you to think well over it. Do you think an independent unmarried woman is going to barter her freedom and give up her political privileges for matrimony when no man would be found to do so? At any rate, I do not think that she will be so ready to enter that condition as if she entered it a free woman. I have great pleasure in proposing the resolution.

Mrs. Perrier: I have great pleasure in seconding the resolution, but there is very little left for me to say. There is, however, one thing to which I must allude. If Mr. Woodall's

* See Appendix, Third Resolution.

Bill, with its coverture proviso, passed, as our Divorce Law stands at present, if a woman in England left her husband for the grossest immorality on his part, unless it was coupled with cruelty, she could not get a divorce. She would, therefore, still be in the position of a married woman, and she would not have the franchise; whereas, if a man got a divorce from his wife on the ground of her immorality only, as he can do, under the existing law of England, she would be a single woman, and would have the franchise. I think you cannot put a greater stigma on wives than that. Then as to the upbringing of children. Do you think that it would be for the happiness and the respectability of a household that our sons and our daughters should know that we married women who are educating and bringing them up (as I have myself brought up a family of children) hold an inferior legal position to the most immoral of our sex? I have great pleasure in seconding the resolution.

The resolution was carried unanimously.

Mrs. Wolstenholme Elmy (Secretary): I have to express the very great regret of Mr. W. L. Garrison and Mr. Frank Garrison at having to leave before the end of the meeting, and also to ask our friends present to pass a most cordial vote of thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Tebb for their generous and graceful hospitality this afternoon. I may not add one word, because some of us are due at the House of Commons at six o'clock on an important deputation.

Mrs. M'Ilquham: I feel deeply grateful, and I know that all the men and women of the Women's Franchise League do also, for the cordial manner in which we were invited, and have been received here by Mr. and Mrs. Tebb.

The resolution was passed with applause.

Dr. Pankhurst: I wish to move a vote of thanks to the Chair. We have all listened with the greatest interest to Mrs. M'Ilquham's admirable opening speech, and the grace and courtesy with which the rest of the business has under her presidency been transacted command our admiration. I move this vote in order to be able to say that to the Chairman (Mrs. M'Ilquham), to Mrs. Scatcherd, and above all to Mrs. Wolstenholme Elmy, we owe worlds of work that have been

expended in bringing about this League. I do not know how we shall be able to reward their exertions, and as to Mrs. Wolstenholme Elmy, she certainly does exert herself in a manner that astounds and impresses us. (Hear, hear.) As a man, I say I feel deeply impressed to see this singular untiring devotion to public service. I feel so much the diminishing quantity of public spirit, whether it is that we have so many things to do, I do not know, but I feel the preciousness just now of public spirit in our country; and when I see it in women, as in these three ladies under their many difficulties, it commands my admiration, and I honour it most deeply. I have, therefore, very much pleasure in moving this vote of thanks. It imports to me an acknowledgment of services which are not easily to be expressed, as they are certainly not capable of being justly assessed.

Miss Hall: I am very pleased to second that. I am sorry that I am not able to do as much as they; but I cordially thank those who do such valuable work.

The resolution was carried with applause.

Mrs. M'Ilquham: I can only say I heartily thank you, as we really have not time for another word.

APPENDIX.

—o—

INAUGURAL MEETING

OF THE

WOMEN'S FRANCHISE LEAGUE,

Held at 7, Albert Road, N.W.,

By kind invitation of Mr. and Mrs. Tebb,

25th July, 1889.

Mrs. M'Ilquham, P.L.G., in the Chair

Introductory Speech of Chairman.

Letters from absent friends:—Mrs. P. A. Taylor, Miss Sara S. Hennell, Mrs. Fenwick Miller, Rev. J. Page Hopps, Mrs. Spence Watson, and others, read by Mrs. Wolstenholme Elmy.

First Resolution:—

That in view of the principle of the equal rights of men and women on which the League is founded, this meeting urges its members and friends to give their earnest and energetic support to the following measures of proposed legislation:—

(1) The Electoral Franchises of Women Bill, which extends the suffrage to all duly qualified women, whether married or unmarried.

(2) The Divorce Amendment Bill, which amends the unjust law of England with regard to Divorce, by assimilating it to the more equitable law of Scotland.

(3) The Devolution of Estates Bill, which remedies the flagrant injustices suffered by women under the law of intestacy.

Moved by Mrs. Alice Cliff Scatcherd, seconded by R. M. Pankhurst, LL.D.

Second Resolution:—

That the following persons constitute the Council of the League for the ensuing year:—Mrs. Ashton Saunderson (Hull); the Rev. Canon Butler and Mrs. Josephine E. Butler (Winchester); Mr. John Bayly (Plymouth); Mrs. Colby and Miss Cordelia Colby (Cheltenham); Mr. Elmy and Mrs. Wolstenholme Elmy (Congleton); Mrs. Fenwick Miller (London); Mr. C. J. Fleming (Manchester); Mr. Cunninghame Graham, M.P., and Mrs. Cunninghame Graham (Gartmore, N.B.); Mr. John Gibson (Aberystwith); Miss Sara S. Hennell (Coventry); Mrs. Stephenson Hunter (Oxford); Mrs. John James (Aberystwith); Mrs. M'Ilquham (Gloucestershire); Mr. H. N. Mozley (Cambridge); Mr. William Malleson and Mrs. William Malleson (Croydon); R. M. Pankhurst, LL.D., and Mrs. Pankhurst (London); Mrs. Alice Cliff Scatcherd (Leeds); Mrs. Agnes Sunley (Leeds); Mrs. Holyoake Smith and Miss Julia Smith (Birmingham); Dr. Kate Mitchell and Dr. Julia Mitchell (London); Mrs. Stanton Blatch (Basingstoke); Mr. P. A. Taylor, and Mrs. P. A. Taylor (Brighton); Mr. William Tebb and Mrs. William Tebb (London); Mrs. Venturi (London); Mrs. Spence Watson (Gateshead); and Mrs. Emma Wood (London); with power to add to their number.

Moved by Mrs. Stanton Blatch, seconded by Mr. William Lloyd Garrison.

Third Resolution.

That the following be the Executive Committee for the year:—Mrs. Fenwick Miller, Mrs. M'Ilquham, Mr. H. N. Mozley, R. M. Pankhurst, LL.D., Mrs. Pankhurst, Mrs. Alice Cliff Scatcherd, Mrs. Agnes Sunley, Mr. P. A. Taylor, Mrs. P. A. Taylor, and Mrs. Wolstenholme Elmy, with power to add to their number.

Moved by Dr. Kate Mitchell, seconded by Mrs. Anna Perrier.

Fourth Resolution.

That the most cordial thanks of this meeting be presented to Mr. and Mrs. Tebb for their generous and graceful hospitality on this occasion.

Moved by Mrs. Wolstenholme Elmy, seconded by Mrs. M'Ilquham.

Fifth Resolution.

That this meeting heartily thanks Mrs. M'Ilquham for her conduct in the chair.

Moved by Dr. Pankhurst, seconded by Miss Hall.

THE FOLLOWING is the text of the *Women's Disabilities Removal Bill*, introduced on behalf of the League :—

A BILL to Amend the Law relating to the Political and other Disabilities of Women.

Be it enacted by the Queen's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows :—

1. In all Acts of Parliament relating to the right to vote at parliamentary, municipal, local, and other elections, words importing the masculine gender shall be deemed to include women.

2. No woman shall be subject to legal incapacity from voting at such elections by reason of coverture.

3. No person shall be disqualified from being elected or appointed to, or from filling or holding, any office or position, merely by reason that such person is a woman, or, being a woman, is under coverture.

4. This Act may be cited as the Women's Disabilities Removal Act, 1889.

(*Prepared and brought in by Mr. Haldane, Sir Edward Grey, and Mr. Thomas Ellis.*)

Ordered, by The House of Commons, *to be Printed,*
2 *August,* 1889.

There will also be introduced early in next Session the *Divorce Amendment Bill*, and the *Devolution of Estates Bill*, approved in the 1st Resolution at the Inaugural Meeting of the League.

All persons wishing to join the League, or willing to assist in the passing of the above measures, are invited to communicate with the Secretary, Mrs. Elizabeth C. Wolstenholme Elmy, Buxton House, Congleton.

Copies of this Report, price (post-free) 3d. each, or 2s. per dozen, may be had from MRS. WOLSTENHOLME ELMY, Buxton House, Congleton.

396.1 (06)
396.1 (06)

WOMEN'S FRANCHISE LEAGUE.

ON

THE PROGRAMME

OF THE

Women's Franchise League.

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT

The National Liberal Club, Feb. 25th, 1890,

BY

MRS. F. FENWICK MILLER,

(R. B. HALDANE, ESQ., Q.C., M.P., IN THE CHAIR.)

LONDON:
THE HANSARD PUBLISHING UNION, LIMITED,
1890.

WOMEN'S FRANCHISE LEAGUE.

Council.

Mr. John Bayly.
Mrs. Stanton Blatch, B.A.
Mr. Jacob Bright, M.P.
Mrs. Jacob Bright.
Mrs. Busk, B.A.
Mrs. Josephine Butler.
The Countess of Carlisle.
Miss Cobden, L.C.C.
Mrs. Colby.
Miss Cordelia Colby.
Mr. Ben Elmy.
Mrs. Wolstenholme Elmy.
Mr. C. J. Fleming.
Mr. F. A. Ford, L.C.C.
Mr. John Gibson.
Mr. Cunninghame Graham, M.P.
Mrs. Cunninghame Graham.
The Rev. Alan Greenwell, M.A.
Miss Sara S. Hennell.
Mrs. Stephenson Hunter.
Mrs. John James.
Mrs. Fenwick Miller.
Dr. Julia Mitchell.
Dr. Kate Mitchell.
Mr. H. N. Mozley, M.A.
The Lady Mary Murray.
Professor Murray.
The Hon. Dadabhai Naoroji.
Dr. Pankhurst.
Mrs. Pankhurst.
Mr. Hodgson Pratt.
Mrs. Hodgson Pratt.
Miss E. M. Schaw Protheroe.
Dr. R. D. Roberts
Mrs. King Roberts.
Margaret, Lady Sandhurst.
Mrs. Ashton Saunderson.
Mrs. Alice Cliff Scatcherd.
The Countess Schack.
Mr. A. Sidgwick, M.A.
Mrs. Holyoake Smith.
Miss Julia Smith.
Mrs. Agnes Sunley.
Mrs. Taylor (of Chipchase).
Mr. P. A. Taylor.
Mrs. P. A. Taylor.
Mr. William Tebb.
Mrs. William Tebb.
Mrs. Venturi.
Mrs. Spence Watson.
Mrs. Emma Wood.

Chairman of Council: Mrs. M'Ilquham, P.L.G, Staverton House, near Cheltenham.

Hon. Corresponding Members of Council—

Professor Aldis, Mrs. Aldis — *New Zealand.*
Dr. George Hoggan, Dr. Frances Hoggan — *France.*
Mrs. Isabella Beecher Hooker, Mrs. Elizabeth Cady Stanton — *U.S.A.*

Executive Committee.

Mrs. Fenwick Miller.
Mrs. M'Ilquham.
Mr. H. N. Mozley, M.A.
Dr. Pankhurst.
Mrs. Pankhurst.
Mr. P. A. Taylor.
Mrs. P. A. Taylor.

Treasurer—Mrs. Alice Cliff Scatcherd, Morley, near Leeds.
Organizing Agent—Mrs. Agnes Sunley, Armley, near Leeds.
Secretary Mrs. Wolstenholme Elmy, Congleton, Cheshire.
Bankers—Branch Bank of England, Leeds.

Objects.

I.—To extend to women, whether unmarried, married, or widowed, the right to vote at Parliamentary, Municipal, Local and other elections, on the same conditions which qualify men.

II.—To establish for all women equal civil and political rights with men.

Terms of Membership.—Approval of the objects of the League, and a subscription of any amount to its funds.

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ON THE PROGRAMME
OF THE
WOMEN'S FRANCHISE LEAGUE.

AN ADDRESS
DELIVERED AT
The National Liberal Club, Feb. 25, 1890,
BY
Mrs. F. FENWICK MILLER.

MR. HALDANE, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:—The objects of the Women's Franchise League, which I have the honour to introduce to this influential audience to-night, are different from the objects of any society that has hitherto existed. It is a remarkable fact, but still it is a fact, that it has been left to this fifty-second year of the reign of Queen Victoria for a Society to be founded having for its object the procuring for women equal civil and political rights with men. That is the object of the Women's Franchise League; and as one means of carrying out that object it is endeavouring (by the "Women's Disabilities Removal Bill," brought in to the House of Commons by Mr. Haldane, Q.C.) to secure the vote in Parliamentary, Municipal, and all other elections for those women who possess the qualifications which entitle men to hold those votes, whatever those qualifications may be.

We have already found that there is some misapprehension as to the meaning of our title. We have been asked why a Franchise League works for anything else but the Suffrage. That query is based on a misconception of the word "Franchise." The Parliamentary Suffrage is only a portion of Franchise, which, of course, as you are all as aware as myself, means simply freedom; and the object of the Women's Franchise League is nothing less than to obtain freedom for half the human race.

We are justified in having formed this League by the success that we have already attained. If there are any who like to be on the winning side let them come over to us, for we are the winning side. Those who have been most active in the formation of this League have already lived through a series of agitations upon women's questions which in the beginning seemed a great deal more impossible to be carried to success within their lifetime than anything that we are now attempting. Our dear friend, Mrs. Elmy, began long ago with the Education of Women; and was afterwards a mainstay of the Married Women's Property agitation, and also of the Custody of Infants Bill, all of which she has seen succeed. I myself began when I was very young with the agitation for admitting women to the medical profession, commencing to study medicine myself in the face of almost insuperable legal and other obstacles. I have seen that movement carried to success, and various other women's causes which, in their inception, seemed almost impossible. So we have reason to believe in the future of our League. The tide of thought and the feeling of our century is with us, and already, though our League has only existed since last July, we have a large and rapidly-increasing body of members; and we have at the present moment a growing balance at our bank; and we have already done a considerable amount of work, which has cost a good deal of money and a good deal of labour. All this has been achieved in considerably under a year. Were we not right, then, so far as we can judge by our success, in believing that the time had come for the formation into a League of all those who desire to see freedom in every respect granted to half the human race?

Now it appears to me that in any question of freedom the onus of proof lies upon the people who want to deny it. Before any set of human beings have a right to absolutely control and govern any others, it behoves them to show good cause; and when I am asked why women should have freedom, I retort, It is for you to tell me why they should *not* have freedom; and that to attempt to enslave one-half of your fellow creatures, without being able to give a good and sufficient reason for that conduct, is beneath men of this century and of any denomination, and especially beneath men who venture to call themselves Liberals.

Why should women have freedom? They want freedom, in the first place, for self-development. We want leave to think, to be, to do, to teach, to amend, to progress, to rise, and to try to help the world as well as ourselves. We are sometimes charged with trying to turn women into men, and such like absurdities. If we were to try to do

it we should simply fail. When we ask for freedom, all we mean is: let us be and do all that Nature allows; it needs no help from men to confine us to that limit. Let us enlarge our minds; let us exercise the womanly influence that we believe will be as beneficial in all spheres of work and thought as it is admitted to be in the home; let us have and do everything that we can prove our power to execute and our right to possess, and put no artificial obstacles in our way, nor lay upon us from our birth any disabilities or disadvantages whatsoever because of our sex. In short, we would obtain for women, as for men, that full unchecked development, that free course, that untrammelled progress which we believe to be the necessary foundation for all happiness to the individual, and for all advance in humanity.

A second reason why women ought to have freedom is because there is a great deal of moral power amongst them, a great deal of intelligence, a great deal of public spirit which they ought to be called upon to exercise for the good of our common country, for the good of mankind. You are shutting out from all public causes, when you shut out woman's direct influence, and try to confine her to her home affairs alone, a large part of the power that you might have; you are trying to draw the burden of life as it were with one wheel of the wagon; you are taking away from yourselves the help that you might have from the public spirit and the impetus which women could bring to the world's improvement.

But the principal reason, the reason that, after all, puts heart and soul into our work, is that we would fain avoid for women the sufferings of slavery. Do you think it is too hard a term to say that women have been made slaves? If so, you do not understand what you are talking about. The position of women in this England of ours, before women dared to speak for themselves, before women ventured to state in print and urge with the living voice on platforms what they desired for their sex (a thing quite as audacious as, or more audacious than, giving a vote at the polls); the condition under which the women of this country lived till quite lately, I say, was simply slavery.

But, you object, the majority of women were not actually treated as slaves. True: if you men had been as bad in your daily lives as the laws that you made, the thing could not have gone on so long,—you would have been exterminated! There were good slave masters in America, of course there were, perhaps nine good slave masters to one bad one; and so women in their state of slavery have very often had good masters. But is that a justification of slavery? assuredly not.

And now, why do I say that women were slaves? Let me tell you

what was the position of women in this country when the Queen ascended the throne. I might take a very much nearer period of time and yet be perfectly correct, but as a rounded date like that gives one something to hang one's mind to, let us see what was the position of women when the Queen came to the throne.

Well, in the first place, women were not educated. Educational endowments had been left from time to time for the benefit of girls but so little was it considered necessary for women to be educated, inasmuch as they were to remain all their lives under the tutelage and guidance of some man, that those endowments had been filched away from them, and in a number of cases, the details of which are readily accessible to anyone who desires them, the endowments meant for girls had been handed over for the use of boys. It was not considered necessary to educate girls much, even in childhood, and as to opening the Universities to them and allowing them equal educational advantages with their brothers, that was perfectly absurd; it never entered anybody's head. So the first struggle for Franchise that women have had to make in this century has been that struggle, crowned now with such complete success, for education as distinct and individual human beings who had powers worthy to be trained, and who would have a right to use their independent mental faculties in freedom all through their lives.

Professions and occupations open to women were very few. There was no place for them in the Civil Service; and even the profession of Medicine, the right to attend other women in their hour of pain, was forbidden them by law. Fathers spent all their means on educating their sons, and it was an every-day thing for families of girls to be turned out on the world penniless and without any bread-earning occupation.

In regard to the inheritance of property, women were (and are) everywhere postponed for the advantage of the other sex. Not only could a man will every shred of his property away from his wife, but even if he made no will, only a small portion of his goods was given to her, while a penniless man marrying an heiress at once obtained fixed rights for his life, even if he survived her, in her lands. Daughters were postponed to sons, and so on in every grade of relationship.

It is, however, the position of married women which is the principal test of how the sex was treated; for it is in marriage that men and women really come into close relationship, and that their interests are most likely to differ; and when I speak of the enslaved position of English women I speak of the position of those—the immense bulk of the adult women of the country—who were married.

It was at that time impossible for a married woman to hold any property. Whether it had been left to her by her parents or other friends, or whether it had been gained by her own exertions, it did not belong to herself, it belonged exclusively to her husband. It mattered not though her husband had deserted her—he might even have deserted her for another woman for several years—he might be living in the same town with herself but not in any way assisting her or even seeing her, he might be neglecting all the duties of a husband, and yet, even money which the wife earned separately from him by the hard toil of her hand or by the skill of her brain was not hers, it was her husband's. Nothing, no conduct on his part, no effort on hers, could keep it away from him and retain it for the use of the person who had earned it or who had inherited it. The wife might be well able to prove that by physical cruelty her husband had compelled her to leave his side; or he might be living in open adultery. No matter. He could receive any personal property falling to her (and "generally does so," said Lord Brougham), and spend or appropriate it altogether independently of his wife. If she became entitled to real property, the husband occupied it or received the rents, notwithstanding a separation brought about by his misconduct. He could likewise seize all that his wife might earn, and take when he liked any savings she made, or sell off any goods that she had gained. As in the famous case of the Honorable Mrs. Norton, the husband could even require the publishers of his wife's books to pay the profits of them to himself and not to her; just as much as the poor laundress's husband could sell off her mangle, or claim her week's pay. Surely one of the principal tokens of slavery is that the slave has to work for the benefit of another and not for his own benefit, and that the fruits of his exertions can be taken forcibly and with the sanction of the law, to enrich another. Yet that was the state of English wives.

As a consequence of this total deprivation of rights of property, a married woman could not in her own person sue for redress for any wrong that had been done to her, or for the performance of any contract that had been made with her. A husband might have deserted his wife, or he might have compelled her by his cruelty, his infidelity, by treatment which it was impossible for her to put up with, to leave him; nevertheless, he could all the same prevent her from obtaining a legal remedy for any wrong that was done to her, whether by himself or others. He could stand between her and the remedy which the law had provided for such wrongs when committed by man against man. A wife had in the eye of the law simply no existence; only through her legal owner could she obtain any redress; and then

the redress was awarded, not to her, but to him for the wrong done to his chattel. Very often it was the husband himself who inflicted the wrongs (again as in the case of slaves, who usually had their wrongs inflicted by their masters); who libelled and abused her, or who stole from her, or who starved or imprisoned or terrified her; and in that case it was clearly impossible for the woman to seek protection or redress. But even as regarded other men, women were made helpless victims of wrong by the law. There is one famous case, not worse by any means than a very great many others, but easy and simple to understand, and therefore I will just spare the time to quote it, in illustration.

It was a case in which a woman had been deserted by her husband for many years; he had gone to America and left her. The woman had always maintained herself; she was a working woman, she just gained sufficient to live comfortably upon and to bring up a family of small children whom the husband had left on her hands. She met with a railway accident and was seriously injured. When she attempted to bring an action for damages against the Railway Company, the Company successfully defended it, and obtained a non-suit on the ground that as a married woman she could not sue for damages for any wrong that had been done to her. Some one took up her case, and after much difficulty found the husband in America, and induced him to allow himself to be joined in the suit with his wife, so that she could sue the Railway Company; and as it was shown that she was incapacitated for the rest of her life from earning her livelihood, the Railway Company was ordered to pay £1,000 damages. This was not, of course, a very large sum, but it was sufficient to have kept the unfortunate woman out of the workhouse, and so far to have compensated her for the pain and incapacity that she had to endure. But the husband had been too well informed of his and his wife's legal position. When the £1,000 came to be paid, he held out his hand for the cheque. It was necessarily paid to him—the law so ordered it in compensation for the damage done to his property; with that money he went away to America, leaving the woman who had suffered the damage to go into the workhouse, without a penny to support her. That is a sample—what need to give more?

There were abundant cases where women were libelled and defamed without remedy, because the libeller was either the husband himself or someone encouraged by him; or else the husband, caring nothing for, or hating his wife, would not move to protect her from such outrage.

There were cases where contracts made with women were broken, and where they were cheated in business in the most heartless manner. In all these points married women had no redress before the law for wrongs, and therefore no protection against their infliction. The law, which ought to have defended all women at least as much as it defended all of the male sex against crime and wrong, handed her over instead absolutely helpless to the mercy of the world. There was no protection from the law for women except it was invoked by the men who owned them, while it was the most cruel fact in many a woman's lot that in her master she found her sternest enemy, her most heartless oppressor.

There again the married woman was exactly in the position of the slave. The law would not recognise that she could have individual wrongs; the law would not give her the personal power to appeal to its protection against any one whomsoever who did her wrong which it owes to all its subjects.

Men have sometimes claimed privilege for their sex on the score that they were the bread-winners of women and children. Well, let us see how the law enforced on a man the obligation to thus provide for his wife and lawful offspring.

Suppose a woman were deserted by her husband, let us see how she could obtain from her husband that maintenance which undoubtedly on every principle of justice a wife is entitled to, even though she have no children on her hands. For in married life it is required, except in the very lowest ranks, that the woman should for her husband's comfort and in order to attend to his domestic affairs give up, perhaps altogether, the wage-earning occupation which she may have hitherto carried on. If her occupation be of a character that she can carry it on still to some extent, at all events she must partially give it up in order to fulfil her duties as a wife and mother. A married woman, therefore, has a just claim for a maintenance upon the man to whom she has given up the best part of her industrial life. If there be children, their claim upon the man whose offspring they are is yet stronger than their mother's. To enable a father to fling responsibility for keeping his children on to the mother is a double infamy—a wrong to the wife and the children both. But how did the law meet their just claim?

The law said that the only way in which a woman, a married mother, could procure maintenance for her children from their father, the only way in which a deserted wife could obtain a contribution to her own maintenance, should be by going into the workhouse! The wife might indeed "pledge her husband's credit," but the deserting

rascal probably had no credit with anybody, and this pretended way of compelling a man to be the "bread-winner" of his family was a sham. I think the law was a little less kind in that respect than it used to be to slaves; I fancy that there was a little more obligation on a master to support his own slave than there was—aye, and practically than there now is—upon a husband to support his wife and family.

Perhaps the greatest wrong of all was the way in which a woman's character was allowed to be taken away in open Court, without her having one word to say in the matter. A woman's reputation is very precious to her. If that be destroyed, what is there left for her in the world? Driven forth from her home, ousted from her place in society, no one daring to call her friend, hardly daring to give her shelter, having to earn her own living under the gravest disadvantages, looked at askance, cold shouldered by everybody, is it not almost like that old sight where the leper went apart and had to cry out to warn those who came near him not to approach within his contaminated circle? And yet, though her fair fame means so much to a woman, the law in those days allowed a man to obtain a divorce from his wife on the ground of her adultery without permitting her either in person or by counsel to have one word to say on the charge, to utter one sound in her own defence! I dare say it appears incredible to you, but it is absolutely true. When the Divorce Bill was under discussion in the House of Lords, ex-Lord Chancellor Lord Lyndhurst, pointing out how terrible were the consequences of this state of things to a woman, said, "But it is averred that the collusion between the husband and the alleged lover [to damn an innocent woman] is rare; I believe that it is not rare, but is constantly occurring." A man could pay another man to confess to having committed adultery with his wife, and without the woman having the opportunity of bringing rebutting evidence, that was received as sufficient, and she was divorced. And there was a case (a case which brought tears to my eyes when I read it and felt how the iron of wicked injustice must have entered into that woman's soul), a case of Lord Brougham's, where a man had thus obtained a divorce from his wife, the alleged lover having ostensibly paid him damages of £50 and confessed, where some time afterwards, by an unusual combination of circumstances, the case was re-opened and the unfortunate woman was able to prove that she had never actually been married at all, but as old Lord Lyndhurst put it, was "as pure a maid as when she was a little girl." Oh! think of that state of affairs. Was there ever anything worse in slavery than the way in which women could be driven

forth in those days, branded and deprived of all they held dear, and yet be absolutely faultless, and condemned without being allowed to say one word in their own defence.

Divorce at that time was practically refused to women. While it was granted to men rich enough to pay for it with comparatively little difficulty, it was refused to women under almost all circumstances, however atrocious the conduct of the husband might have been. There were only four cases altogether in the whole record of Ecclesiastical Divorce Courts and the House of Lords (and they were of inconceivably abominable offences on the man's part), in which a woman had been allowed to obtain a divorce; and yet, as I have already shown you, if a faultless wife left her husband without having obtained a formal divorce, however infamous his conduct had been towards her, she was in a state of positive outlawry. But although that was the effect upon a woman of leaving her husband without being set free from her yoke by a divorce, still no cruelty, no repeated gross and barbaric and open adultery, no ill-usage whatever on the husband's part, was allowed to entitle a woman to divorce in those days. She had to put up with whatever her master chose to do, or else to suffer all the cruel consequences to reputation, property, and person of one under an actual outlawry. And remember, in this I speak of the state of a wronged and faultless wife.

The women who lived subject at the will, or according to the conscience of their masters under those vile oppressions of enslaving laws had fathers and brothers who loved them; and there must surely have been many good husbands whom such laws shocked. Nevertheless, I am showing you what the state of affairs had come to be when men had absolute power over women's lot and exercised it without women daring to breathe a word for themselves and their sisters.

The last point I will call your attention to is as to the law with regard to the custody of children. Surely if there is anything that any human being has a natural right to, a mother has a natural right to the love and the upbringing and the daily care of her children. I heard a prominent and distinguished member of the House of Commons a little while ago speak of what he called "sex bias"; and there *is* such a thing as sex bias. I am aware that my own mind is inevitably sometimes biased on such matters, for I am unable to conceive that a father has any right at all to the custody of his child which can for a moment be put in competition with the right of the mother. I do not propose to argue that as a just proposition. I admit to you that it is doubtless a token of my sex bias; it is, I know, probably because I am a mother and am not a father, that it appears to me

that the claims of the mother to the custody of the young child so absolutely outweigh those of the father, that really the father ought not to come into the question as such at all. If ever a child is taken from its mother it should be on no other ground than that of irrefragable proof that she has failed in her maternal duty, and shown herself unfit to have the care of it. This is how it seems to me with my sex bias. But I beg to point out to you that men have the sex bias in the other direction; and that you must put those two biases into opposite scales in order to get an even and just law. For what was the position of mothers with regard to their children's guardianship when men managed things entirely by themselves, with their strong bias in the paternal favour? The position of affairs was simply, as a Judge declared from the Bench within the hearing of my own ears: "The English law does not recognise the mother at all; the English law only sees the father and the child." That is very pointed, I cannot improve upon it. The English married mother had no more right to her own child than its nursemaid had. That, Ladies and Gentlemen, was what the English law had done about the right of the mother to the custody, the nurture, the upbringing and the daily affection of the children to gain whom she had given so much of her strength and so many of her pangs, and whom she needs must love and serve with proverbial devotion and passion.

"The English law did not see the mother, it saw only the father and the child." A man might—aye, mark you, and men constantly did—take away from a mother's care and society one after another of the children whom she bore and nursed, without alleging any fault against her as a woman or a mother. A man could set aside, whenever he chose, any agreement that he had signed before marriage as the consideration on which he got his wife, as to how and where the children were to be educated; as Mr. Agar Ellis deprived his wife of all private intercourse, even by letter, with her growing girls, with the explanation that he did so simply because he apprehended that she would speak to them about the religion in which he had agreed before his marriage that they should be educated. Worse even than this, a father could stretch his dead hand from his grave and will away the custody of children from their mother. What! a dead father could order that his wife should not guard and train and love her own babies, without having to supply any sort or shred of reason for that sentence? Even so: in English man-made law there were no maternal rights or claims recognised! And, crowning infamy of all, even if a father made no such wicked provision, the mother did not become the legal, as she ever must be the natural and right guardian of her own children. In default of the father's will, his male representative succeeded to his rights, and could take the children away from her who had borne them and cherished them beyond her life!

Was this not slavery? The woes and flight of the mulatto mother invented by Mrs. Stowe's genius set all England weeping; but English and Scotch mothers too—refined women, adoring mothers like you and me—have seen their children torn from their embrace, or have fled secretly and lived in desolate concealment with their little ones, as the only way to keep in their tender arms and near their breaking hearts the darlings of their souls. And this is how the law of our land treated us in the most ardent, the most vital of our affections! The mother whose very babes are not her own to hold and cherish, who only kisses her children's lips and trains their thoughts and guards their lives so long as her master likes to leave them with her—ah! she is a slave indeed.

As to the person of a wife, we have not even yet arrived at that stage where we can venture to suggest that, as John Stuart Mill said, "the greatest of barbarisms which law and custom have not ceased to sanction is that any human being should be thought to have a *right* to the person of another." Within the last two years, seven judges in conclave have declared the law to be to-day that a married woman is in this respect still absolutely a slave, with no rights of free-will in herself.

Now I submit to you that I have proved my heavy indictment up to the hilt. I have shown to you that under exclusively man-made laws women have been reduced to the most abject condition of legal slavery in which it is possible for human beings to be held. In property, in work, in person, in the affection which they bore for their children, in reputation, in their claims to right themselves before the law when wronged, in every respect that can possibly be thought of, a course of unchecked man-making of the laws reduced women to the most enslaved and the most helpless position in which it is conceivable for human beings to be placed, under the arbitrary domination of another's will, and dependent for decent treatment exclusively on the goodness of heart of the individual master.

I repeat that women did not suffer from those laws in a great many cases; in a very great many cases, women went through life sheltered, cherished and honoured, without being aware that such laws existed. But did that make it any better for those other women who were actually victims of the bad laws? Or did that make it any

the more right that the irresistible legal authority of a civilised state should be simply an engine of tyranny, a means of heart-breaking torture and oppression always ready to be put in action at the command of scoundrels and villains?

I submit to you that when you know that this is what came about for women under the old state of affairs, it should make a man with a heart and conscience hesitate greatly before he consents to have placed upon him the responsibility of absolute power over the other sex. It should make a man ask himself very seriously whether he thinks he has judgment, he has watchfulness, he has conscientiousness enough, to be entrusted with the absolute power which men have exercised over women in the past, and which men so abused? I ask you to take that question into your consciences.

Now it is said that these laws are repealed—they have been repealed without Women's Suffrage—therefore you do not want Women's Suffrage. It is true that some, not all, of these evil laws have very recently* been rectified, altogether or in part; but how has this been achieved? In every case by years of bitter effort, never spontaneously by Parliament, but only by the hard, untiring, difficult work which has been done, mainly by women, partly by good men, to rouse public opinion, and to move the legislative machinery to reform.

Only those who have shared in those labours know how hard and how heavy they have been, how difficult it has been to make one step, how at every moment the chances of a women's bill are liable to be dashed down by some irresponsible man, some man who feels no responsibility because there are no women amongst his constituents, and what watchfulness has had to be given, and what difficulties have had to be encountered, in order to get a women's bill advanced a single stage. We maintain that this is not a proper way to carry out reforms. In this country the legitimate way to make reform is by the action of a representative government. This has been granted in the case of all sorts of men, down to the very poorest and the most ignorant. It has been recognised that the way, the proper way, the effective way, the only certain and rapid way, in which they are to improve upon any bad laws which afflict them is by giving them the vote, by

* Only the Married Women's Property Law has even yet been made absolutely just between the sexes, and that reform was not achieved till 1882. The Divorce Law was improved (but still left very unfair to women) in 1857; every other reform has been made within the last few years. University degrees were only opened to women in 1880; medical practice by them was legalised in 1876; not till 1886 could a deserted wife sue her husband for any allowance even for his children's maintenance, and only in the same year were married mothers given some small right to their children's custody.

allowing them to send representatives of their own interests and desires to Parliament, and by arousing within the mass of themselves that sense of power over, and thence of responsibility for, their own position and that of their fellows, which nothing but the possession of the vote can give to any class.

Need I say that every argument which can be adduced with regard to this matter applies to the principle of equal rights, namely, that the vote shall be given to all women who have the qualification which entitles men to vote. There is curiously an endeavour being made just at present to exploit all the work, all the effort that has been put forth for Women's Suffrage for over 20 years past, to exploit that for the benefit of unmarried women! Now, I am not going to imply any sneer against them. From Queen Elizabeth downwards there have been many distinguished women who died single; and before Florence Nightingale there were many others who had made themselves famous for their goodness and their wisdom. Far be it from me to say one depreciatory word of them; but this I do say, that to propose that being unmarried shall be a necessary qualification for having an influence upon public affairs is perfectly grotesque! Just reverse the case, and suppose it is suggested that the vote shall only be given to men who are bachelors! It is a preposterous notion to make celibacy an additional test of the right to vote in the case of women.

Of course we do not claim the vote for wives as such—for all women. All we say is that *every* woman who possesses the legal qualifications which entitle a man to vote, shall also have the right to vote, that is to say, where a married woman holds property in her own right, carries on a separate business, or lives apart from her husband, the fact that she has a husband shall not deprive her of the vote to which she is otherwise entitled. To make celibacy a qualification for the vote is too absurd.

"But," said somebody to me recently, "it is not fair of you to talk like that, because widows as well as single women would have a vote under Mr. Woodall's Bill." Yes, so long as they remained unmarried, but the effect of their getting married again would be to restore them to that feeble, incapable condition before the law in which they were no longer fit to have a vote. They would then be overtopped once more by the sensible women who had never been stupid enough to get married at all.

One is astonished that so extraordinary a proposition can ever have entered the mind of man. But so ridiculous is it that I feel little doubt that it will be laughed out of court if ever it be seriously made in the House of Commons.

We can ask for nothing less than *equal* political rights for women with men. Every woman who has the qualification which entitles a man to vote, be she a married woman carrying on a separate business, be she a woman who has an estate in her own right (as it is now given to married women to hold property by the Married Women's Property Act), or be she a single woman or a widow, every woman who fulfils separately from a male relative the qualification which entitles a man to the vote, must have the vote. This and this alone is a principle; therefore this alone is worth working for—the Suffrage for Women on the same terms as it is given to men. To ask for less is to be false to our cause, because it is to acquiesce in a difference being made before the law between the sexes. This is sometimes spoken of as "going step by step." The analogy is false. It would be rather like getting a living body half through a door and allowing the door then to be shut upon it, squeezing it to death.

There are two arguments which are put forward by the people who are responsible for the proposal of a celibacy qualification for women; they are arguments which destroy each other like the Kilkenny cats. One of them is that if married women were not specially excluded from the Franchise, men would create fagot votes for their wives; and of course, under the Ballot, the wife would always vote exactly as her husband told her before she went into the polling booth, so in that case those men would simply have a dual vote. The cat on the other side of the line is that to allow married women to have separate opinions will introduce discord into families. That there shall be another way of preventing discord being introduced into families—that is, by persuading men that their wives have a right to their own convictions, and that as long as she does not drag those opinions in with the breakfast coffee or the supper beer, a man has no right to object to his wife having opinions—that does not appear to occur to the people who use that argument. But the fear of domestic discord is assuredly a very chimerical one. People who are on affectionate terms can agree to differ sometimes in opinion; and husbands and wives who are prepared for home quarrels over politics would quarrel over something anyhow—religion, or the new cook, or the daughters' suitors. The harem system alone is suitable for a man who wants to deny his wife's right to her own convictions on any subject of importance to herself and the human race.

But I want to point out to you that these arguments destroy one another. On the one hand you have the vision of women voting exactly as their husbands tell them; so that all that is necessary for a man to do to get two votes is to give his wife a fagot vote: and on the other hand you have the spectacle of wives everywhere rising up in political revolt against their husbands, so that if the husband is a Home Ruler that is enough to make a wife a Unionist, and so on and so forth with the whole catalogue, and there will always be quarrels between the couple. Well, the contingency of difference of opinion may be allowed to balance the fear of fagot votes.

It is said that the House of Commons will only give votes to women on these unequal terms. Supposing, what I do not believe, that the House does take that view, the House can so limit it in Committee. But our duty is to ask for our principle—the vote on *equal* terms—and to leave any suggestion of inequality to come from our enemies.

But seriously, it seems to me so very ridiculous to pretend that getting married should be a disqualification for the exercise of a Franchise which a person is entitled to upon other grounds, that really I cannot believe that this apotheosis of the single woman can be practically brought before the House of Commons. Rely upon it, bachelors would want similar privileges over married men next.

And now, just one other question. I have said that a great many of those bad laws are repealed, but is everything done? By no means. On the programme of the Women's Franchise League we have two Bills that are now actually before the House of Commons: Dr. Hunter's "Divorce Bill," the object of which is to equalise the grounds for divorce between husband and wife; and Sir Horace Davey's "Devolution of Estates Bill," which is intended to remedy some of the injustices suffered by women in regard to the property of intestates. But after these things are over there is still plenty of work to be done before women are placed legally and socially in the position in which they ought to be.

I do not intend to dwell upon any of these matters, for to-night I represent the Women's Franchise League, and the Bills which I have spoken to you of now are the only ones which they have formally adopted. But in carrying into practice our principle—to obtain for all women equal civil and political rights with men—there is yet much work waiting to be done. In many other respects, both law and custom require great alteration to be just and equal.

In order to secure just laws, we require the protection and the assistance of the Parliamentary vote, and that is the immediate practical object for which I ask your help and support. I venture to ask that help and support of men—although it is always a difficult task to appeal to the depositories of power to part with a portion

of that power. But, gentlemen, I do make that appeal to you with confidence. I make it with confidence, partly because of what has already been done; because men have already shown that when they are appealed to by women who care for their own sex, and when injustices and wrongs and sex privileges are pointed out, some men are capable of opening their eyes to those wrongs and of endeavouring at least to do what women fairly and openly demand. I appeal to you with confidence, also, on the same grounds on which I know that I and my friends will go on working in this cause. Why do we do it? Not for our own sakes. To each of us it is an effort and sacrifice. What is the power to vote to an individual? I do not know that I should have had a happier hour, that I should have had a more successful moment in my life, had all the bad laws under which I was born been different, or had women already possessed the Parliamentary Franchise. No, we do not work for ourselves. The women who are now suffering from bad laws and from cruel tyrannies, the unhappy women, the poor, struggling oppressed ones, cannot speak. It is for us who perhaps have greater powers, or who have had better fortune in life and in our relationships, to speak for the less happy and weaker. Therefore, it is just because the wrongs and the oppression and the repression of women weigh upon us who individually scarcely feel those evils, because it makes us unhappy to know that these things have been and that some of them still are, that I know that in the hearts of many men there will be an answering chord; that it is possible to evoke from men, too, an equal desire to try to right the wrong, to try to set the oppressed free, to try to elevate in the scale of beings those who are now too often oppressed and ground down and ill-used.

It is because we can care for the sufferings of women whom we have never seen, and because we care that the women who shall live in future generations, women of all grades of society and all varieties of power, shall hold a better position, shall be more considered, shall be happier, as far as laws and customs and conventions can make them happier, than they have been in the past, that I appeal with confidence to men, as well as to other women, to join in that sympathy and that hope, and to help in securing equal civil and political rights with men for all women.

"THE WOMEN'S DISABILITIES REMOVAL BILL"

PROVIDES—

(1) That in all Acts of Parliament relating to the right to vote at Parliamentary, Municipal, Local, and other Elections, words importing the masculine gender shall be deemed to include women; (2) that no woman shall be subject to legal incapacity in voting at such Elections by reason of coverture; (3) that no person shall be disqualified from being elected, or appointed to, or from holding any office or position, merely by reason that such person is a woman, or, being a woman is under coverture.

Copies of this Pamphlet, price (post-free) 2d. each, or 1s. 6d. per dozen, may be had from the Secretary of the League. MRS. WOLSTENHOLME ELMY, Buxton House, Congleton.