

THE PRESENT ASPECT OF WOMEN'S
SUFFRAGE CONSIDERED.

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4th December, 1897.

PREFACE

IN reprinting this Essay first delivered as a Lecture in 1877, I have thought it best not by additions or omissions to attempt to bring it "up to date." It may help our cause to show what the general position of women was at the beginning of this movement.

These twenty years have no doubt made a great and salutary difference in our whole position; some part of this has been done by legislation, more by the growth of public opinion, from the continued ventilation of the subject, and the pressure of inevitably changing social conditions, which has, in fact, forced women to a great extent out of the home province to which they had been exclusively consigned into spheres of more active general work and influence. Indeed, without undue boasting we may say that these favourable changes have been mainly initiated and carried on by women themselves; they have assiduously pressed their claims on public attention and justified them by showing themselves capable of good work in those larger spheres. In one most important movement they have shown especial energy and won especial success—that for the Higher Education of Women. In this, it is just and pleasant to say, they have been ably seconded by many high-minded men, not only private workers but men whose official position enabled them to secure for them important advantages.

Legislation has done something, though very little, in the way of opening public work to women; it has also done something to remove social inequalities; it has given married women the right to their own property, and secured them some protection from brutal cruelty; also the right of mothers to the guardianship of their own children has been

in some measure recognised. But the Legislature has not yet given them that without which no rights are secure, a voice in the choice of our Legislators and until we have that we must continue agitating by the peaceable methods of appeals to reason and justice.

Moreover, though the amount and quality of the opposition has been sensibly affected for the better, we are still liable to be met with the same old prejudices, and, as we think, weak and flimsy arguments; and we must still patiently endeavour to refute these and put the whole question in its true light.

A. S.

December 22nd, 1897.

PRESENT ASPECT OF WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE CONSIDERED.

(The following paper was delivered as a Lecture at a meeting convened by the London National Society for Women's Suffrage, on the 14th May, 1877, in St. Matthew's School, Great Peter Street, Westminster, when Mr. Roebuck, M.P., was in the chair. It has been printed with very slight alterations, chiefly consisting of some remarks on the debate which took place in the House of Commons last Session on the subject.)

IN opening the subject of Women's Suffrage, my first wish is to present it in such a light that it shall not at once awaken prejudices against it; and I should wish to approach it not as a novelty advocated by a distinct and necessarily aggressive party, not as at first blush it may be considered as merely an agitation, a battle maintained by a class whose view of their due position in the world is different from that which the world has hitherto been disposed to take, and who, therefore, can expect for a long time little save uncompromising opposition, contempt, or at least utter indifference.

I hope we have passed that stage; but I wish the question not to be regarded simply as one of Women's Rights—an unlucky phase fostering bitterness. It is a question of men's and women's rights, the rights of both to the fullest good that our social and political system can yield. It is the complement of other advances—a part of an inevitable movement, of which there can be no more doubt than of the lapse of ages, or of the movement of the heavens, or of the growth of the human individual. Carrying on the idea, I may say this claim for women is only one outgrowth in a general and manifold development which resembles a tree budding forth in all directions. We find it linked with kindred objects with almost all that is good and useful in public effort and in social renovation, with consciousness of women's needs, social, material, and moral, and the needs of the community in general. This advance cannot be stayed; it springs from a law of nature more real and fixed than that which draws a hard and fast immovable line between the spheres of the two sexes according to theories and usages of earlier and very different ages. This law that I speak of is that duties and spheres will change, expand, and modify according to the other changing

conditions of human communities. In this case the recognition of this law coincides with the full operation of an established principle. What we now ask is, that the Constitutional system may be fully and fairly carried out—that the freedom and justice it is supposed to secure to all classes and individuals may not by legislative enactment be confined to about half the nation—that anomalies caused by artificial restrictions, not inherent in, not contemplated by, the original system, may be removed; the anomaly, for instance, of a large amount of the landed property of the country being in the hands of persons without political rights; we ask that men and women may not oppose but co-operate with each other in all great and wide objects for the national good.

I trust in all that I shall now say I shall appear to be speaking, as I feel, in a friendly and reasonable spirit. How, indeed, can I feel otherwise when I know how many good and wise men are helping us now; when I believe that we shall finally win our cause, and that it will be through the goodwill of *men* that we shall win it, of those men who compose the House of Commons—and, moreover, when I see a most distinguished member of that House kindly consenting to do us the service of presiding at a meeting for the furtherance of our object.

I may as well just say what it is that we ask for—what we mean by Women's Suffrage. We mean simply Women-householder's Suffrage. That is, we ask it only for those women who have the same qualifications as give men a right to vote; for those who are householders and ratepayers—nothing more. But we are argued against as though we were demanding the suffrage for *all* women; that would be Womanhood or Universal Woman's Suffrage. This would be to demand a complete change in the whole Constitutional system; and an absurd change, for it would give women the vote in cases where men would not have it. Some who perfectly understand us complain that the term, thus constitutionally limited, is misleading—False Women's Suffrage they are pleased to call it. This seems to me rather unnecessary quibbling; the words are in fact as correct as the converse term of Women's Disabilities. But to men who reproach us with inconsistency because this definition excludes married women (all but a most minute fraction) we can only say that the laws which necessitate this exclusion by depriving wives of their property are not of our making. As to those very few who *are* householders independent of their husbands, I should myself think it just and desirable that they should have the franchise; but to ask this would be to raise quite a different question. The claim must be based on other than Constitutional grounds,

and would involve all manner of issues that I cannot dwell on now. As it is, the principle that we are contending for—that sex should cease to be in itself a disqualification—will be once for all secured; and no line can really be drawn between the rights and interests of such interchanging sets of persons as the married and the single. In fine, we ask for what we can get, not for what we cannot; and we know, and those who reproach us know very well too, that to ask for more than this would simply be to ensure the total defeat of the whole Bill under a storm of opposition.

To return to our general subject. This claim of the franchise has been objected to as a novelty—which no doubt it is, and as an innovation—which I shall hope to show that it is not. Every beneficial change was at first a novelty; even an innovation would be matter of alarm only till it ceased to be an innovation; and a political measure in particular becomes an accepted fact in a year or so. This fact in especial will have nothing politically revolutionary in it. It is not, as one might judge from the language of its opponents, a new nation living apart, with laws, language, and ideas of their own, that it will admit within the pale of the Constitution; it will only increase the number of voters within the classes already enfranchised, and in those mainly of the more educated section, that by circumstances most orderly and law-abiding. A small additional number, 300,000 or 400,000—that is, less than a seventh of the whole electoral body—will share with men the privilege of having a voice in the nomination of the men who are to represent us in Parliament. This will not affect the action of the Constitution, or the organisation of Government; the same system of men and measures will prevail, subject as now to the approval of the bulk of the electors.

But this proposal, though denounced as a departure from the usage of time immemorial, is in truth *no* constitutional innovation. It is against no early custom, was till 1832 against no existing statute, and is in fact rather a usage let drop than a claim to be newly conceded.

"Time immemorial" we know, does not protest against women having a vote, since the Parliamentary system has not existed above 600 years. Still less has "time immemorial" protested against women having a share, a good large share, in Government, since from the earliest ages we have seen women-sovereigns, sometimes with absolute power.

In our own England, we have, as the earliest form of a ruling council under the sovereign, the Witenagemot, *or assembly of the wise*, which definition happily did not exclude women, as kings' wives and mothers and abbesses sat by

prescriptive right in it. There was also local government, shire, borough, and parish courts, the basis of the later system of representation; and in these women had a vote, as since in our similar modern institutions. And when Parliamentary representation was established no limit of sex seems to have been thought of; freeholders simply are named as entitled to the franchise, and freeholds, we know, might be held by women. It was a principle expressed then by our kings that what "concerned all should be approved by all." Whether the right was much used we cannot tell, as no registers of electors were kept in those days, but probably in times when political liberty was so imperfectly comprehended women thought no more of their vote than men did of theirs. In Henry VI.'s reign occurred the first limitation of the franchise to 40s. freeholders; the word used here to designate the voters is "people." In James I.'s reign, which was about the time when first the idea of civil liberty began to be associated with representation, we find on two occasions, when women's votes had been recorded, that the question was brought before the courts in Westminster Hall, where it was decided that "*a feme sole*, if a freeholder, might vote for a parliament man." And in the Record Office are to be found the names of several women-electors; women even figure as returning officers.

In William III.'s time Parliamentary representation first began to be a matter of party organisation, and the system fell into the hands of political cliques, of the great nobility, of the wealthy land-owners. As whole classes and masses of men acquiesced in their exclusion from the suffrage, it was scarcely to be supposed that women would make any stir for *their* rights. Their claim, then, may be said to have been simply ignored. But before the question *was* agitated, the emancipation of women (on the supposition that a right long unexercised did not exist) was first demanded in 1826 by a meeting of working men, and some thinking men and enlightened women were already raising the question in other circles. So far was the question from being settled, that a lady, still living, with whom I am acquainted, then a young married woman, but of the family of a burgess, once gave her vote in a borough election with no further formula than the being caused to make affidavit before the mayor, that she did it under no compulsion from her husband. But when the first Reform Bill, that of 1832, was passed, there was no claim for women made in the House; and those eligible for the suffrage were in the Bill qualified as male persons. In 1850, Lord Romilly's Act declared that all phrases betokening the masculine gender should be taken to include women

unless the contrary were expressly provided. And certainly in various Acts at the time the term "men" was used for both sexes alike, so that when in the second Reform Bill, that of 1867, the word "male persons" in the superseded Bill was changed to "men," it was resolved to put the question fairly to the test.

In the elections that followed, a number of women applied to be put on the register and several recorded their votes. The case of those who had been refused registration was tried at the Court of Common Pleas and their cause was argued by several distinguished lawyers, among them the present Lord Coleridge, who held that the "women's vote was an ancient Constitutional right that had never been rescinded." And even the *Times* stated that, should the plea be rejected, "the nation would be distinctly committing itself through a judicial tribunal to the dangerous doctrine that representation *need* not accompany taxation." It did so, however; it was decided that the word "men" used in different clauses of the same Act should include women for purposes of taxation, but should exclude them where a right and privilege was concerned. Thus, legally foiled, the cause had to be fought out constitutionally.

This movement had already begun, though still in its infancy, when in 1866 a petition was presented to Parliament in its favour, and in 1867 it was nobly inaugurated in the House itself by that great and good man, Mr. John Stuart Mill. He took advantage of the new Reform Bill then introduced to propose striking out the words supposed to signify male suffrage only. It is said that at that time Mr. Mill was the only man who could have brought forward this claim in the House without exciting general laughter, and even he expected to find scarcely a single supporter. But to his surprise, and thanks to his splendid advocacy, seventy-three members followed him into the lobby. Since then the number of parliamentary supporters has been steadily, though slowly rising. Through six successive sessions (from 1870 to 1876, omitting only 1874) the Bill has been regularly presented to Parliament by our faithful and able champions, Mr. Jacob Bright and Mr. Forsyth. In 1875 the majority against it had diminished in a House of 339 members from 67 to 35.

It is true that in the two last sessions the Bill was defeated; in 1877 by a larger majority than usual, and this year not by votes, but simply by a noise, the majority refusing to hear arguments on the other side, and thus literally roaring the question out. But in neither case did the House represent any charge of opinion outside; the result must be attributed

to special circumstances within—a very strong whip of a party which has lately proved itself exceedingly violent in its opposition to all Liberal views. But the number of its Liberal supporters had not diminished; and I believe Mr. Forsyth was right in saying that whatever the chances in this Parliament, in a new House the result could scarcely be doubtful. We shall see how public opinion has been growing if we look back upon the ten years of this movement. The only notice the public press at first took of it was to denounce it as the work of a few restless noisy agitators; though, as Miss Becker has well remarked in answer, in all great movements for the common good, it has invariably been the few who were restless and dissatisfied with a wrong state of things who first essayed to put it right. In private society there was at first a strong prejudice against it as there always is against anything quite new, and not well understood, a prejudice felt by women as well as by men. But there has been an active and rapid progress since, especially in women's minds, which I think every one who mixes at all in society of any kind or class can testify to, and of which the tangible signs are the increasing number of signatures to petitions in its favour. In 1874 and 1875 there were upwards of 400,000, of which about half were women's, about four times the amount of three years before; the two next years somewhat less, only because much less time was given to collect them, but, as it is, we have had this year 235,832 signatures. Four thousand women signed a memorial to the Prime Minister in its favour, and numbers of women are coming forward to work for it in every way. These years of effort have meanwhile done us much good; they have made us fitter for the suffrage by teaching us to understand it better. We are thankful for the ridicule, even for the occasional abuse, that has been dealt out to us; it has braced us up to prove it unjust and unwise, it has given ardour to the championship of a well-abused cause. I don't mean that the persecution has been very cruel, but some amount of scorn, even of sneers and personalities, must be expected by those who come forward to maintain whatever runs counter to public prejudices. All we ask of favour is to be listened to, not shelved and ignored. We are thankful then for the bracing opposition—and still more thankful for the help which prevents this question from any longer being regarded as one of women *versus* men, the view with which it was first encountered. For men, many men, legal-minded and statesmanlike men, of all parties, from the sincere Conservative to the fervent Radical, have joined our camp and accepted the charge of carrying our banner. Has it ever been known that

a cause so begun, so seconded, so long and steadily and earnestly maintained by a growing number of good and able men and of the women best qualified to form a judgment, has failed of final success?

I attribute the increase of favour which this movement has met with, not only to its being better known and more talked of, but also to the increased and increasing need of it. The condition of women in England has been gradually, but greatly changing with all the changes—social, political, commercial, material—of the last forty years. In this period of transition, as we may trust it is, the traditional state of dependance and protection for women is becoming less and less the rule, while freedom, power to act and the means of self-support have not increased in like measure. The fact that there are nearly a million more women than men, and that fully three millions (that is, nearly half of the adult women) are obliged to earn their bread, alone presents a case which the old theory of "women's sphere" ceases to apply. The political enfranchisement bestowed by successive Reform Bills, joined with legislation, promoting commerce and private enterprise, have very much benefitted the men of various classes in this country, have given them laws enabling them to protect their rights, obtain better education and higher wages, laid open to them more extensive and profitable fields of labour, and raised them in dignity and importance in the political scale. Of course, as wives and daughters, women share more or less in the improved material condition of the men, yet legislation keeps them in the same state of thralldom and hopelessness which so often counteracts those benefits; while, as women having to support themselves, few of these advantages are shared by them. The opening of new spheres of employment to men leaves an immense number of women still to starve at shirt making for two-pence farthing the shirt, or at other almost equally unremunerative drudgery, while the higher and more honoured callings are still shut from them. And in such work as they do in common with men, even with equal qualifications and equal skill, and sometimes with harder labour, they are almost invariably paid much smaller wages. Too often they are kept down by the ill-grounded fears and jealousies of those very men who force their masters to give the women the most laborious and the worst paid part, or drive them from the business altogether, thus using their trades-unionism both to secure their own rights and deprive women of theirs.*

* Of this, if called upon to do so, I could give instances too many for citation here, but will only allude to the rules and regulations made and

Moreover the facilities for education have not been extended to women in anything approaching to like measure with men; and to crown all, that enlargement of Parliamentary representation which has so much helped to raise the position of all classes of men, leaves women the same political cyphers as before.

I do not suppose the strongest upholder of "things as they are," could point out a way in which keeping women out of citizenship will remedy such grievances as I have enumerated. But if I am asked what effect political emancipation would have on them, I answer in general terms that, in the first place, we believe the social status of women will be raised by the legislative acknowledgment of their complete equality with men. For, explain it as you will, the not having a vote, that is, the belonging to a class not considered fit to judge of or help to decide even its own affairs, is a slur and a brand which must affect the general estimation of women, joined as it is with legislation that in many points expressly affirms their inferiority. Justice to any class or individual implies, in my thoughts, liberty to make the most of their life, to develop all their faculties, be socially useful and personally independent. Legislation, political or social, that hinders this, is not, in my opinion, justice. We are not asking for legislation to favour women over men, or to force social regulations to their advantage; we only ask that it may not help to obstruct what, given free play, women may hope to do for themselves.

It is very true that a beginning *has* been made; some steps have been gained, thanks in great measure to the terrible force of necessity, and to the resolute purpose of women themselves in qualifying themselves for wider spheres, and their usefulness in some branches of public work begins to be acknowledged. But all this progress has been hampered by difficulties and opposition at every step, and I contend that the political inferiority of women renders their work much slower and more imperfect than it need be. I ask for a reform on principle to put an end to this curious, inconsistent state of things, a great advance in feeling and knowledge mingled with barbarous survivals that deny on one hand what is inevitably yielded on the other.

enforced by strikes or threatened withdrawal, all with the objects above mentioned, on the part of the workmen in various trades—as the wood-engravers of London, the watchmakers, the carpet workers of Kidderminster, the factory weavers of Yorkshire and Nottingham, printers and type-setters in Manchester, painters of pottery-ware in Staffordshire, not to mention such opposition as many members of the medical profession are still offering to women students,

In two ways the exclusion from the franchise tells directly against women who have to work for their livelihood; their value as tenants is less to their landlords from their not having a vote, and cases are frequent in which they have not been able to carry on a business which had been their source of maintenance after a husband's or father's death. They have been turned out of a farm,* or shop, or a public house, of which perhaps they had been the real and successful managers; and this may often be a terrible hardship, amounting sometimes to ruin. Again, there is a growing tendency to legislate for women in restriction of their personal liberty, whether supposedly for their benefit, or not, without any consulting of their wishes. One of these measures is intended as protective; women's working hours in factories and workshops have been shortened by law. For as the *Spectator* itself says of those natural rulers and protectors under whose reign of chivalry women are supposed to be so safe and happy, "experience shows that men will always make women work harder than they ought, harder than they do themselves." The consequences are that women's wages have been reduced, and workwomen often dismissed to be replaced by men. Men, not being meddled with by legislation, have been able to get their hours reduced and their wages not diminished.

The value of the political franchise for men has been so thoroughly recognised that every change has been in the direction of extending it, and the last Reform Bill admitted to it a great proportion of the working classes. By the advocates of "things as they are," the very same arguments were brought against this extension as are now urged against the women's franchise. It was said they did not want it; they were not educated enough for it; they would make a bad use of it; it was a revolutionary measure and would subvert the Constitution. But these fears have not been realised, the nation has not been revolutionised, the same class of men is returned as before, and the result is, more equitable Legislation, more attention in the law-makers to the needs and education of the people.

This just and simple principle that all classes should join in choosing the men to make the laws which control them all as classes and as individuals, that some share in regulating

* The frequency of this case was denied in the late debate, though not, as far as I am aware, from any personal knowledge on the subject; but even supposing it to happen in comparatively few cases, it is worth citing as illustrating most vividly the violation of constitutional principle contained in this law of exclusion, which is therefore distinctly answerable for all the evil, be it more or less, involved in it.

the State should be possessed by all who help to maintain it, who bear its burdens and obey its decrees—this principle is now being applied to the only class of men still excluded—the agricultural labourers—by the proposal to assimilate the county to the borough franchise. The result of this measure, which will assuredly ere long be passed, will be that the Government will consist of nearly all the men, the governed only of the women. I believe the extension of the franchise to be just and constitutional; I do not deprecate it, but I confess that unless this vertical extension is accompanied by a lateral one, I look forward to it with alarm. I think that the necessarily large masses of wholly uneducated electors that it will bring in require counter-balancing by the introduction of a class that will include more of education, responsibility, and cultivated morality; and I cannot but feel that the entrusting of the dearest, most delicate and most domestic interests of this latter class to those which include so many much less fit than themselves to judge of them, is a very serious prospect for women.*

It is commonly said that the interests of women are sufficiently represented in those of men. On many points, no doubt, they are so; but there are points on which the interests of men and women are, or seem to be, in conflict, and these have been hitherto decided in favour of men. Their interests do not really conflict; but when the laws that regulate the relations of two parties are made by one of them only, they will be found to embody the views of only that party, and much that is, in practice, harsh and inequitable, will be the result. "The laws of England," Mr. Gladstone remarked, "have in many points been uniformly unfair to women." Though this unfairness is shown chiefly in the laws respecting wives and mothers, there are laws, as those of inheritance, which are unfavourable to all women, postponing the succession of daughters to that of all the sons and their descendants. But I do not think, though hardships often result from this, that women are given to complaint about it. They are not ambitious to be the richest of their family, but all the more they ask not to be obstructed in honourably gaining their livelihood, and to have a wider field for independent exertion allowed them.

The strongest of these points are the laws affecting wives

* The well-organised efforts which have been lately made to increase the Irish vote by putting on the voting register a larger proportion of Irish lodgers and small house-holders in the Metropolitan boroughs and elsewhere, will, without the necessity of waiting for further legislation, have the effect of extending the franchise to large numbers of uneducated electors.

and mothers. Our marriage law, which has been called, by one who is no friend to our cause* "the most barbarous in Europe," hands over the woman in person and property absolutely to her husband's power. By Common Law the wife possesses nothing of her own. This monstrous injustice dates from the reign of Henry VIII. It was made possible, however, in some measure to evade this law by the help of the Court of Chancery which invented for the use of the richer classes a contrivance called "settlements," whereby through special arrangements made before marriage, the use of her own property could be secured to the wife, and the capital of such property was put out of the power of herself or her husband to dispose of by the institution of trustees. But wherever these special arrangements had not been made, the wife was helplessly dependent as before, and as the object of the Court was not at all to guard woman's rights but to protect the interests of property, the unjust and barbarous principle remained the law of the land. With great difficulty, and after long resistance, some further modifications have been obtained in a state of things generally acknowledged to be monstrous and unjust, by the Married Women's Property Act of 1870, which secured to wives the control of their own earnings, and the right to property inherited from an intestate. But this law, mutilated as it was by its opponents, is so imperfect and unintelligible that, on the whole, women are little better off than before; and the unsatisfactory device of "settlements" is still nearly all that they can resort to, expensive and troublesome as it is, often unknown to women, whose ignorance of technical law is not surprising, but is a real hindrance to self-defence, and, as I said before, available only for especially privileged classes.

A husband is not liable for his wife's support while she is living with him beyond a plain bare maintenance, that is just so far as to keep her off the parish; but this law is hard to enforce; he can evade it by a petty fine, and parish relief is generally refused when it is known that the husband *can* maintain her; so that the wife may, and sometimes does, starve for want of necessaries under her husband's roof. And this law of maintenance has been made equally binding on the wife if he has squandered his means and she has either property, or earnings of her own. That, in spite of the theory that the husband maintains the wife, which I have seen alleged against women's rights,† very large numbers of

* The late Sir Fitz-James Stephens (1898).

† Mr. Goldwin Smith says: "It must be remembered that the man remains responsible for the maintenance of his wife and children." Not

men live in idleness on their wives' earnings, is but too well known to those whose experience lies among the working classes.

Again, a man may, if he chooses, leave all his property away from his wife; she has no rights that can avail against his testamentary dispositions. If he dies intestate, the widow has but a half or a third, even though the whole property may have come originally from her, and the rest of it goes to the next of kin, perhaps an entire stranger.

Next, as to control over the wife's person. By the theory of the common law it is absolute, though of course some checks are provided against the abuse of it. But the husband can compel her to live with him, however bad his conduct, however wretched the place he would confine her to. He can reclaim her by force if she has left him; nay, even if he has deserted her for twenty years, leaving her all that time to maintain herself and her children.* In all these cases she is wholly in his power, unless she can prove that his violence causes her to go in fear of her life.† As for those terrible cases which we now alas! so repeatedly see in the public papers of savage cruelty towards weak and helpless women, of murder by brutal husbands upon wives, I am unwilling to dwell upon them, shocked as our eyes and hearts daily are by their miserable details. But have not the laws encouraged such unmanly violence and tyranny by teaching men that their wives are their property? do not these laws, that good men would abhor to make use of, seem meant as a warrant to bad men for ill-doing; and is the punishment inflicted by law anything like adequate to the offence? And has not the tone of conversation, of the public press, of the House of Legislature itself, been too often unfavourable to a serious consideration of the matter? Has it not been regarded as rather a funny subject than otherwise? Has not literature forgotten itself into a defence of the men who kick, pound, mangle and massacre their wives? And when some good-hearted man brings forward in the House a motion for strengthening the inadequate legal protection for women, is he not sure to be met with jocularity,

legally—as many a starved wife and child know, whose "natural protector" is spending the money, which perhaps she has earned, at the public house.

* These instances are taken from decisions of police magistrates.

† I am told by a lawyer that a wife is not entitled to this release from a husband even in case of ill-usage if he is subject to *delirium tremens*; because to constitute cruelty *will* and *intention* must be proved, and where this malady exists there can be neither.

and the subject dropped as something too unimportant to proceed with?*

But perhaps the wrong that women feel most is the state of the law with respect to their children. The child is by law the father's alone; the mother has no legal right to it. He may take it from her and give it to the care of anyone he will; the comparative fitness of the respective parties for the charge makes no difference. A late modification of the law (passed in 1873) enables the mother by an expensive and troublesome process—a suit in the Court of Chancery—to obtain the care of the child *if the Court see fit to award it*; but the principle of the father's paramount rights remain the same.† In a late terrible case in Scotland where a bad father took from the mother an infant a few months old no redress could be had by Scotch law, and the Lord Advocate opposed in Parliament any change in that law, on the ground that it was in principle the same as that of England.

Again, the mother is not by law the natural guardian of her child; the father can, living or by will, appoint any guardian he chooses; she, under no circumstances, can appoint one. We all know how this tells in cases where the parents are of different religions; if the father dies first, he can by will decide what religion the child is to be brought up in; nay, if he leaves no such directions the law still presumes the child is to be of the father's creed, and the relations may train it accordingly in spite of the mother's wishes. Can we wonder that mothers have been known to fly the country and hide themselves that their children may remain their own?

Now, in suffering this state of things to stand, I do not accuse men of wanton injustice; they have accepted the time-honoured institutions they find, and, in true British character, are in no hurry to alter them—that is all. But to those who aver that women's interests are sufficiently cared for in a legislature of men, nay, better than they could be by women themselves, I must needs point out that this state of the law is more or less acknowledged as wrong by almost every one, and that some few just-minded and resolute

* There has, no doubt, recently been legislative action concerning offences against the person; but this was immediately inspired by cases in which the violence had extended to men. The *Pall Mall Gazette* observed that the kicking to death of wives was often caused by the wives' own extreme ill-conduct, "but now that *men* also," etc., etc.

† The first limitation of the law which recognises the father as the only parent was enacted in 1833, empowering the Court of Chancery, on special application, to grant to the mother the care of her child, up to seven years only! The age is now extended to sixteen, but this remedy is to be secured only by the precarious process just named.

men have, year after year, brought forward Bills to remedy it; and that, year after year, the House is counted out, or the order of the day voted, or the Bill thrown out, or so altered as to be spoilt and ineffective. The Act of 1870 for amending the law as to married women's property, imperfect as it is, took thirty years to get passed, and an attempt to enlarge and simplify it, by putting the law on a basis of equal justice, has just been rejected in the House of Lords.* "There is no reason," says Mr. Goldwin Smith, "why Parliament should not do justice in any practical question as to women's rights that may be brought before them." There is no reason, but that women's practical interests are not always the same as men's, and in the cases where they are not, of course the represented portion of the nation will be more attended to than the unrepresented. This is quite natural; it is, and has always been thus, in like cases. We all know how the unrepresented classes are apt to be legislated for. Such considerations are the very staple of the argument for enfranchising working men. In fact from the pressure of other business deemed more immediately important it is most unlikely that members will even make themselves acquainted with the claims and wants of women. "Wrongs will be redressed," says Mr. Bright, "when our legislators know of them"; but it is part of our complaint that they do not know of them.

Against members in general, as I have said, I wish to bring no charge. But with respect to those opponents who most vehemently rebut our plea for equal rights, it is a strong point on our side that none of these have, as far as I am aware, ever attempted to remedy any even of admitted abuses, nor shown a sign of sympathy with the sufferers, nor have, in short, ever come forward in any matter, in which women are concerned, except to resist their appeal, and sometimes even with scorn and contumely. The very contrary is the case with those true Liberals and sound-hearted Conservatives who are helping us now.

Having thus stated the nature of our claim and some of the grievances that we desire to see remedied, I must now inquire what are the objections brought against it. Waiving those that I think have been answered in my previous statements,

* As a specimen of the arguments that are to be found to tell against us, I may mention the suggestion, that a married woman, if she had her property in her own power, might leave her husband and set up in a shop or a business with a man whom she called her cousin for a partner. This argument, or whatever it may be called, seems to have a peculiar charm for our legislators, as it was repeated from a debate of some years ago in the Commons, where it met with equal success.

most of them may be summed up in what I may call the *ad foeminam* argument, as thus:—"All that you say as to unenfranchised classes and Constitutional rights would apply to men, but not to women, on account of their sex." If you ask why, you are generally told that women are not fit to vote. To this perhaps a few words furnish a conclusive answer—women are held fit to possess property, and the possession of property is the only fitness required for the vote. But if we press for particulars, we are met by the great Nature-argument; we are told of the peculiarities of our nature, our conditions, our duties and our character; that is, in other words, our physical and mental inferiority, our home sphere and our political tendencies. I will endeavour to encounter each of these arguments in turn.

Now I do not, of course, deny the natural differences between men and women. I do not deny that certain works, especially those of which the sole, or chief, qualification is physical strength, will best belong to men. That is so obvious, that there is no fear of such works being transferred to women, and we need not legislate to keep them in men's hands. I humbly think that Nature, so fondly referred to by our antagonists, has marked, and will always keep marked, certain broad general distinctions, and we shall realise much better what *are* the natural limits, when artificial restrictions are removed. Nor am I arguing that women can do all that men do; but I ask that what no one denies that they can do they should not by law be hindered from doing.

But one would like to know, when it is so glibly said that Nature is opposed to this or that, what is meant by Nature. Is it ancient usage or established convention, the law or custom of our country, training, social position, the speaker's own particular fancy or prejudice, or what? And when Nature has been defined, one would like to have defined what particular actions are, or are not, against that aforesaid Nature. It seems that for a woman to manage property, carry on large businesses, be a farmer, a merchant, a parish-overseer, a clerk in various capacities, a municipal elector, or member of a School Board, or even a Sovereign, is not against Nature, but to give a vote for a Member of Parliament is. I once heard that great, comprehensive, tremendous statement, uttered loudly and emphatically at a great public meeting by a worthy gentleman—I cite him only as typical—that "the female suffrage was against the laws of God and Nature." But if it be not against the laws of God and Nature for a woman to exercise the direct, simple, sometimes absolute power given by a seat on the throne, as she has done "from time immemorial," to use the favourite phrase

of one of our opponents, can it be impious and unnatural for a woman to have an infinitesimal share in regulating the machinery of the State which controls us all? She will not make laws, she will merely help to choose the men who will help to make laws for us. Our opponents say that this is a demand for women to govern men, but as this Bill would only add to the electoral body by less than a seventh, they must know very well that there is no possibility of that.

"I hate women who meddle with politics," said Napoleon to a witty French lady. Napoleon, we know, strongly maintained that nature forbade women to have anything to do with politics. "Ah, General," she replied, "you men sometimes have a fancy for cutting off our heads, and we women would like to know what it is for." She might well have said too, that women might have something to say to State Councils that sent thousands and thousands of those they loved best to be massacred. Ours is not so extreme a case, but we feel that politics means legislation, and that legislation enters into questions in which we have a right and a necessity to be interested. We cannot separate domestic politics from social conditions of life. If then we are told that we have nothing to do with politics, we can but answer that politics have a great deal to do with us.

As for that mental inferiority imputed to our sex—the mind hopelessly closed to logic, the incapability of taking large views, the want of a sense of justice, are these considered an inherent peculiarity belonging to sex or not? If they are, it would be idle to suppose that any woman ever did, or could do, political work, or any large general work at all; the point is settled irrevocably, in spite of all historical and present examples to the contrary; and all the women who have shone in various departments of thought, science, and action, must be dismissed as monstrosities. But if it only means that by general experience there are more men found qualified for such work than women, then it is but a question of more or less, and as there is not a logical, nor any kind of intellectual franchise for men, we may dismiss this argument as irrelevant. And it will also be open to question whether this supposed inferiority of ours, as difficult to prove as it is easy to affirm, is not the fruit of present, long-continued, but removable conditions. We ask that legislation may cease, by positive restrictions, to make it impossible for us to judge of or to modify those conditions.

The second argument drawn from our sex is that well-known one called by Mr. Jacob Bright the "spherical argument." He reasoned excellently that we could not practically draw a hard and fast line between men's and

women's sphere, they intermingle in the business of life, there is much occupation, many interests, much work necessarily in common. This phrase of "women's sphere" is the most indefinite of phrases, often the most inconsistent with facts. It varies with every age and every country. In India, for instance, we see it carried out with the most rigorous exactitude according to the men's notion, and the result is, that in the working classes women have all the toil and drudgery; in the upper classes they have the home-sphere in perfection—that is, utter confinement and seclusion.

With respect to the home as the woman's natural sphere, there is a semblance of truth in it which the fact belies. At least, that sphere is by no means her domain, for as wife and mother she has, as we have seen, no legal power, hardly any legal rights. Nor am I aware that our "women's sphere" friends mean anything more than that she is to be the chief working subordinate, by no means even an equal authority in it. So that this distinction seems to result in man's keeping the supremacy in every sphere to himself. But granting this "home" to be our sphere—as to many a woman it is a safe and happy one—our antagonists have failed to show how the giving of a vote every four or five years, or even taking an interest in politics as much, let us say, as men commonly do, would take a woman out of her sphere, or prevent her fulfilling its duties. Moreover, since to a large and increasing number of women this sphere is denied, the restriction amounts for them to the exclusion from any. Mr. Goldwin Smith says that our business is now to distinguish between men's and women's spheres. Surely, this process has been going on with more or less rigour since the world began; in the face of the fact I have mentioned, and many others, it might perhaps now be useful to ascertain what is their common ground. No doubt, the home duties must be, and always will be, performed, but it is a misfortune, not a glory, if a woman finds it necessary to bound all her thoughts and cares to it: that is, to a very narrow range of personal interests. But every argument founded on the home importance of women, as the educator of men, and her moral and social influence as man's companion, points to the necessity of her having a sense of wider responsibilities. She cannot educate men who are to be citizens without some knowledge of what citizenship is, or some feeling of citizenship herself.

I come now to the third class of alleged disqualifications of woman, her moral character, and her political tendencies. I have sometimes sat to hear Bills of Indictment drawn against women, to which it is almost a sufficient answer to

say that a political dogma that rests on the depreciation of half the human race stands self-convicted of fallacy. And besides, our opponents contradict themselves, accusing woman alike of too much imagination and a want of it, of tenacity and fickleness, of cheese-paring economy and reckless expenditure, of selfishness, and unreasoning sympathy. Between all these I think we may strike a balance and conclude that her faults and virtues are those of human nature in general. But granting the favourite charge that she is more emotional and impulsive than man, what then? Can the more or less of qualities common to the race make the one half of a nation fit to be represented, the other not? Is the Irishman disqualified for a vote, because he is more impulsive than the Englishman? And may not this variety in the proportion of qualities be an advantage rather than otherwise? May there not be a danger from the exclusive preponderance of a certain set of tendencies, and may not the infusion of a new moral element sometimes strengthen the higher considerations which might be in danger of being postponed to merely commercial, or other self-regarding interests? Women have no sense of justice, it is said, and will vote according to their feelings; is that worse than voting according to the sense of drink or to sensibility to a bribe? Will an occasional triumph of sentiment, as a moral feeling is generally called, in the region of politics be more fatal than the triumph of self-interest of the lowest kind?

But then there are the political tendencies of women, and here again our antagonists contradict each other; for some allege our political apathy and want of public spirit, and others our furious reactionary fanaticism. The metaphysicians have, in fact, stepped forward with certain philosophical theories, evolved, I think, from their own inner consciousness, and proving chiefly the desire to justify a foregone conclusion. The language of these theorists implies that man is, properly speaking, all human nature, with all his faculties perfectly balanced, and woman an imperfect anomalous accessory, a bundle of instincts, always foolish, and mostly mischievous. I need not say that the opposite theory regards the two sexes with their, not contrary tendencies, but different proportions of the same, as making up human nature, and presenting such a unity in diversity as, co-operating in the world's work, must produce the finest results. But let us see to what conclusions the first mentioned theory, boldly pushed to its extremes in the hands of one of these philosophers, leads him. According to him *all* women are as *one* woman, with no variety in thought, feeling, or opinion, and all—I am quoting his admired words—"by a deep and permanent cause, the

sentiment inherent in the female temperament," at once Tory and reactionary, and also revolutionary and anarchic, and disposed to loosen the marriage ties. This abstract woman, who is like no concrete woman that I ever saw or heard of, has, it seems, "no love of liberty or law," desiring only the personal government which her weakness needs; therefore, all women will, as soon as the vote is granted to them, band together to oppose those personal governors, and against *their* will and in defiance of *them* troop to the poll to "demolish free institutions" and "put an end to all franchises whatever."*

I imagine we shall, most of us, be a little startled at finding ourselves all classed together as one Conservative, priest-ridden, idiotic animal, who, if a modicum of power be granted it, will rise up an insane firebrand to "overturn the institutions on which the hopes of the world rest." But I venture to think that even if the mass of female voters were to be so incredibly silly as he gloomily pictures them, men would manage to out-vote them. Ours is not a nation in which rampant folly on vital political questions is allowed to have it all its own way. However that may be, I think the general common sense will dismiss the whole grand rhetorical hypothesis as founded on an enormous assumption which no facts have yet justified. I believe, and I think most women, and men who are really acquainted with women, will agree with me, that women vary as men vary, that they are moulded and modified by the same diversified influences as affect men—birth, education, family-belongings, social atmosphere; and that, these variations apart, Englishwomen are of the same race as Englishmen, and partake of the same strong national character. So that, on the whole, Magna Charta is not likely to be repealed by the female descendants of those who won it for us.†

Finally, what these metaphysicians and rhetoricians seem to forget is that to the large majority of women-voters the claims of practical life will be much more present than political visions and abstract principles; that their votes will

* My readers must not think I am exaggerating. I have given the statement almost entirely in Mr. Goldwin Smith's own words. His article is full of equally astounding assertions as to historic or existent facts; but I have no space here to point them out. Nor is it necessary, for that piece of rhetoric is, I imagine, nearly forgotten. But the above theory may, and does, reappear in various shapes.

† The results of the School Board elections have curiously falsified Mr. Smith's vaticinations. *The Spectator* attributes to the disappointment of the reactionaries the increased acrimony shown by the Tory party in the House against Women's Suffrage.

represent not only a sex, but members of classes with the interests belonging thereto—landowners, farmers, traders, shopwomen, and handworkers—persons who are likely to be quite content with the general institutions of their land when they do not press too hardly and directly on their own moral and material well-being, which free institutions are much less likely to do than arbitrary ones.

Others of our opponents, as I have said, dwell on our incapability of sympathising with great causes, our natural apathy about politics, and, at the same time, our stagnant Toryism. This, one might say, is adding insult to injury. We are excluded from all practical share in politics, we are taught that they are not our concern, our "sphere" as it is called, we are brought up in perfect ignorance of them, and then we are reproached for our indifference to them! I might rather wonder that we care as much for politics as we do. It needs but for an intelligent man to be in the habit of talking in his family on such matters, for the simplest and most unassuming women to take an interest in them. But—want of sympathy with great national causes! Have there then been no patriotic women in England's history? Do not our hearts beat for our country, for its welfare and its greatness, for its defenders, for their sufferings, their perils, and their glory, just as strongly as any man's? I do not think many men who have themselves great causes at heart will echo such a complaint.

As for the indictment of universal Toryism, if it be true that there are more Conservatives among women than among men, this cannot to the true Liberal be a just reason for their exclusion. What business have we to make or maintain laws to exclude the political party whose views we dislike? Try and educate them rather to a better view of things is what we should say about an excluded class of *men*; and if our Bill pass, I daresay my Liberal friends will look to this in future in their own families.* But it is no part of my argument to decry this phase of political opinion or this habit of political thought. It may well have its tender, its generous, its useful side. What I am concerned

* It is obvious that till a practical test of the political tendencies of women is arrived at by admitting them to record their votes, such generalisation is incapable of proof but remains in the region of assertion and speculation only—as, for instance, when the Liberal representative of a Welsh county said that, though he *had been told* that in Wales women were mostly Liberals, he *had been told* also that in England they were all Conservatives. The contrary assertion has lately been made by many Conservative gentlemen in London, who *have been told* that women would generally be Liberals.

with is to show that it is with women, as with men, a phase dependent on their social and intellectual conditions, not on the "inherent temperament of sex." It would be more fair to say that in politics women ordinarily adopt the opinion or the men around them than that all women have but one opinion amongst them. If this leads generally to Toryism, we can only say that on Constitutional principles the party that has a majority in the nation has a right to a majority in the House. But conversation, books, journals, joined to all the quickening influences of varied society, are rapidly giving women the power of forming their own opinions, and it is a certain fact that for the most part the highly-gifted and enlightened women who, in their own spheres, lead public opinion, are thorough Liberals.

Even should a Conservative Government, in giving a vote to women, temporarily strengthen their own cause, we shall not be alarmed, believing, as we do, in those general permanent laws, which necessitate progress, yet restrain political excess, maintain with us, in the long run, a due balance of forces, and have always rendered it impossible for even the most extreme partisans, when in the ascendant, to introduce a real and lasting reaction.

There is one more argument that I must notice which has been rather in favour with literary journals. It is this—that the basis of Government is physical force, that is, personal strength, and therefore women being physically the weaker are unfitted for the franchise. This is alarming, for physical weakness, combined with legal inequality, seems to ensure not so much protection as oppression. But what is meant by physical force being the basis of government? I have always thought that government was designed to *supersede* physical force, that civilisation meant the reign of law instead of that of brute-strength. Public opinion, moral restrictions, mental power and organisation, make up now the forces on which government rests, compared to which bodily force is simply nothing. This would be going back to savagedom indeed. Doubtless, before communities were formed, the man who could knock the other down would have most power. But, as soon as people began to live in an orderly way together, it was the strongest headed, not the strongest handed, man who became chief of the tribe. The titles of our first rulers, the eorls and ealdormen, imply not that they were the most muscular, but the oldest and therefore the wisest, and our Witenagemot ("assembly of wise men") was formed on the same principle. Physical force is one of the instruments kept in reserve by government, and the government may be that of a woman, or a weak old

man, and be none the less secure. Our Cabinet ministers are not chosen from the men who can knock each other down. Depend upon it, it is something more than muscle that keeps society together, or we are living on the brink of a convulsion. If all the muscle of the nation were pitted against the brain no doubt the women would go down, but so too would all the men of intellect. But I do not fear any such divorce between brain and muscle. The classes who most represent the latter have quite enough of the former to know that the law is still stronger than they, and they respect it accordingly.

And, after all, what connection has this theory of physical force with Women's Suffrage? with the vote given by a small fraction of them, legally and constitutionally, in an orderly and settled state of things? Does it mean only that none are to be represented but those who can take by force what they want, or defend by force what others attack? This would exclude from the suffrage all sickly men, and most men above 60. But the embodiments of physical force—soldiers, sailors, and police—have no vote. It would be just as fair to say that women ought not to have property, because, if men wanted to take it from them, they could not defend it by force.

But the philosophers have invented some curious imaginary cases to support this theory. They say that, if women have the vote, they will be sure to attempt to pass some absurd law. That they will force candidates to pledge themselves to it, the House of Commons to pass it, the Ministry to sanction it. That the physical force of the nation will rise in revolt to overturn the Government, and thus all Government will be rendered impossible. This prediction of an extraordinary skill in political organisation and combination to be shown by the sex asserted to be least interested in and most incompetent for politics, and the assumption that, if half the nation are lunatics the other half must be imbeciles, I think, we may dismiss, in Mrs. Fenwick Miller's words, as "speculation run mad."

Perhaps I ought to take some notice of the speech made against us last year by our most distinguished opponent, Mr. John Bright. It will not require much notice, for I cannot think that he was speaking his best, or that his arguments would have much effect, except on minds previously biassed. He dismissed, however, the political objections, which he considered groundless, and rested his case on the "sentimental" argument. He dwelt on doubts and uncertainties as to what might follow from such a beginning. Surely, this is not the way in which he would regard concessions made to men. If the concessions are, in themselves, just and reason-

able, he would trust to the same sense and justice and reason which caused them to be granted to prevent concessions which should be neither just nor reasonable.

In fact, the only two distinct objections that Mr. Bright brought forward were—first, that this demand is based on hostility to men, and will cause still more hostility; secondly, that electioneering is too vile a business for women to have anything to do with. As to the charge of hostility, it amazes me. We ask that we may help in the choice of men to maintain a masculine Government. We are not demanding the vote that we may elect women instead of, and in opposition to, men. Hostility! Why, all we ask is to be gained from and through men, and men are helping us now—husbands and wives are working side by side. Is not the hostility shown rather more in the refusal than in the demand?

But Mr. Bright thinks that, as soon as men have shown their generosity, their justice, in raising women to a level with themselves, the women will be armed against the men, and there will be discord and enmity everywhere. To paint this discord in sufficiently alarming colours, he has to travel far beyond the four corners of the Bill. He pictures a household with the father and mother voting different ways, and the brothers and sisters quarrelling in consequence. Does he really mean that we are to legislate to prevent there being a difference of opinion between the men and women in one family or, rather, to prevent women from expressing a different opinion from the men? At present, assuredly, the men and women in a household can differ about politics, and about things which interest them far more deeply than politics—religion, for instance—without quarrelling. What, then, is there in this vote—given at an interval of years, and done with—to change human nature so entirely? Love depends on the thousand daily incidents of life, not on the abstract opinions of people who, in nine cases out of ten, have no strong interest in such matters. If a man is a kind and just husband, he need not fear his wife's estrangement because he votes Whig and she votes, or would, if she had the power, vote Tory. Mr. Bright thinks the fact of our legislators having mothers, wives and daughters must prevent their ever being unfair to women. Yet, he will not allow that women having fathers, brothers and sons will prevent their arming themselves against men.

But Mr. Bright's second objection—that against women having anything to do with the processes of choosing a member—raises more serious considerations. If such grossness, violence and corruption are, as he says, inherent in the present political system, it becomes a question whether

Representative Government is a thing that ought to continue, or whether *men* are fit to conduct it? I need not say that I do not admit either alternative at all; but, in taking for granted that the whole thing is necessarily so bad that even a man must feel shame in having had anything to do with it, Mr. Bright makes the most damaging admission I ever heard from the lips of a Liberal. But have we not found, to the credit both of men and women, that, on social occasions, whether of business or pleasure, the presence and participation of women have helped to soften, purify, regulate. Will it not be the case here? It is allowed that, since the ballot, the election day no longer presents the objectionable scenes that it once did. May we not hope that that and the previous process *need* not be such as it will disgrace a woman to have to do with? Let us never, no, not for a moment, acquiesce tranquilly in the necessity of evil accompanying the performance of any work, public or private. Let the desire and effort that women should concur in this work be a pledge of efforts equally strong to lift it above all that can tarnish or debase it.

The other speeches against us in the debate of 1876 do not call for much notice. The arguments were not new nor very profound, and were mostly such as, I think, have been sufficiently answered in the foregoing pages. One of these speakers, indeed, said that, when the majority of women wished for the vote it could not be refused them. But how are honourable gentlemen to discover that majority? The almost impossible task is set before women of *letting it be known* that the vote is wished for, without *showing* that they wish for it. No such paradoxical test was applied to *men* when it was decided that it was fit and just that the great majority of them should have the suffrage, whether they wish for it or no. But, in our case, petitions are scouted as no test; all agitation is regarded as the work of a few restless women, meetings and speeches are ridiculed; the many women of culture, thought, and feeling, of social energy and devoted benevolence, who desire it, are passed over as unknown, or put aside as exceptional, or branded as masculine. This last assertion has not, I believe, been made by any men whom we have reason to respect, nor will it, I hope, deter us. The causes that move us in this matter lie deeper than such men's words and thoughts can fathom. And if to have a warm interest in great national and public concerns, and to wish to help in them with our best work, is to be masculine, then let us be masculine, and be proud of being so. No virtue ought to be monopolised by either sex.

The debate of last session presented no such distinguished

opponent as Mr. Bright, and, as we have said, the state of mind of the House was not favourable to any calm and serious discussion of the claim. But of the speeches that were made, and the articles in the press that followed, all had this in common, that they ignored the Bill before them and its provisions, to dwell upon something that it did not contemplate. In fact, they could make out no case whatever if they did not do so. So they "rose upon a wind of prophecy," making general alarming assertions, which involved the three well-known assumptions—1st, that women would form the absolute and great majority of the voters; 2nd, that women, having, instead of human nature, a peculiar feminine nature, would always act as one woman, and opposed to men; 3rd, that political arrangements can change nature itself.

The fears that may be entertained by good-hearted and reasonable men of a deterioration in that which they love and admire, though we may think them erroneous, are entitled to respect; but we cannot yield a like deference to that noisy majority which made one ask whether we were governed by brains or by strength of lungs, and suggested the painful doubt that "masculine" and "manly" were not always convertible terms.

But there was somewhat more of novelty in some of the newspaper arguments of the subject, and I propose to examine those of two of them, the *Spectator* and the *Times*. That of the *Spectator* is indeed the old one of physical force, but now formulated into a very distinct political principle. The writer in this journal, who appears as our regular opponent, at any rate never drops the character of a man of culture and a gentleman; I desire therefore to answer him as seriously and as cogently as I can. I will first quote his argument: "Women can only obtain the franchise by persuading men to give it them . . . and so long as men choose to refuse their demand, they have no means of enforcing it. This of itself constitutes, at all events, an initial difference between the cases of men and of women who are denied it. The nearer Parliament comes to a proportionate representation of the forces which, if there were no Parliament, would govern the country, the nearer it will approach to a perfect machine for its own purpose. . . ."

When the middle class was refused the vote they demanded, they could threaten a march from Birmingham to Westminster. When the artisans were refused the vote they demanded, they could demolish the Hyde Park railings." It is assumed as usual, of course, that the women electors will be the majority, and that their vote will be given *en masse*,

not divided like men's, and he further illustrates his point by a case which he assumes will be frequent, if not normal, in which it will be opposed to that of the majority of men's.

Put shortly, the above statement means that the paramount claim of any interests whatever to the attention of the Legislature is founded—not on force of reason, nor on the justice of the claim, nor on a numerical majority, nor on anything but the possibility of violence. The argument, then, leads to this or nothing—that no political class of measures may exist, save such as the classes disposed to violence (if such there be) may tolerate. On this showing, the government of England is the rule of a Parliament tempered by fear of mob-violence. Our political condition, if there were no parliament, which—the *Spectator* tells us—is to regulate the representation of forces within it, would be, of course, either personal and despotic rule, or anarchy caused by the predominance of the brute-force element—an element which I thought Parliament was instituted, not “proportionately,” that is preponderantly, to represent, but to control. Carry out the above argument, and it follows that we must live under a mob-tyranny. For, of course, the working classes—I name them because it is of the that it is assumed that they would menace violence—could threaten a demonstration when they believe their interests assailed, whether they have a vote or not; and in these cases, says the *Spectator*, “it is wise to yield rather than have a state of permanent civil war.” Thus, if the lower classes were to demand Universal or Manhood Suffrage, they must have it because they can use force to insist on it. The *Spectator* admits that in that case we shall have a worse House of Commons, indeed he thinks it already worse in proportion to the lowering of the vote, but that it must be done because Parliament must “accurately represent the forces out of doors.”*

I should have said that the allowing matters to come to such a pass as to necessitate hasty concessions to popular demands, in order to prevent civil war, exhibited not government in its normal action, but the absence of any real government at all. That our Constitutional system is so framed as to exclude any such alternative, is shown by the fact that the lower stratum of society have not exercised this power of rule by intimidation even in the days when they really had just cause of complaint. Had those demands of

* May I suggest that certainly one element, that of the “roughs,” was very “accurately represented” by the majority in the debate I have been speaking of.

the people, which the *Spectator* has instanced as successful, not been just and reasonable, it was the duty of the Government to resist them, to resist, if necessary, lawless mob force with organised and law-sanctioned force. It was not because the people threatened to march from Birmingham to London, or broke Hyde Park railings, but because those demands were just, and, being just, were backed up by a great force of opinion in the educated and influential classes that the Government felt they could not take the responsibility of refusing them. This principle, as embodied in our practice, will I think sufficiently guarantee the safety of a Constitutional system of which women's votes should form a part.

But the *Spectator* writer gives us a test, which he seems to consider crucial, of the mischievous working of female participation in politics. Here is the Great Eastern Question, and the national feeling about it. All women, it is asserted, would vote for the use of force in aid of the oppressed Christians—most men would be for neutrality, and thus a dead-lock or a riot, or, at the very best, a simple nullification of the women's vote must ensue. “For (he asks) do we suppose that in such a case the men would quietly submit to be forced to war by the women, the men who fill our armies and navies, and pay the taxes?” Does not this able writer forget that women too pay taxes, or have the same interest in them as men, that our armies and navies are voluntarily filled, and that *they* are not the classes that we find most averse to war? But, in short, it is utterly idle to talk of a direct opposition in this matter, or in any like matter, between men and women; there is no such sharp division of opinion as it is, and not the remotest desire on any woman's part to go to war on one side or the other. Does he suppose that while the great mass of the nation is saying, “Let us keep out of war,” a chorus of feminine trebles will rise in the midst to cry, “No let us rush into it!”

But supposing that in any disputed question the small contingent of the women's votes should help to turn the scale, and this could only be if the party were a very considerable one already—what then? Is a good measure nullified because women may concur with men in passing it? Is a bad one less dangerous because men only have had the passing of it? And what is this more than the usual course of constitutional action as now regulated? Does it not constantly occur that the views of one class of voters will help to determine the preponderance of some line of policy? Have not the illiterates and the public-house customers in great measure returned this Tory House of Commons? It is true that the *Spectator* writer must in consistency approve of this, because

they are the classes from which violence is possible; women belong to the classes which have neither the will nor the power to make a disturbance—they belong to the propertied, the pacific, the educated classes; therefore, they must not have a vote. But does not this apply to classes of men just as well as to women? Might we not on this ground eliminate clergymen, old men, and sickly men? We can make a class of them at once for purposes of disqualification. Clergymen, especially, might be supposed likely to vote as a class, and not in accordance with working men, and are not likely to support their opinion by violence; yet we do not fear Constitutional ruin from their vote. Nor surely are our working classes such wild animals as to trample down law and society whenever they do not get their way, and crush the women to begin with, as the *Times* kindly assures us they will. Before this happens, England will be no longer England, and whether men or women have a vote, will then be little matter.

The *Times*' article is too long and declamatory, and, I must say, too little to the direct purpose to quote; briefly, its assumption is that we always are, or are going to be, in a violent state of conflict, of either external war, "blood and iron," or of internal fury, stormy meetings, and the like, when a rough vote, not a gentle one, is wanted, and women must be put aside altogether as having nothing to do with the matter. This, of course, is an argument concocted to suit merely the present moment, and could not have even the semblance of force at any other. Such a state of things (if it ever exists) must, one would think, be quite exceptional in our age, in our country, under our system of government, amidst our well-organised community. The very principle of the Constitution is to give all interests free play. We were once told (as I have shown) by the *Times* itself that property must be represented; now we are told that the vote should be not for property, but for bodily force. We had hoped that in our present stage of civilisation brain as well as force would have its influence, that old men, feeble students, men of peace, might give their votes safely, and yield their best help to their country councils. But no! it is absurd to take into account anything but passion and violence and brute force. This, then, is the age of "Sturm und Drang" with a vengeance!

The *Times* further says, "Here are men wrestling in rude arenas, in stormy passion, in daily and nightly excitement, and women in domestic calm, quietly and theoretically revolving the questions which are arousing the deepest passions and interests of men." And it asks, "Are both

these classes to have votes alike?" and adds, "We submit that such a division of labour is preposterously unfair." Might we not paint the picture a little otherwise, as thus—"Here are men rioting, raving, and roaring in public-houses and the like, in strong irrational excitement; and here are women feeling, thinking, and suffering at home on matters which are of equally deep and vital interest to them; and is it a fair division of labour that they should have no part in the question but to suffer, while the roarers and ravers are to decide? It seems to me that if women can think and feel earnestly on these subjects without going into a passion or a public-house, they have, so far, a better claim to be heard.

We know, indeed, very well that the noisy brawlers do not represent the real governing forces, least of all on occasions of critical importance. But the *Times* has, it appears, a particular objection, on occasions like the present, to what it calls, "gentle philosophical votes." It is new to hear women's political characteristics thus described, we have generally heard complaints of their preferring sentiment to reason, and of the danger of "hysterical" politics; but it seems we are to be hit hard on every side. Parties, it appears, are now furiously divided, some savagely disposed for war and bloodshed, others as fiercely bent on neutrality, for it is assumed that no men are, or ought to be, calm on this subject. Why we are to be especially given up to physical force on an occasion like this, which as the *Times* justly observes, is "a matter for statesmen, not armies to decide," I really do not know. We read of Queen Elizabeth who, like a statesman as she was, kept the balance between peace and war in far more perilous times.

But I am not the least disposed to admit that we are, or are going to be, in such a state of violent agitation and of discord between men and women, from expectation of a war which will drive all our peaceful civilians into the field, and turn the whole body of women into nuisances to be carted away. I see nothing in this, any more than in our normal state, that will make the vote of an orderly taxpaying law-obeying part of the community other than useful and proper.

The last point that I have to mention on the whole subject might as fitly have come elsewhere; it may be urged by others (as it is) as an objection to our claim, it may be urged by us as a social grievance. We are, it is said, not educated enough for the franchise. But what is the standard for a man? Not to be able to write his name, or even to read it when written, but to understand the mark made for it. That is all the education required for a male elector. Compared with this, the female standard will be that of high cultivation.

No doubt women might be better educated (as well as men) but if in truth we are less fit than the humblest artisan, whose doing is it but that of the political and social legislation which has fixed our status for us, just as formerly the want of education of the lower orders, as they were termed, was the work of those higher orders who had undertaken to manage everything for them? The importance of education and of providing the means for it, whether for general culture or special training, has been recognised by public opinion for men, but not for women, otherwise than of the most imperfect and superficial kind. But women are not content with this, and are trying their best to improve it. They are struggling with immense difficulties—difficulties from that trades' unionism which shuts them out from established general institutions, from the means of special training, from the use of endowments lavishly applied for the other sex, difficulties from the indifference of the State, and still more from the indifference of the public. Yet, unhelped, at least* at first, save by the private exertions of some good and wise men, women have struggled on, showing alike in those who are working for others and those who are working to educate themselves, some of the most valuable qualities that could be applied to its own work by the State, such as will at least surely enable them to understand what they are doing when giving a vote.

I think the history of the long-continued, earnest, piteous struggles of women for an education which, for many, means absolutely bread to eat, which for all means usefulness, refinement, elevation, happiness, will justify me in saying that not till women are of some political value will their education be regarded as a matter of national importance.

The arguments that I have now dealt with singly, may, I think, be summed up together as the expression of a not unnatural, though unreasoning prejudice, shaped either into a robust denial of facts, or a contradiction to that common sense which is applied readily enough to other subjects, or a chain of purely speculative and fanciful hypotheses. But there is one argument that has been less touched on than any other, which yet is more worthy of reply as having a wider scope and being built on more rational promises. It may be said—Mr. Bright, indeed, has said it—that a nation has a right to choose how it shall be governed, whether by one man, or by few, or by many. But the nation *has* chosen,

* It is with pleasure that we notice the liberality of various public educational bodies in offering their advantages, as has recently been done, to women students.

long ago, and most decisively and permanently, that it shall be governed, not by one man, or by few, or even by many, but by itself—that is by *all*, as it understands the word *all*, which is, in fact, all who, as it is said, have a stake in the country; it remains then only to decide how that government by all shall be best organised. But the objectors, those who wish to regard all institutions as yet on their trial, will argue that the condition to be first sought in a system of government is the selection of the best powers in the nation for the purpose of governing, that the representative system has in its very nature a tendency to make such a discovery and selection difficult, and to expand beyond its nucleus of the fittest, and that the larger the non-selective admission of popular elements is made, the less effective is the governing power; and that the exclusion of women as a body is to be justified on this principle.

To which we answer first, that a still greater and more vital principle underlies all our ideas of government, and that is the liberty of the governed, which appears to be essentially connected with that expansion from which the exclusion of half the nation is a mere anomalous departure. Secondly, that if our system had been deliberately framed on such principles, that is, the selection for government of the best powers in the nation, which includes of course the rejection of the worst, and the exclusion of women decided on as part of the method for the purpose, there would at least be consistency in this view. But as in point of fact no such principle was ever recognised from the first formation of a representative system to the further modelling and extension of it; as the exclusion of women has been an undesigned and accidental feature of it, inconsistent with its real first principle, the representation of property; as not exclusion but expansion has been the law of its growth, in accordance with all other national conditions—this exclusion of *one* element together with the ever-increasing admission of others still less select, to which the quality of the government resulting from their choice must more or less correspond, does not tend to the improvement of the representation, but does tend to the depression and depreciation of the one class that is thus marked as inferior to all classes of men, and so far to the unsatisfactoriness of the legislative result, and to the injury of national freedom.

Granting the inherent imperfections of a representative form of government, it is certain that it is the only one that the nation will recognise, that the result of all progress has been to strengthen and expand it, and that if the tendency of such expansion towards a democracy is regarded as

dangerous, the exclusion of the only remaining element which would not be democratic is not more politic than it is just, any more than is the deliberate rejection of social and civil powers which undoubtedly exist, from the field where they would have their highest as well as most defined and best limited exercise.

To go back briefly on the whole subject. These terrors expressed as to women's being in any way mixed up with men's affairs and with public business, all start from a point of view which we are passing away from. In fact, the barriers that once enclosed women are falling spontaneously and inevitably on every side, and what they *can* do, they will and must be allowed to do. When the ground has been conquered in so many other directions, when women have proved themselves worthy comrades of men in intellectual work; when they have a thought, a will, often a voice in large movements, beneficent organisations, social reforms, it really seems to be a kind of old-fashioned pedantry to refuse them this one sign of equality with men before the law—this proof that they too have a part in all that makes a nation's greatness and prosperity.

And now to draw to a close. We have been told of women's indifference to politics, and especially to the possession of a vote. We hear of the "few women who desire it." I do not know that those who say so have taken any pains to ascertain whether they are few or many; I have already given some proofs that they are not a small number, and that they are growing. I believe that those who think* them few, and affirm that they find the "best women" against it, have inquired—if they have inquired at all—only amongst the strictly drawing-room class, the ladies at ease, with every comfort and enjoyment, and knowing perhaps but little, at any rate taking no account, of the classes who have none of their advantages. Without disputing their merits, I should say they are the women who have in general thought least upon the subject. I find indifference co-extensive with ignorance, and obstruction the result of indifference. I find that the two classes whose opinion ought to have most value on the subject are most in favour of it. These are, first the women of cultivated thought and practical usefulness, who have given their attention and their powers of work to women's needs, and to public and social questions as connected with them; secondly, the

* Here, indeed, I might quote Mr. Mill, who says: "If only one woman in twenty thousand used the suffrage, to be declared capable of it would be a boon to all women."

women who from their social position suffer most from that man-made law of which the object has been to enforce the rights of men at the expense of theirs. For this is not a "ladies'" question, it is a "woman's" question, and I and many others know how the working order of women feel their practical grievances, and how they would hail any change that promised to amend them. And I am sure that those who are now indifferent, because uninformed, on the subject, will feel with me when they realise what is wanted, and what help can be given.

How can we help them? There are legitimate womanly ways by which women who have no desire, perhaps no power, to do what men call "descending into the arena," can further this movement for the benefit of their sex. They can sign petitions—this is the constitutional method provided whereby individuals and classes can, without any kind of agitation, violence, or publicity, make the Legislature acquainted with their wishes. Again, they may use their social influence in a way no one thinks unfeminine—they may persuade; I do not by persuasion mean coaxing, but appealing with our hearts in our words to men's reason, and best feelings. Let us remember the wife of Croke, one of the judges on Hampden's famous trial for his refusal to pay ship money. He would have yielded to fear, and given judgment for the King, but she adjured him not to sacrifice his conscience for fear of injury to his family, saying that she was content to suffer any misery with him rather than that he should violate his integrity. What she was in those fiery times that tried the metal of all hearts, let us be whenever occasion may arise—that is, helpers of others in the path of devotion to duty.

I conjure then all those, men and women alike, who have not thought much on this subject before, to think of it earnestly now. I conjure those who are already working to work on without discouragement, confident of the result. Let us think of the great causes that have been won by sheer hard struggling year by year, begun by one or two high-hearted men, carried on by a determined band, secured at last by the voice and sanction of the nation; all won by the same process that we are now pursuing, steady peaceful, constitutional effort. The Abolition of the Slave Trade, perhaps the purest and noblest cause ever striven for, was a work in which women aided men; the passionate humanity which dictated their efforts was common to both. Again, the first Reform Bill was a people's success; this cause was fought for with more partisan violence from the strong class feeling which the struggle excited. But what was notable in it was that such an extension of the suffrage as the

creation of a £10 borough franchise, and a £50 rent county franchise was thought at the time so revolutionary as to endanger our ancient Constitution, yet it proved so insufficient as to be changed in thirty-five years for our present rate-paying, and £12 tenant's franchise. But the most perfect example of a legitimate and successful agitation for a political object was that of the Repeal of the Corn Laws, an act which gave bread to starving millions. All these great causes were triumphantly and gloriously won, and the secret of the success was the intense, glowing, inspiring zeal of those who believed in them. Let us have faith and fervour like them.

I believe the heart of the country is with us; but after walking among these safe, smooth social fields, we have to knock at the iron gates and pass through the thorny paths of the two Houses of Legislature; and there we may again be baffled for the time, nay most probably shall be. But till we have conquered we must not relax our efforts. I shall be content, as one of our supporters has said, "to die in harness," certain as I am—as certain as that the sun will rise to-morrow—that the progress of enlightenment, liberty and justice, will not long continue partial and one sided, that ignorance, frivolity, and unreasoning submission will cease to be the portion of one sex and the delight of the other, and that this subjection of half the race will, like other barbarisms, melt away into the darkness of the past.

ARABELLA SHORE.

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

WHY SHOULD WOMEN DEMAND THE FRANCHISE?

Because it is unjust that those women who are taxed equally with men should have no direct representation in the Parliament which decides how the public money should be raised and how it should be spent.

Because women, no less than men, must obey the laws.

Because some laws affect the interests of women specially.

Because women as a class must be the best judges of their own interests.

Because political experience shows that no large class of citizens is fully protected without a share in the making of the laws which affect them.

Copies of this leaflet may be had from the Secretary, Central and Western Society for Women's Suffrage, 39, Victoria Street, London, S.W., at 9d. per 100 post free.

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE ASSOCIATE SCHEME.

WITHIN the last few months a new scheme of work, which appears so far to promise well, has been inaugurated by the Central and East of England SOCIETY FOR WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE. The Central and West of England Society has therefore adopted it, and considers it may lead to considerable results in more than one direction. Some account of the scheme may therefore be of practical use and interest to friends of the cause.

As has already been stated elsewhere, at the Birmingham Conference of October, 1896, definite geographical areas were laid down for the work of the various Suffrage Societies. The Central and Western Society feels that it has now become necessary to perfect the organisation within their area, and particularly important to gain a foothold in every constituency. It is also desirable to keep in touch with the countless friends who from time to time have shown some active sympathy (such as signing petitions, distributing tickets for meetings, etc.), but who are constantly lost sight of from their not being subscribers.

Such undertakings would clearly throw an enormous additional burden of work on the office, which it could not effectually grapple with even were the Society's funds indefinitely increased; therefore some kind of local machinery has become necessary which will be simple and easily set in motion.

To this end the Committee propose to appoint a Local Hon. Secretary in each constituency, who should work directly in con

nection with the central office and be responsible for a complete record of all friends of the cause living in her constituency, and for the distribution of literature and information as to local work. To enable her to keep an exact and reliable list of supporters, all friends who are not already Members (*i.e.*, subscribers) are asked to become Associates, by signing their names and addresses in a book kept specially for the purpose by the Local Hon. Secretary.

The rules for associates are extremely simple. They are as follows:—

- I.—Any person who has attained the age of eighteen years, and who is in favour of any extension of the Parliamentary Franchise to Women, may become an Associate of the Central and Western Women's Suffrage Society.
- II.—No money contribution is required from any Associate, but Annual Subscriptions or Donations, being necessary for the carrying on of the work, may be sent to the Secretary of the Central and Western Society, 39, Victoria Street, S.W. Subscriptions of any amount constitute Membership. Members are entitled to receive the Annual Report of the Committee, and the Literature of the Society.
- III.—Any Associates changing their address should inform the LOCAL Honorary Secretary of the change. If they remove into a different Constituency, the Local Honorary Secretary will forward their name and address to the Local Honorary Secretary of the new Constituency.

The first step in working the scheme in a constituency is to secure the services of a Local Hon. Secretary; next, in order to quickly reach a large number of supporters, it is necessary to employ a paid worker to call upon all those who signed the great appeal to the House of Commons, of 1896, to explain the Associate Scheme and to invite them to enrol themselves. When a considerable number of Associates and Members have given in their names it is found desirable to invite them to a drawing-room meeting in the Constituency, where they can have an opportunity of hearing

details of the present position, and immediate prospects of the movement. By these means Associates will be informed of any plans in which they might give assistance, such as work during elections, collecting signatures to petitions, audiences for meetings, etc., and sympathisers will thus feel themselves more in touch with the progress of the work than has hitherto been possible.

It will be seen that this Associate Scheme is of such a nature that it can be set to work in any and every Constituency where Local Hon. Secretaries are to be found. It provides a means by which, in process of time, every sympathiser in the country might be included in the national organisation as an Associate, while it opens opportunity to those able to give active work to render valuable service in the enrolment of Associates.

The area of work of the Central and Western Society consists of the following Metropolitan Constituencies:—

Camberwell	{ North Peckham Dulwich	Paddington	{ North South
Deptford		St. George's, Hanover Square	
Greenwich		St. Pancras	{ North East West South
Hackney	{ North Central South	Tower Hamlets	{ Whitechapel St. George's Limehouse Mile End Stepney
Islington	{ North West East South	Westminster	
Lewisham		Woolwich	
London City			

and the Constituencies in the following Counties:—

Berkshire	Shropshire
Derbyshire	Staffordshire (N. W., Leek, and Burton Divs.)
Dorsetshire	Warwickshire (Rugby Div.)
Hampshire	Wiltshire
Oxfordshire	

and all the Constituencies in North and South Wales.

All who are able to suggest the names of possible Local Hon. Secretaries, or give other help in starting work in Constituencies not yet organised, are earnestly invited to communicate with MRS. ✓ CHARLES BAXTER, Secretary of the Central and Western Society, 39, Victoria Street, S.W.

It is to the wishes of their constituents that M.P.'s look; the Associate Scheme will give ample opportunity to all who would work in the cause of Women's Suffrage, for it has the merit of being practicable in every locality, large or small, central or remote. The scheme should therefore commend itself to the careful attention of all who would strengthen the movement at its roots.

National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies

Executive Committee

Mrs. ASHFORD	Mrs. GRAY HEALD	Miss MELLOR
Mrs. Lady FRANCES BALFOUR	Mrs. FAWCETT	Mrs. PRISCILLA BRIGHT McLAREN
Mrs. BEDDOE	Mrs. ARTHUR FRANCIS	Mrs. WYNFORD PHILIPPS
Miss BIGG	Miss EVA GORE BOOTH	Miss RATHBONE
Miss HELEN BLACKBURN	Miss S. E. HALL	Miss ROPER
Mrs. BROADLEY REID	Mrs. ASHWORTH HALLETT	Miss LOUISA STEVENSON
Mrs. RUSSELL COOKE	Hon. Mrs. ARTHUR LYTTTELTON	Mrs. TAYLOR
Mrs. ENFIELD DOWSON	Miss MAIR	Miss TILLOTSON
Mrs. WILLIAM EVANS	Miss J. McLEA	Miss WIGHAM

Secretaries: { Mrs. L. BAXTER, 39, Victoria Street, Westminster.
Miss EDITH PALLISER, 10, Great College Street, Westminster.
Miss ESTHER ROPER.

Parliamentary Advisers

Mr. L. ATHERLEY JONES, M.P.	Mr. W. JOHNSTON, M.P.
Rt. Hon. LEONARD COURTNEY, M.P.	Mr. J. H. JOHNSTONE, M.P.
Colonel COTTON JODRELL, M.P.	Professor R. C. JEBB, M.P.
Mr. F. FAITHFULL-BEGG, M.P.	Mr. CHARLES McLAREN, M.P.
Mr. J. T. FIRBANK, M.P.	Mr. T. W. RUSSELL, M.P.
Sir EDWARD GREY, Bart., M.P.	Mr. WILLIAM WOODALL, M.P.
Mr. LEWIS FRY, M.P.	Mr. G. WYNDHAM, M.P.

National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies

Birkenhead and Wirral Women's Suffrage Society
Birmingham Women's Suffrage Society
Bristol and West of England Society for Women's Suffrage
Cambridge Women's Suffrage Society
Central and East of England Society for Women's Suffrage (10, Great College Street, Westminster.
Central and Western Society for Women's Suffrage (39, Victoria Street, S.W.
Cheltenham Women's Suffrage Society
Edinburgh National Society for Women's Suffrage
Halifax Women's Suffrage Society
Leeds Women's Suffrage Society
Leicester Women's Suffrage Society
Liverpool Women's Suffrage Society
Luton Women's Franchise Association
North of England Society for Women's Suffrage (Manchester)
Nottinghamshire Women's Suffrage Society
Sligo Women's Suffrage Society
Southport and District Women's Suffrage Society

RULES

- I.—That the title shall be the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies.
- II.—That the objects of the Union shall be to obtain the Parliamentary Franchise for Women, on the same terms as it is, or may be granted to men, and to promote joint action in Parliament and in the country.
- III.—That those Societies only shall be eligible to join the Union which have Women's Suffrage for their sole object, and are formed on a non-party basis.
- IV.—That the Executive Committee shall consist of representatives of each Society forming the Union.
- V.—That a General Meeting of the Union shall be held annually. The time and place of meeting to be fixed each year by the Executive Committee.
- VI.—That any funds given specially for the purposes of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies shall be dealt with by the Executive Committee of the Union.
- VII.—That no alteration shall be made in the Rules except at a meeting of the Executive Committee of which at least twenty-one days' notice specifying the proposed alteration shall have been given to the Committees forming the Union.

NATIONAL UNION OF WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE SOCIETIES.
CENTRAL AND WESTERN SOCIETY.

To obtain the Parliamentary Franchise for Women on the same terms
as it is or may be granted to Men.

Offices:—39, VICTORIA STREET, WESTMINSTER, S.W.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

Mrs. BATESON
Mrs. BEVAN
Miss BRISTOWE
Miss JULIA CAMERON
Sir CHARLES CAMERON, LL.D. M.P.
Mrs. CONYBEARE-CRAVEN
Mrs. RUSSELL COOKE
The Rt. Hon. LEONARD COURTNEY, M.P.
Miss SHARMAN CRAWFORD
Mrs. RHYS DAVIDS
Hon. Lady GREY EGERTON
Mrs. EVANS (Leicester Committee)
Sir R. U. PENROSE FITZGERALD, M.P.
Miss ISABELLA FORD
Mrs. E. O. FORDHAM
Lady GROVE
Mrs. HAWES
The Rt. Hon. A. STAVELEY HILL, M.P.
Mrs. JOHN HULLAH
Mrs. LEEDS
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Mrs. DUNCAN McLAREN (Edinburgh
Committee)
Mrs. CHARLES McLAREN
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W. S. B. McLAREN, Esq.
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Miss GERTRUDE STEWART
Mrs. T. TAYLOR
Mrs. D. A. THOMAS
W. WOODALL, Esq., M.P.
G. WYNDHAM, Esq., M.P.

The above Society is anxious to organise all friends of
Women's Suffrage in the Constituency of _____

The Committee have appointed a Local Hon. Secretary
and hope that every man and woman over 18 years of age
who approves of any extension of the Parliamentary Fran-
chise to Women will allow his or her name to be included
in the list of Associates in _____

Subscriptions or other active help are optional, but
money and work are greatly needed and would be much
valued.

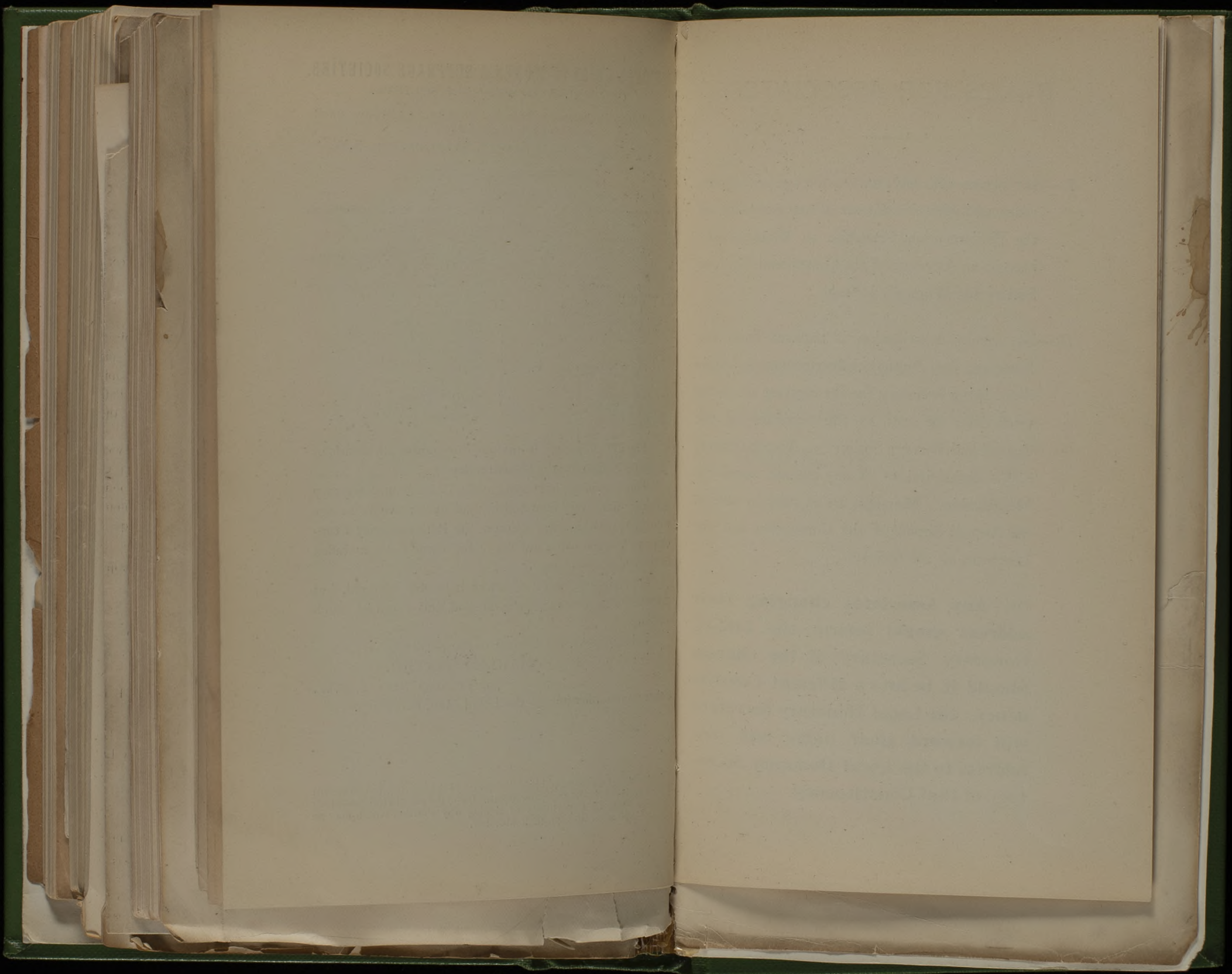
Subscriptions may be sent to the Secretary—

MRS. CHARLES BAXTER,

39, VICTORIA STREET, S.W.

Other communications to the Local Hon. Secretary.

It is not proposed to publish the names of Associates, but they will
receive tickets for local and other meetings, and the Local Hon. Secretary
will give them an opportunity of signing any Petition which may be
sent to Parliament through their Member.



RULES FOR ASSOCIATES.

I.—Any person who has attained the age of eighteen years, and who is in favour of any extension of the Parliamentary Franchise to Women, may become an Associate of the Central and Western Society for Women's Suffrage.

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III.—Any Associates changing their address should inform the LOCAL Honorary Secretary of the change. Should it be into a different Constituency, the Local Honorary Secretary will forward their name and new address to the Local Honorary Secretary of that Constituency.

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE IN THE
LIGHT OF THE SECOND
READING OF 1897

“ONE lesson, Nature, let me learn of thee,
One lesson which in every wind is blown,
One lesson of two duties kept at one,
Though the loud world proclaim their enmity—
Of toil unsever'd from tranquillity!
Of labour, that in lasting fruit outgrows
Far noisier schemes, accomplished in repose,
Too great for haste, too high for rivalry!”

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

ary of that Constituency.

Women's Suffrage

IN THE LIGHT OF THE SECOND READING OF 1897.

One day in the second Session of the twenty-sixth Parliament of the United Kingdom, being the year of the celebration of the longest reign, the House of Commons passed a vote in favour of removing the bar which has been gradually silted up against any woman recording her vote at the Parliamentary polling booth.

What is the value of that vote? It is as easy for the opponents of the enfranchisement of women to belittle the significance of the incident, as for the advocates of the measure to make too much of it, and if not easy for those who take sides to judge, neither is it easy for those who “sit on the fence.” However, whatever be the relative importance or unimportance attached to that vote of February 3rd, 1897, this much is certain, that it is not an isolated fact but one of a series of facts which reveal an unmistakable movement amongst the women of all English-speaking countries contemporaneous, broadly speaking, with the Victorian Era.

Suppose that, instead of considering this movement through the brief vista of two generations

of individual men and women, we were to regard it from the distant standpoint of two generations as reckoned by the growth of races, we might find that what at first sight appeared to be a symptom of modern growth, is in truth due to the same characteristic which made the Anglo-Saxon child of the Teutonic family the most self-contained and independent portion of the great Indo-Germanic race. Though the effort to carry a Women's Suffrage Bill through Parliament dates from a decision of the Court of Common Pleas in 1868,* that decision was only one effect in the long train of cause and effect by which the rights and privileges of earlier times were absorbed by legal procedure. When feudalism yielded before statute law, jurists moulded on the Roman system naturally found it much more convenient to ignore women; thus the rights of mothers in the guardianship of their children were quietly forgotten†; thus the right of the wife to be reckoned of kin to her husband was treated as non-extant‡; thus daughters were set aside by the encroaching practice of entail male.

This elimination of the "Spindle Side" in all matters of family law, aided and abetted by the

* At the General Election which took place in 1868, upwards of five thousand women applied in Manchester and in many other places, to be placed on the Parliamentary Register. A test case was brought before the Court of Common Pleas, which decided against their claim, November 9th, 1868.

† 12, Charles II., C. 24, §8, 9.

‡ 22-23., Charles II., C. 30.

diversion of their educational endowments consequent on the destruction of the Convents, was accompanied by a correlated tendency to discourage all public interests on the part of women which was very marked throughout the seventeenth century.*

The education of women was never lower than at the beginning of the nineteenth century, yet in many respects women had never before stood in such need of exact knowledge, for science was gradually inaugurating that new era in industrial life which has brought about the transference of money-producing occupations from the home to the factory, a process still going on before our eyes, when creameries and steam-laundries are sweeping the washer-woman and the dairymaid from their wonted place, regardless whether they find a less favoured place or no place at all, at the bidding of the whirring engines.

These concurrent influences, acting and reacting, have wrought many subtle changes in the condition of women's lives—mingled, as all changes are, of good and evil. Nevertheless, all that is best in our modern industrial system, in our representative government, and in our educational schemes, partakes of the primal characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon race.

The common cause of all these causes of our advance as a nation has to be sought yet further

* For much historical evidence of this discouragement, see *British Freewomen* by Mrs. Stopes (Swan Sonnenschein's Social Science Series) especially the chapter "The Long Ebb."

back, in the distant times when the Indo-Germanic race was still in the cradle of its existence, when as yet the world knew neither Greek nor Roman, nor Indian nor Teuton. Its life was then that of a sturdy pastoral people, with the free movement and mutual interdependence which a pastoral existence entails, gathering all, old and young, men and women, boys and girls round a common centre of occupation in its flocks and herds, with the daily herding, feeding, tending, milking, which provided work for all.

Of all Indo-Germanic peoples the Anglo-Saxon longest retained its primitive mode of existence; this interdependent polity was thus ingrained deepest into its nature. Long after the Greek woman had lost her pristine freedom and companionship with men, long after the Roman woman had passed beneath the rigid *Patria Potestas* of the Twelve Tables, the Anglo-Saxon retained the idea of companionship of men and women that comes of a sense of mutual helpfulness. It was no accident that the foundations of the most complete legal system the world has seen were laid in the wall-begirt city of a war-compacted population; or that Constitutional Government had its origin in a race who dwelt in separate homesteads each in its own garth or yard, which made the open parish not the walled city, the nurse of its public institutions, and which made mutual family responsibility, not paternal authority, the foundation of its jurisprudence. The Anglo-Saxon spirit survived in the maxim that man and wife are one, but was quenched

by the Roman influence that narrowed that one to the husband. The Anglo-Saxon spirit lived on in the principle that every one of independent judgment should share the franchise, but was quenched by the Roman influence that denied any independence to women.

Our natural affections rejoice in the fact that the mother's nurture influences the characters of her children all their lives, and we point with pride to the great mothers of great sons. But the father's authority largely controls the intellectual development of children in later years and counts for much in encouraging or discouraging the budding ambitions of youth. Those of sons are rarely thwarted, those of daughters were but a short time since as rarely encouraged, nay often positively discouraged and quenched, but it is a fact attested to by the biographies of most women who have made their own mark in the world that they had the encouragement of their fathers in their youth. So influences intermingle, acting and reacting, mothers on sons, fathers on daughters, these on their sons again.

History repeats itself. In many lands and many phases the history has been repeated that races are most vigorous and homes most full of healthful energy where the component members share the sympathies and interests of life in common, not only in their domestic affections but in their intellectual pursuits, their cultured arts and their public spirit. Nevertheless, when the responsible heads of households, the keepers of homes, are

called on to unite in national chorus and elect representatives of the national will, then modern trespassers on ancient privilege cry halt! and arrest the vote of by no means the least responsible portion of the community, for no other reason than their womanhood.

What wonder that when women realised that their inherited ideal of mutual companionship had been thus rudely assailed, the most far-seeing among them determined to resist this denial of their independent responsibility.

What the loss of the ideal of mutual companionship between the two halves of the human race may ultimately involve, is only too clearly and sadly revealed to us in the secluded twilight lives of our Indian sisters, closed within Zenana walls, to the undoing of the moral and physical fibre of the people. Yet once the women of India were free, like the rest of their and our early ancestry.

To turn again to our own story here in Great Britain to-day:—When this reign began, of which the sixtieth year has just been completed amid universal thankfulness for the continuous steadfast grasp of a true and earnest woman's hand on the sceptre—when that reign began, women in the British Isles had practically no standing as citizens: their old privileges as burgesses had been taken away by statute or buried by tradition,* so that they were nowhere as citizens, they were nowhere as regards education, their old endowments had passed

* Cf. *British Freewomen* as above.

almost entirely to boys and men,* their highest standard of attainment was "to do nothing, gracefully." No organised work, no associated effort of any kind, was to be found amongst women; their public usefulness was shrunk to the narrowest limits.

Yet though nowhere politically or educationally, and we might almost say nowhere financially—so circumscribed was their power of disposing of their own property, so limited their opportunities of earning money—yet they were still socially on their own ground. Here the Roman matron preserved her dignity and here the English woman has lost none of hers, therefore the reminiscences of women sixty and seventy years ago show that they by their firesides, in their drawing-rooms and their work-rooms, shared the enthusiasm of fathers and brothers over the great questions which stirred the public conscience. Women whose sympathies had been roused by the grave issues of Slavery, Reform, Corn-laws, came inevitably to feel that "the reasons alleged for withholding the franchise from certain classes of persons"† to use the words of the first women householders' petition, "did not apply to

* "The proportion of endowments for education which had fallen to the share of girls was something under £3,000 a year as against £277,000 given to the boys" (Miss Shirreff at Social Science Congress, Brighton, 1875).

† "The true reason of any qualification at all with regard to property in voters is to exclude such persons as are in so mean a situation that they are esteemed to have no will of their own." Blackstone's *Commentaries*.

the petitioners."* The growth of feeling on this subject may be seen by the following passage from a circular that lies before the present writer, convening a meeting, to be held at the house of Mr. Commissioner (afterwards Recorder) Mathew Davenport Hill, at Clifton, on January 24th, 1868, in order to form a society in Bristol to assist the Women's Suffrage movement. "The conviction has for years past spread wide and deep that any race or class which is without political representation will never in the long run escape great social injustice. The injustices endured by women as a class need not here be counted and enforced. Men and women of the highest name† have of late united to claim Suffrage for the female sex (on the same terms on which men receive the franchise) not as the remedy for the evil, but as a condition without which justice will not be attained."

One of those who that day joined the Society and has worked for its cause to the present hour, has

* The petition here referred to was presented by the Right Hon. Russell Gurney, M.P., on April 5th, 1867, and was signed by 1,606 women duly qualified in all respects, except sex, to vote, and must not be confused with the memorable petition from 1,499 women presented by Mr. J. S. Mill in 1866.

† A petition with 3,559 signatures of persons of all classes, presented on March 28th, 1867, by the Right Hon. H. A. Bruce, M.P., included—to name a few of the signatories who have since passed away—the Dean (Alford) of Canterbury; Prof. Cairns; Edwin Chadwick, C.B.; W. K. Clifford; George Grote and Mrs. Grote; Thomas Hare; M. Davenport Hill, Q.C.; Sir Roland Hill; W. B. Hodgson, LL.D.; Mary Howitt; Rev. Charles Kingsley; B. W. Richardson, M.D.; Humphry Sandwith, C.B., etc. etc.

often related to this writer how Mr. Commissioner Hill, in asking them to join, said: "he was asking them to help a great Cause that was unlike all other great causes in that it would require their support for a very short time. The claim was so clear and reasonable it had but to be brought before Parliament to be granted."

That was in 1868, and now we are in 1898; but the hopes that budded so vigorously in the hearts of the early workers have taken firm root in the hearts of a generation of workers that has sprung up since. Last year the House of Commons, by the vote of February 3rd, admitted the righteousness of the claim more distinctly than on any former occasion.* Our legislators, it is true, last year hesitated to ratify this vote by any immediate encouragement—nay rather the further stages of the measure were thwarted in a manner to somewhat negative the favourable promise of the beginning. Some members were probably influenced by the

* In 1870, the first year that any Bill for the Enfranchisement of Women was brought forward, the second reading was carried by a majority of 33; but this was because the opponents were not on the alert. They mustered strongly and threw it out in Committee a few days later by a majority of 126.

In 1886 again a second reading was passed; the division was, however, not on the Bill itself, but on whether it should or should not be that day discussed. The division, with its majority of 57, was taken as equivalent to a vote for the Bill.

But on the present occasion it was a direct vote on the Bill itself, and no delusion on the part of the opponents, for they were much on the alert, and sent round a whip against the Bill, signed by twelve members taken equally from both sides of the House; yet it passed by a majority of 71.

thought that the time was now come for Government to take the lead, and act on the vote of February 3rd, by making themselves responsible for the measure, as previous Governments have done for previous measures of Electoral Reform. Some perhaps even indulged a secret hope that further procrastination might lead to the evaporation of a measure which they were compelled to approve so far as force of logic went, but which they were impelled to dislike as far as sentiment was concerned.

Suppose further procrastination did lead to evaporation? Suppose that the Women's Suffrage Societies were to take up the pleasing illusion that this second reading showed their work was done and that now Government would be so sure to carry on their suit for them, that they might give up their offices and dissolve their Committees? Suppose no more petitions, no more meetings, discussions, conferences, no more correspondence in the Press, or memorials to M.P.'s, or heckling of candidates—what would be the result of such confiding patience?

Past experience gives considerable means of forming a judgment as to the result, even if we confine ourselves to the experience of last year, 1897. In that year we have learned that even the fact that over 800 women hold the certificates of Cambridge University, as testimony of intellectual capacity, is insufficient to induce the authorities to acknowledge their capacity in the only manner which is fully convincing to the world at large. Many a woman-student then sadly learned to know—in the

words of Miss Wilkin's New England Farmer's wife—
 "You ain't found out yet we're women-folks, Nancy Penn, you ain't seen enough of men-folks yet to. One of these days you'll find it out, and then you'll know that we know only what men-folks think we do so far as any use of it goes, an' how we'd ought to reckon men-folks in with Providence, and not complain of what they do any more than we do of the weather."

Again, it was shown in that same year, and again in 1898, that although women have undeniably had a large share in the initiation and development of numerous organisations which now form an important part of the parochial work of every Church in the country, this was entirely over-looked by the Convocation of the Church of England when it seriously planned to form Parish Church Councils to assist the incumbent in the "initiation and development of Church work," from which all initiators and developers who happened to be women would be excluded from election.

There is a curious inconsistency in the whole matter, for while only *male* communicants are proposed as elected Councillors, Churchwardens are to be *ex-officio* Councillors. Consequently, though no women are to be elected (according to the report approved by Convocation) women will not unfrequently be *ex-officio* Councillors! It must be well borne in mind that women owe their eligibility as Churchwardens to old practice. Convocation in discarding their assistance prefers modern innovation to the custom of centuries, *viz.*, the innovation

introduced by the Public Worship Regulation Act of 1874, which took example by the Representation of the People Act of 1832 and defined a parishioner, for the purposes of that Act, as "a male person of full age."

Such actions amongst the leaders of thought and cultivation are indeed proof positive of the ease with which the wheels would run backwards if women relaxed their vigilant efforts to obtain "this condition, without which justice will not be attained"—or if seemingly attained for a time, can have no guarantee of continuance.

In saying this we by no means forget that the municipal vote, taken away in 1835, was restored in 1869; nor that the administrative bodies created in recent times—the School Board, County, District and Parish Councils—are all elected by the votes of women as well as of men, so that 729,758 women are now on the Local Government registers of England and Wales (forming 15 per cent. of the electorate); also that women can serve on School Boards and on the Parish Councils and District Councils which have taken over the work of the Poor Law Boards. Neither do we forget that some 900 women are at this time serving on Poor Law Boards, nor that women were made eligible for such service in Ireland in the session of 1896 and are placed on the same footing as women in England in the Irish Local Government Bill of this Session. But while we thankfully remember these things and rejoice that women can put some of their best energies to the service of the house-keeping department of th

ary of that constituency.

State we must also remember that without persistent, strenuous, earnest effort on their own parts, these things would not have been. This is not the place to enter into the history of all the steps by which they have been brought about—enough for this present paper to point out how easily all that has been gained might be lost.

An illustration of this occurred last year, when the City of London Bill was introduced to incorporate the Borough of Southwark with the City of London. If that Bill had been passed it would have deprived the women householders of Southwark of the votes conferred on them by the Local Government Act of 1894. This not by any intention *prepcense* but simply from over-looking the accidental circumstance that the City of London, unlike all other corporate boroughs, has no women on its municipal register. But indeed as the law now stands no new municipal Borough can be incorporated without some loss of rights to women, for although they are eligible for Parish and District Councils, they are not eligible for Town Councils; thus in the transfer from District to Town Council they would lose their present eligibility and not gain the new one. When powers held by the clear and unquestioned tenure of a recent statute are thus insecure, it is evident that many liberties may be quietly—unconsciously perhaps, but effectively—over-ridden by fresh legislation, and there can be no security in the future any more than in the past, where the guarantee of representation is lacking. What though the vote of some 800,000 women be in itself a small thing

and the vote of each solitary individual amongst them be as next to nothing, still it is "the power of the next to nothing" that Science shows as the greatest power of all. "The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small." Races who have winnowed the mother element from their grist have found the mills to grind forth chaos and collapse, so that the land where the collapse has been most signal is the land where to the social and intellectual repression of women has been added their physical repression also.* History warns us in innumerable times and places that if we relax effort to ensure a fair proportion of the mother element in the aggregate of national responsibility, we shall pass on our heritage of freedom in a state of diminishing vitality.

But British women have no thought of relaxing effort. There is a great difference between wishing and intending, as Miss Becker wrote long years ago. Many friendly Members of Parliament may be content with wishing, but there are a few who really intend that this claim to the vote for women shall succeed, and the women themselves who intend it, increase continually in numbers and in influ-

* A striking letter from a resident in China, in the *Spectator* of March 11th, 1898, corroborates this. After telling of the uprising against the practice of foot-binding which has recently begun amongst Chinese women, the writer says: "It, (foot-binding,) has meant the giving up for the nation of all work done by women, the stunting of their intellects, and the stranding of the men in a quagmire of filth and ugliness. For in a country where no women can stand, naturally no house-cleaning is done by women."

ence. What though there be still many whose horizon is completely filled by their duties to their families, or perhaps in some cases by frivolities, they "match the men" who are immersed to the eyes in business—or perhaps in sport. Because some do not apprehend their proper obligations as citizens is no reason why others who do apprehend them abundantly should be compelled to miss their fulfilment.

The measure in question is not a revolution as of the whirling fly-wheel, but a revolution as of the deliberately moving cog-wheels, grinding slowly with incessant motion. History repeats itself, ay, then let it be that the East repeat the happier record of the West, rather than the West tend back to the decaying record of the East. If Anglo-Saxon women keep true to the spirit of their ancestors, their sons cannot long fail to respond, mindful that all dwell in a common country with common human needs here below as well as a common heaven above, with its common hope.

APPENDIX.

The Parliamentary Franchise (Extension to Women) Bill runs as follows :—

On and after the *passing of this Act* every woman who is the inhabitant occupier as owner or tenant of any dwelling-house, tenement, or building within the borough or county where such occupation exists, shall be entitled to be registered as a voter in the list of voters for such borough or county in which she is so qualified as aforesaid, and, when registered, to vote for a member or members to serve in Parliament.

Provided always that such woman is not subject to any legal incapacity which would disqualify a male voter.

Its effect would be practically to place on the Parliamentary register those women who are on the registers for Local Government elections. These number 800,000 in England and Wales; Scotland and Ireland would add about 200,000 more; the whole being equivalent to one woman to every six men electors, taking the average of the whole country.

The second reading of this Bill was the signal for the drawing together of the Women's Suffrage Societies into a closer organisation than hitherto.

The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies includes the Central and East of England, the Central and Western, the North of England and the West of England Societies, and the various local committees connected with these; also the Edinburgh National Society.* The policy of the Union as declared in the statement issued last autumn is to place Women's Suffrage in such a position "that

* The Societies in Ireland unite work for Women Poor Law Guardians with Suffrage work and act in co-operation with the Union.

no government of whatever party shall be able to touch questions relating to representation without at the same time removing the electoral disabilities of women."

The Executive Committee of the Union consists of representatives from the various Societies in the Union.

The following Members of Parliament are Parliamentary Advisers to the Union :—

The Rt. Hon. Leonard Courtney
Colonel Cotton-Jodrell
Mr. F. Faithfull-Begg
Mr. J. T. Firbank
Sir Edward Grey, Bart.
Mr. Lewis Fry
Mr. L. Atherley Jones
Mr. W. Johnston
Mr. J. H. Johnstone
Professor R. C. Jebb
Mr. Charles McLaren
Sir Wilfred Lawson, Bart.
Mr. T. W. Russell
Mr. William Woodall
Mr. George Wyndham

Those who desire to help the movement can obtain all information from Miss Edith Palliser (*Sec. Central and East of England Society*), 20, Great College Street, Westminster; and Mrs. Charles Baxter (*Sec. Central and Western Society*), 39, Victoria Street, S.W., Secretaries to the Union.

London:
WOMEN'S PRINTING SOCIETY, LIMITED
66, WHITCOMB STREET, W.C.

