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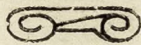
MILESTONES

Presidential Addresses at the Annual Council
Meetings of the National Union of Societies
for Equal Citizenship

BY

ELEANOR F. RATHBONE

1920--1929



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FOREWORD.

Some people (I am one of them) like looking through collections of photographs, showing the members of a family group at various ages and stages of development. It is for those members of the N.U.S.E.C. family who share this taste that this collection of reprinted addresses is intended, in the hope that it may serve to recall the events, hopes, fears, failures and achievements of a momentous ten years—too recent yet to count as history, but full of grounds for gratitude as to the past and of lessons and suggestions for the future.

ELEANOR F. RATHBONE.

EQUAL CITIZENSHIP.

March 9th, 1920.

Speaking to you for the first time as President, I cannot help feeling myself a kind of usurper. You have done me a great honour in electing me as successor to Mrs. Henry Fawcett, and I am very grateful to you for it. But don't imagine that I do not realise that in a sense Mrs. Fawcett can have no successor. She stands by herself, and no one else can be to the National Union what she had been, at least while the generation that has known her and served under her remains. The woman's movement is too great to have any one leader. In its kingdom there are many mansions, and each has made its characteristic contribution towards the common cause. But the character of a household is determined by its head, and the special contribution of the National Union under the inspiration of Mrs. Fawcett may be summed up—if I estimate it rightly—in four qualities that are among the most essential to statesmanship—foresight, faith, tenacity, and sagacity. Long before the movement had become popular, or even formidable enough to be unpopular, Mrs. Fawcett saw its possibilities and set herself to the slow task of development. It requires courage to brave misrepresentation, odium, and imprisonment, but it requires an equal and perhaps a rarer courage to plant seeds that will require a generation to grow to maturity, and to spend a lifetime in fostering them. It requires again something better than courage to resist all temptation to quicken the pace by succumbing to the dangerous doctrine that the end justifies the means, and to hold fast to the Kantian maxim of statesmanship: "Act so that the maxim of thy action might become law universal."

Looking backward now, I think we can all see that the lean years of the movement were not wasted. They taught us many lessons in practical politics—to know each other, to work loyally together, to take defeats and rebuffs without rancour. Better still they built up a sense of solidarity among women of all classes

which will never, if we handle our opportunities rightly, be broken down, and that serves as a much-needed corrective to the threatened over-development of class solidarity leading to class welfare. There were some among us—happy innocents—who thought that when the vote was won (though only for some women) the need for sex solidarity was over and we might venture to behave as if we had already reached the place where “there are neither male nor female; neither bond nor free.” Surely these dreamers must have had a rude awakening when they realised that one of the first-fruits of the first Parliament elected partly by women voters had been the placing on the Statute Book of an Act which, without once mentioning the word “woman” or “female,” has the effect of legally excluding women, for the first time in British history, from nearly every department of skilled industry except a few trades traditionally their own. The Pre-War Practices Act was passed in fulfilment of a pledge given in war-time under very exceptional circumstances, and women in consequence made no resistance to it. But that such a pledge should have been asked for and its literal fulfilment exacted four years later in spite of the intervening experience of the industrial capacities of women, is only one of many accumulating proofs that when any groups of men, whether grouped together as a political party, a profession, or a trade, accept the formula, “equality of opportunity between men and women,” they do so with the mental reservation—“except when it may be inconvenient to ourselves or those we want to please.” Fortunately for us, there are in every such group, of whatever party, high-minded men whose sense of justice and belief in fair play is stronger than their sectional prejudices, and their presence in our movement, enormously valuable for the practical help they give, is still more valuable because they are a living testimony to the fact that the movement is not based on sex-antagonism, but, on the contrary, seeks to remove the remaining barriers to a real comradeship.

A Scotch gillie once described an uneventful but abortive day on a trout river as “a day fu’ o’ great expectations.” For women the Session of 1919 has been chiefly “fu’ o’ great expectations,” but the basket is not quite empty. We landed

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women in politics.

one very fine fish when, by the passing of the Sex Disabilities Removals Bill, the legal profession in both its branches, the Magistrate’s Bench and the Jury-box were all opened to women, and the door to the Civil Service was set ajar, but with a door-keeper behind it to see that women do not enter in too large numbers, nor to the choicest places. Another instance of successful group exclusiveness! The present session of Parliament has begun with one of those notable second reading victories which experience has taught us to receive in a spirit of rather chastened hopefulness. More encouraging, however, more significant of the changed spirit of the times than even the acceptance without a division of the second reading of a Bill to enfranchise another five and a half million women voters, was the attitude of matter-of-fact and almost indifferent acquiescence adopted by the Press. It is evident that even two years’ experience has convinced the public that the woman’s vote is not going to spell either sex warfare or national disaster. To speak frankly, however, the very experiences that have reassured our former opponents are making some of us a little anxious and uneasy. We do not want the woman’s vote to be acceptable because it is possible to say of it that it has made no perceptible difference to politics, except to facilitate the removal of a few disabilities directly affecting women. We hoped and we hope still, better things from it than that. We want the contribution of women to national life to be a very distinctive contribution and to make a very great difference. But if it is to do that it must bubble freshly out of the mother earth of women’s own personalities and be impregnated with the salt of their own experience. It must not be a bottled vintage bought at the party wine-shop. That is why we value our non-party women’s organisations, where women can meet together to discuss both sides of contentious political questions, and to hammer out the truth for ourselves. That is distasteful of course to the party organisers of all sides. They would much rather keep their flocks of sheep in their own folds, safe from the contamination of goats and the danger, perhaps, of finding out that goats have their good points after all. A prominent Labour woman once explained to me that she did not want the minds of

her women members "confused" by being brought into contact with women of another class or party, and that she deprecated the contact particularly when the invaders were women of advanced and democratic ideas, because then the danger of confusion was greatest! One knows that there is even a school of thought that wants all the University teaching that comes to working men and women to come to them through distinctly Labour channels, so that the history and economics taught shall be of the right dogmatic brand; just as it was in the old Tory days of University tests. This cropping out in a fresh place of the old spirit of distrusting freedom and protecting truth seems to me simply deplorable.

A turn of the political wheel may any day bring us back to protection of commodities, but for heavens' sake let us stick to free trade in truth! By all means let every woman who feels an affinity with one of the existing political parties join that party and work in it loyally. But she will lose nothing and gain much, even as a party worker, if her opinions have stood the test of opposition and friction with other minds. We all know the difference between the canvasser who repeats parrot phrases and the one who really knows and feels, and if women aim at ever being better than party hacks, they must not let their minds be put in blinkers by any political leader.

There is one great topic of the day on which one might have expected a great and spontaneous uprush of united opinion among women; yet, so far, it has somehow failed to come, perhaps because we have not yet grown accustomed to expecting to be listened to, except about our own claims. Women are the natural custodians of childhood. That, at least, is part of the traditional role assigned to us by men, and one that we have never repudiated. Indeed, the facts of nature are such that it is not possible that we should ever repudiate it. It is, therefore, a strange irony that in the years when women have attained not only here, but over a great part of Europe to a full share of responsibility for public affairs, there is more wide-spread and intolerable suffering among children than the world has seen, perhaps for centuries. Women certainly are not

responsible for the harsh destiny that has made these children, by whose stripes the Allied nations have been healed, the scape-goats of their fathers' sins. But surely a special duty rests on us to insist that everything that can be done shall be done by the co-operation of statesmen, financiers, and philanthropists, not only to stop the famine but to change the conditions that produced it and to ensure, by a better ordering of the affairs of the nations, that those conditions shall never recur. It may be said that so far as that depends on the statesmen of our own nation, it is already being done. If so, then let those men who are guiding the wheel of the State feel behind them the strong driving power of a united women's opinion, so that they may be blown up the Hill of Difficulty as a cyclist is blown by a wind so strong that it is easier to go upwards than to go down. Lord Robert Cecil—one of the best friends the Woman's Movement has ever had—has warned us. Let us beware lest it be said of women in future years that they have thrown away the first and greatest opportunity that has been given to them to justify at once their womanhood and their citizenship.

THE USES OF UNPOPULARITY.

March 8th, 1921.

The National Union exists to attain certain clearly defined ends, and meeting together after a lapse of twelve months, it is natural that we should take stock and reckon up our gains. This year it is inevitable that the reckoning process should be rather a depressing one, for so far as legislation is concerned, the plain fact is that there have been no gains. As those who read the Parliamentary sections of our Annual Report will see, we have had a year of hard work, illuminated by a good many rays of hope, but the rays have always faded before they have brought fruition. During the early months of the Session, work was concentrated on the Labour Party's Representation of the People Bill, which would have given us the first point on our programme—Equal Suffrage. The great majorities by which the Bill passed its earlier stages led us to think that perhaps something would really come of it. But its later history merely served to remind us of the lesson which we learnt so thoroughly in the old Suffrage days, that private members' Bills are useless except as propaganda at the beginning of working for a reform. The private member proposes, but it is always the Government that disposes, and no reform of importance can be actually carried except through them. During the later months of the year we have been occupied partly in efforts at pricking up the Government to take action on the franchise, partly in propaganda for Bills dealing with other reforms on our programme not yet familiar to the House, viz., Equal Guardianship; the Rights of Married Women with regard to Maintenance; and the Position of the Unmarried Mother. We have also had to do a great deal of defensive work to prevent further restrictions on the right of women to work—restrictions which are all the more irritating when camouflaged as protection.

In the sphere of women's industrial and professional interests, it must be confessed that the horizon is very stormy.

Exactly the situation has, in fact, developed which some of us foresaw in 1917. We then predicted that if trade became depressed after the war, a sharp conflict between the industrial interests of men and women might unfortunately arise, and this could not be waged on fair terms if women were still unfranchised. They would be liable "to be treated as a football in a game between Capital and Labour, with the Government acting as umpire." We know that this argument had a considerable effect, especially on Mr. Asquith. We won the vote, but not, alas! for the industrial women, most of whom are still contending unarmed against politically armed competitors. Public opinion, which in war-time cried "The women are splendid," is now crying "Women; out you go." In war-time the supply of women's labour, under the pressure of patriotic motives, adjusted itself flexibly to the demand, and now it is not so adjusting itself. The occupation which wants most women is not the occupation which most women want; nor is it the occupation for which their part experience has fitted them. People seem to imagine that domestic service is a form of unskilled labour which any woman can undertake. If they would pay a visit to the nearest Employment Exchange, they would soon see that the women who stand in queues waiting for their unemployment benefit are not the domestic treasures for which their souls are thirsting.

Meanwhile, there is no doubt that the industrial tension is acting unfavourably on the whole woman's movement by making it very unpopular. But Suffragists ought not to need reminding of the uses of adversity. There is no better fertilizer for any cause than a good dose of unpopularity. During the war women got accustomed to quick returns and much praise, and there is no doubt that the experience enervated and demoralised many of them, especially the younger ones. The veterans were less affected, probably because they had so long believed, that "the majority is always wrong," that to find themselves on the winning side made them positively uncomfortable, until a little further observation vindicated their earlier generalisation by showing them that though the majority is occasionally in the right, it is nearly always for the wrong

reason. But there is no doubt that the younger generation of women, beginning its work at a time when sex prejudice was temporarily in abeyance, has been inclined to doubt the necessity for having a woman's movement at all.

For this reason I could not really manage—I know the confession comes badly from an Oxonian—to feel the least bit sorry for the recent rebuff at Cambridge. It was a mortifying episode, but it will be worth far more than a victory to the cause of progress, if it has convinced the younger generations of University women, who, as teachers and in other professions can do so much to influence the thought of other women, that there is still need for women to hold together and work together.

Only, if we are convinced of this, do let us keep a firm grip on the living facts that lie behind our movement, and remember that it is a *real* equality of status, liberties, and opportunities we are working for, not the legal, technical equality that consists in mere freedom from restrictive laws and disabilities. These Council meetings are a suitable time for plain speaking, and I feel impelled to say plainly that I am feeling at present rather disillusioned about women—women in general, and even those that form the N.U.S.E.C. in particular. Like every other political and social movement, we have depended, and must necessarily depend, largely on women who have some money and leisure to spend on something besides the struggle for existence. Such women had mostly got all they wanted for themselves out of the woman's movement when it gave them the vote, the right to stand for Parliament and local authorities, and to enter the learned professions. Consequently, many of them have either left the movement or are giving it rather a half-hearted and inactive allegiance. When they were working for the Suffrage, they found it good propaganda to speak and write of the wrongs of the sweated woman worker, the unhappily married wife, and the Poor Law widow. Such arguments, they found, had more weight with the public than the mere reiteration of the intolerable fact that their own gardeners and coachmen had votes and that they themselves had none. But now these useful arguments have served their turn, and the pledge implied by their use

seems to be forgotten. They acquiesce in all the reforms on our programme, but not with the passionate conviction that cannot rest until it has expressed itself in action. They believe, for example, in Widows' Pensions, but are satisfied that these must come "in time"—that is to say, when a heavy percentage of the quarter of a million widows we have now with us have lived through a few more years, each containing 365 days of hopeless struggle with impossible conditions, and their children have grown into adolescence with bodies stunted and minds warped by privation. Most women are showing themselves in fact (or so it seems to me) just as richly endowed as most men with "the world's inexhaustible patience of the wrongs that only torment others." Their imagination seems no less sluggish and their vision as shortsighted.

At least, if it is not so, how can we explain the complaint we hear so often from the officers of our Societies, that they find it difficult to sustain the interest of their members in our programme, or to attract new recruits? It is true, of course, that a programme containing six points does not allow of such intense concentration of thought and activity as our old simple objective, "Votes for Women." It is also true that the mental effort it requires is much greater. Let any woman who has social experience and an ounce of imagination in her mental composition, reflect on any one of the social or economic reforms on our programme. There is not one that does not stand for an effort to relieve a mass of human suffering, or to break away bonds which are cramping and thwarting the free development of human capacity. How can anyone say that such a programme is less inspiring, less worthy an object of effort and sacrifice, than the old struggle for the vote? The fact is that the very strength of our programme is its weakness. Its richness and diversity make it harder to grasp. For that reason we are more dependent than ever on having strong societies with capable officers to act as interpreters, and we have not nearly enough of these. Our principal task during the coming year must be to strengthen our societies in the constituencies. Our Parliamentary work will be ineffective unless it is known to have the driving power of public opinion

behind it. Owing to scarcity of funds we cannot rely as we used on paid organisers. Therefore, delegates, we must look to you. If you do not find enthusiasm in your localities, you must kindle it. The occasion for it is there and the materials are there. It is your business to apply the spark.

RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT.

March 7th, 1922.

This is the third time in succession that I have been compelled to begin a presidential survey of the year by recording that it has been one of great activity and little visible achievement. As in 1920, we have spent much of our time in rolling stones nearly to the top of the legislative hill, only to see them roll down again. Outside Parliament we have had one or two distinct setbacks, notably the second rebuff at Cambridge University ; the backslide in the matter of women police, which had begun even before the Geddes Report gave it a rough push, and the action of several hospitals in closing their doors to women students. In these matters women are suffering like a great many other people from the reaction that has followed the war. The nation three and four years ago was very like a man in the earlier and pleasanter stages of intoxication—blustering about the dreadful things it would do to its enemies, but effusively friendly with everyone else ; very free with its money and very noble though incoherent in its sentiments. Now it strongly resembles the same man in the cold fit that follows on a drinking bout. Its head aches, it is feeling ruefully in its empty pockets ; the idea of fighting other people or fraternising with them is equally distasteful. It wants only to be let alone and make itself comfortable as it can at its own fireside ; it doesn't mean to part with anything to anybody and noble sentiments make it feel sick. So long as John Bull continues in this mood women must expect to find that professional jealousy and trade union exclusiveness will put up a strong fight against the achievement of equality of opportunity between men and women.

Yet, in spite of this, it would be a great mistake to suppose that the year has been entirely one of retrogression or at best of marking time. In some respects, on the contrary, there has been distinct progress. The two most tangible achievements have been the return of Mrs. Wintringham as the second woman Member of

Parliament and the favourable verdict of the Committee of Privileges of the Lords on Lady Rhondda's petition. The latter foreshadows, though it does not of itself immediately ensure, the speedy entry into the House of Lords of a quite considerable phalanx of Peeresses in their own right. But we doubt whether even this promises as much good to the causes we stand for in future as the solitary entry into the Commons of Mrs. Wintringham. Considering the circumstances under which her contest was fought, her success means much more even than the return of a second admirably qualified woman M.P. Lady Astor blazed the trail for other women candidates, but Mrs. Wintringham has made that trail much more easy to tread, because her victory in a three-cornered contest fought under conditions of special difficulty has done a great deal to dispel the illusion that women candidates are unpopular with the electorate, and should therefore be eschewed by all political associations who aim at fighting to win and not merely at keeping their forces together. There has never been any difficulty in getting women accepted to fight forlorn hopes, and they ought to be willing to take their fair share of such contests. But party organisations must be made to feel that women expect their fair share also of contests that offer a reasonable prospect of victory, and Mrs. Wintringham's success has immeasurably strengthened the hands of those who are working towards this end.

Her victory was, of course, a party victory, but it was a woman's victory, too, and in its latter aspect the N.U.S.E.C. may justifiably claim to have played its part by the help it was able to send her. Not only at Louth but throughout the year, its election policy has been abundantly fruitful of results. It has brought the Union much publicity; it has helped to make it both respected and feared as a political force; and it has helped to bring back into our ranks much of the old fighting spirit.

In Parliament, too, our work has been very far from unfruitful. Though we cannot claim to have succeeded in getting any of our reforms actually placed on the Statute Book, we can, I think, claim without fear of contradiction to have done some really

valuable pioneer work in initiating legislation. The Equal Guardianship Bill, which so narrowly missed success last year, was our very own Bill, drafted and promoted by the National Union, and worked for untiringly throughout the Session by our Societies, as well as by nearly all other women's organisations throughout the country. The auguries for its success this session are excellent, unless, of course, the Session comes to an untimely end through the dissolution of Parliament. The Equal Franchise Bill, which Lord Robert Cecil is introducing to-morrow in the House of Commons, is also the National Union's Bill, drafted by us last year. The Matrimonial and Separation Allowances Bill, which has obtained an excellent place in the ballot, was also brought to birth at the office of the N.U.S.E.C. In all this work of thinking out legislative measures, we could, of course, have done nothing without the legal skill, the administrative experience, and the Parliamentary assistance which have so freely been put at our disposal by men friends of our movement both in and out of Parliament. The National Union has never lacked such friends, who have made the cause of women truly "our common cause."

But our minds to-day are not fixed solely on what are called, in the narrower sense, "women's reforms." We meet together as a body of citizens no less than as a body of women, each with our separate share of responsibility for the common weal in this country, and throughout the world. Indeed, I believe it is only the truth and we need surely not be ashamed of it, that many of us find our minds so burdened and obsessed by the great problems that are perplexing our own and other countries, that we find it difficult to give ourselves wholeheartedly to the tasks that are more specially our own. There is the problem of trade depression and unemployment. Knowing what suffering that has brought to millions of homes throughout the country, where women and children are enduring privation no less than men, how can we feel that that problem lies outside the sphere of any great organisation of women? We used to be told that "woman's sphere is the home," and there is a sense in which that is and always must be true. The problem of maintaining the standard of life in the homes of the people and protecting it from false

"economies" that threaten to debase it must therefore always be a woman's problem. There is the problem of international peace. When the Prime Minister proclaims that the only practical policy for this or any country at the present time is a policy of "peace on earth and good will towards men," he is only asserting a truism which was accepted by the National Union three years ago, when we decided to place work for the League of Nations in the forefront of our programme. But the practical minds of women incline them to interest themselves less in lofty generalisations than in the practical application of those generalisations to existing facts. Male statesmanship in this and other countries does not seem to have carried us far at present towards a realisation in concrete fact of the universal brotherhood of man. The knowledge, for example, that millions of men, women, and children in Russia are irremediably doomed to death by starvation because thirty-two civilised nations, assembled together at Geneva last September to work for the cause of international peace, were unable between them to provide half the cost of one battleship to avert the threatened calamity, weighs too heavily upon our minds to allow of any cheap optimism as to the future. I feel that I am perhaps in danger of dropping into the trick of lofty generalisations myself when I say—and yet I must say it—that it seems to me at the present moment much less important that we should secure for women better salaries and wages and better opportunities in industries and professions and the good things of life generally (important though those things are), than that we should succeed in making the vote and political influence of women felt in the community as a force that entirely refuses to be satisfied with platitudes about a better England, peace, stability, and international interdependency, but means to insist on having those principles translated into working maxims of statesmanship. There are signs that the general mass of women voters are awakening slowly to the measure of their influence and their responsibilities, and never in the whole course of the woman's movement has there been a greater need for bodies like the National Union—free from party bias because it includes all parties—to guide the opinion of women and make them articulate, organised, and effective.

PATIENCE AND IMPATIENCE.

March 6th, 1923.

I want first to thank you all for the honour you have done me in again choosing me as your President. For reasons which were explained in a letter which I circulated to our Societies about two months ago, I am not at all sure that you were wise in doing so. But I am quite sure it is a choice which illustrates one quality of which I have always been rather proud in our National Union for Equal Citizenship, that it is a courageous and large-minded body, a body which does not seek to bind all its members to a pedantic adherence to every article in a cast-iron creed, but welcomes, or at least tolerates, differences of opinion, so long as it is satisfied that they concern the methods by which our common cause can be achieved and do not indicate any half-heartedness about the cause itself. You all know that upon questions of method there have been sharp differences of opinion in the Union in the past, and there are sharp differences of opinion still, and when those questions have been put to the vote I have almost as often, I think, been in the minority as in the majority. And among the societies which have nominated me there are several whose representatives, I know, take a quite different view from mine on some of these controversial issues.

It is true that some of my colleagues regard these issues as matters of principle rather than method. For example, one of my good friends among them said to me recently: "You are such a good fighter: *what* a pity you are such a bad feminist!" Now my private opinion—and I told her so—is that I am a much more root and branch feminist than she is. The fact is, that there are two kinds of feminism, or rather two ways of interpreting sex-equality. There are those who interpret it in terms of identity with men, and those who interpret it in terms of difference. The former school do not, I think, imagine the status achieved by man to be so ideal that all that woman needs is to climb up and stand by his side. But they see truly that one of the tricks, devices by which men have sought to lead women to acquiesce

in their inferiority of status, is by pretending that it is not really an inferiority, but only a difference corresponding to a real difference of function. Hence these feminists feel that they are taking the safer course in always demanding the identical right that men have enjoyed, just in the spirit of a housewife, who, because her grocer has repeatedly tried to palm off on her an inferior substitute for some article, will insist on having the recognised brand "as patronised by the Royal Household." Other feminists, while conscious of the risks they are running, are like the housewife who insists on selecting the goods that please her palate without reference to what others have preferred. I belong to the latter school. I want women to build up their own status, liberties, and opportunities free from men's restrictions, but not necessarily identical with those of men. It is a fatal thing for a woman's organisation to get the reputation of being "anti-man," and I would not for worlds bring that reproach on the N.U.S.E.C. But I knew a wise old lady who was fond of repeating: "The more I see of some people the better I like my dog"; and after every experience of men's politics and administration my feeling is: "The more I see of some men, especially politicians, the less I want women to adopt all their methods and standards of value." Fortunately, on most questions of immediate practical politics, these two schools of thought think alike.

If you study our Annual Report carefully, I think you will agree that the amount that has been accomplished by our small staff in our cramped headquarters has been creditably large. It would have been even larger had it not been for the constant and rather nerve-racking pressure of limited means on nearly limitless needs. But as this is a condition of chronic economic toothache suffered by nearly all organisations which depend on voluntary funds, we must not grumble at it.

I wish we could point to more definite results of all our activity. But I do not think that anyone who has been in close touch with the facts will argue from this want of positive success that our work has been fruitless. In the first place we are, as everyone knows, now living through a period of reaction following

on the tremendous wave of progressive feeling which swept away so many barriers in 1918-19. In such a period it is something if those engaged in a forward movement can keep the ground they have won and occasionally gain a fresh foothold here and there. While no great disfranchising movement is to be feared, there are many ways in which privileges already granted can be filched away and opportunities withdrawn and rights fall into desuetude if those concerned are not on the alert and active in pressing their offensive. Secondly, we must not let ourselves forget that the greater a movement is, and the more deep-rooted the evils it seeks to remove, the slower is the progress normally made. In the brilliant little article on "Loyalties," which appeared in last week's *Woman's Leader*, the writer reminds us how "age-long and world-wide" are the conditions which the feminist programme seeks to change.

From the dawn of history, in varying degree, women have been oppressed, exploited, sometimes flattered and pampered, but always dominated by men. Everywhere law and social custom, education, religious ritual, moral standards, and the distribution of wealth reflect the oppression of women. From age to age the voice of articulate male humanity has joined in the chorus of "Thou shalt not—thou canst not." And to this stupendous effort of auto-suggestion female voices have contributed their dreary repetition of "We may not—we cannot."

Is it surprising that a fortress so built and buttressed, whose defenders include so many of the dominated race, cannot be carried by an assault, or a long series of assaults, but only slowly undermined, inch by inch, until its walls sag and bulge and split and allow us to creep in and win over the defenders and establish ourselves in a corner here and there.

I have given you some reasons why we should be patient, in the sense of not letting ourselves be discouraged or induced to desist by slow progress. May I now suggest why we should be impatient, in the sense of not complacently accepting slow progress as inevitable, when perhaps it is partly the result of the insufficiency or misdirection of our own efforts. It is quite true that in working for a cause which is part of the great cause of human progress we can afford to take long views, and say: "Leave now for dogs and apes, man has forever." But the individual man or woman has not for ever, at least, not as it concerns that little span of life, rounded by a sleep, for which

alone we are responsible. There is nothing perhaps in all the world so entirely personal and relative as Time. While of the Deity it may be true that a thousand years in His sight are but a watch in the night, it is unfortunately equally true that to anyone suffering from unendurable physical pain or intolerable social conditions a watch in the night seems even as a thousand years. Do not let us forget, therefore, that since every one of the reforms for which we are working stands for a mass of remediable human suffering, or of undeveloped and thwarted human capacity, every day's unnecessary delay does matter. Most of those whom we are seeking to liberate are very patient. It is for us who can say of ourselves: "Our lot is fallen unto us in pleasant places. Yea, we have a goodly heritage" to be impatient for them.

Let those who preach the loyalty of class and the loyalty of party, and who disparage the loyalty of women towards women, explain if they can how it is that, though workingmen have had their franchise for nearly three-quarters of a century, it is only since women have been enfranchised, and then only through the efforts of the disparaged non-party and largely "middle-class" organisations, that the wrongs of widows and ill-treated wives and unmarried mothers and sweated women-workers have been brought effectively to the front? The truth is that there are facts of life which "every woman knows" and no man looks at from exactly the same angle, and this creates a camaraderie which makes women desire to stretch out their hands to each other across the sundering seas of class and race, despite everything that the apostles of class hatred and racial hatred can do to stop them. And for the sake of the world's peace it is well that it should be so.

PUT NOT YOUR TRUST IN PARTIES.

March 26th, 1924.

Those of us who were engaged in the Suffrage Movement had a long training in the part of Sisyphus. Over and over again we rolled our great measure of enfranchisement very nearly to the top of the hill, only to see it slip from our grasp and roll to the bottom again. Hence of all the excellent cartoons which appeared from time to time in *Punch* dealing with the suffrage issue, none went home to us so much as one which depicted the Woman Suffragist after one of these mishaps, surveying her precious barrel and exclaiming ruefully, "Don't talk to me of Sisyphus! he wasn't a woman." When we gained our votes, some of us thought we had done playing that part for ever. But experience soon taught us that it has only changed its character a little. Instead of our efforts being concentrated on one great big measure of enfranchisement, we have found ourselves in charge of some half a dozen smaller measures, each containing a separate brand of the precious elixir of Equal Citizenship. All these have got somehow to be safely lodged on the top of Constitution Hill. Sometimes a small measure has got to the top after the first effort. More often after a measure has been slowly and painfully pushed up part of the way, the end of the Session has found it stuck fast, or a premature dissolution of Parliament has dashed it to the bottom again, and in either case, all our work has to begin afresh.

We have now had six years of this sort of experience, and it is time to take stock of our gains. During the first year we had behind us the strong wind of the Reconstruction Spirit, and our measures were fairly blown to the top of the hill with scarcely any effort on our part. By the end of it women were already eligible to sit in the House of Commons. In the pre-war days it used to be prophesied that at least a generation would intervene between the granting of votes to women and this reform. During the same year the University of Oxford, with a magnificently

large and generous gesture, threw its gates wide open to women. During 1919, the Reconstruction Spirit was still blowing, but counter currents had begun to make themselves felt. The Women's Emancipation Bill introduced by the Labour Party, besides granting the franchise to women on the same terms as to men, would have given to Peeresses the right to sit in the House of Lords and have opened to women all civil and judicial offices and posts under the Crown and both the legal professions. The history of the Bill showed the favourable state of public opinion. It passed through Committee without a single amendment being raised, and was given a third reading in the teeth of the Government's opposition. After its first reading in the House of Lords, it was side-tracked by the introduction into that House of a Government measure—The Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act. This was a much smaller measure, but nevertheless it secured one substantial advance—the admission of women to all branches of the legal profession and to jury service which did not involve membership of the House of Lords. The same year saw the election of Lady Astor as the first Woman Member of Parliament. On the other hand, there was evidence of a growing wave of opposition to the employment of women in industry and the professions, and through the Pre-War Practices Act a legal bar was for the first time placed against the employment of women in many industries. Though a temporary measure made in fulfilment of a war-time pledge, and therefore not resisted by women's organisations, this was felt by many to be a dangerous innovation.

During 1920 the period of trade depression and unemployment began, and we found ourselves full in the midst of reaction. The glow of enthusiasm that had burned in men's hearts had faded away, leaving only grey cinders—excellent material for the paving-stones out of which the road to a certain place is said to be made. From then onward very little actual progress has been made. The forces of the woman's movement have been strong enough to resist any tendency to take away privileges once definitely given, but not strong enough to secure fresh instalments of justice, except in very small fragments. In the N.U.S.E.C. Report of 1919, one finds the very same reforms

under discussion for which we are now struggling—equal franchise, equal guardianship, widows' pensions. With the addition of the reform of the Separation and Maintenance Orders system, which we embodied in a Bill in 1920, these are the Bills at which we have been working ever since, and we have been back again at our old task, rolling our barrels up the hill and seeing them roll down again at the end of each Session. Nevertheless, there has been one reform, important in principle though not perhaps affecting a very large number of cases, which achieved an easy and speedy victory through the Matrimonial Causes Amendment Act of last year. We owe that specially to the prescience of our Parliamentary Secretary, Mrs. Hubback, who suggested the idea to our Executive and with some legal assistance drafted the Bill and succeeded in inducing Major Entwistle to become its sponsor in the House. There have also been the small Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1922, and the Bastardy Act of 1923. But perhaps the greatest achievement of last year was the return to Parliament of our eight women M.P.s, which has put the question of women in Parliament on quite a new footing in the eyes of the Party organisers and wire-pullers, who are convinced by nothing but accomplished facts.

When the present Government came into power at the beginning of this year our hopes ran high. Whatever our party sympathies might be individually, we must all have felt that for the cause of equal citizenship, the return of a Labour Government to office should presage great things. Was not the Labour Party pledged, not only by the explicit terms of its Election programme (we all know that election programmes are written not in marking ink, but in a fluid warranted to fade in the shortest possible time after the election is over), but by everything that can or should bind a party—its fundamental principles and traditions, its declarations individual and collective in Parliament, and from a thousand platforms—to nearly every item in our programme. We have by no means given up hope yet that this first view may prove the true one, and no one will wish to form too hasty a judgment on a Party taking office under such exceptional circumstances, a minority party dependent on the support of others and bound therefore to move with even greater

caution than other Governments new to office. But the events of the last few weeks have certainly given us qualms and have sometimes caused us to rub our eyes in astonishment.

The greatest surprise has been the Government's attitude on the question of equal franchise. Instead of the Government measure which we had reason confidently to expect (were it not that old suffragists have learnt to expect nothing), we found ourselves confronted with a debate on a Private Members' Bill, moved by a supporter of the Government, and doubtless consequently in that well-disciplined Party, with the Government's consent. Yet the first speech in the debate by a Minister was that of Mr. Rhys Davies who "could give no indication now as to what the attitude of the Government would be if the Bill is sent to a Committee upstairs," and further drew attention to the fact (as though warning the House of an unforeseen danger) that it would involve the enfranchisement of a large number of domestic servants and placed the women voters in a majority in the country. Then followed Mr. Clynes with the assurance that "if the Committee genuinely wishes to extend these rights to the women of the country, the Government will not be behind in endeavouring to find time to pass the Bill into law." If the *Committee* genuinely wishes! Has the Government then no mind of its own on this question? One's mind flashes back to the days of the Conciliation Bill, and again to the months that preceded the passage of the Representations of the People Act, when it was brought home to us that it was only at a considerable sacrifice that the Labour Party could bring itself to accept anything less than complete adult suffrage, and again to the Party's own Women's Emancipation Bill which passed through the House of Commons in the teeth of the Government's Whips. We have not forgotten the reminder which speakers from the front bench so frequently give the House, and especially their own followers in it, that a party in office must speak with a new sense of responsibility. But has a party in office *no* responsibility towards its principles and past professions and pledges? Are its members expected to quaff the waters of Lethe before kissing hands? Here is a measure which, so far as the woman's part of it is concerned,

would undoubtedly command a majority in the House, would take very little Parliamentary time, and involve the country in no considerable expenditure. If the Government lets "I dare not wait upon I would" with regard to such a measure, what *have* they courage for?

Then again, there is our Equal Guardianship Bill, involving some technically difficult points and incurring some opposition, mainly from permanent officials wedded to Conservative traditions, but embodying a principle so unquestionably just that it has more than once received a second reading without a division. What are the Government going to do about that? Hitherto there have been no signs that they are going to do anything.

Then there is the cause of Widows' Pensions, which the Labour Party claims to have made peculiarly its own. A measure it is true, will cost the country money, possibly from £10,000,000 to £20,000,000 per annum, according to its scope. But are we going to hear from a Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer that the country can afford to strengthen its Air Force and build five new cruisers but cannot afford, in spite of an unexpectedly satisfactory surplus, to find bread for its widowed mothers and fatherless children? One can imagine the scorn which our old and true friend Mr. Snowden—one of the best friends women have ever had in Parliament—would in his private capacity have poured on such an estimate of relative values. It is true that the Government has definitely promised to deal with this reform—some time. But knowing the precariousness of their own tenure, might we not have expected them to show a noble impatience, a determination that though it would be their last act they would make this reform once for all safe from the changes and chances of political strife?

We do not make these criticisms in a cynical or pessimistic spirit. We still hope. But it is our duty at this Annual Council meeting not only to take stock of our past gains and of our internal equipment, but to make a sober and impartial survey of future prospects, and if we seem to see weaknesses or dangers—whether on the surface or hidden, whether due to our own defects or those of others—we must speak plainly about these things and

consider how they can be remedied. All I have been saying merely confirms a truth which past experience has repeatedly brought home to us, that while our cause may have more affinity with some forms of political belief than with others, it cannot really be identified with any political party, since it here appeals to sympathies, and there arouses prejudices, which are independent of party of class or time, and lie very deep down in masculine human nature. Therefore we would do well, while showing gratitude to our supporters and trust in our tried friends, not to let either emotion lull us into over confidence. Let us keep our political armour bright and our powder dry. We are a long way from the Millenium yet.

THE OLD AND THE NEW FEMINISM.

March 11th, 1925.

Standing at the corner of Trafalgar Square any evening, one can read the news of the day flashed off against the night sky. At first, if one is new to the sight, it seems as though some momentous message must be spelling itself out. But soon one realises that the record is mostly of trivial happenings and that after a few minutes the same story repeats itself over again.

The Parliamentary history of the last few years has been rather like that electric moving ribbon. It has reeled itself off with so much flash and brilliancy that it is difficult to realise how little it has all amounted to. Each Session we have watched the development of our several Bills with fascination, thinking that something decisive was going to happen. Then the end of the Session has come and the next Session's record has been just the same old serial stories broken off at about the same stages : Equal Guardianship, our own Bill, well favoured and full flavoured, and the Government's somewhat pallid and shorn version of the same thing ; Separation and Maintenance Orders, a Government Bill in which we recognised our own work in a meagre and attenuated form ; an Illegitimacy Bill, again clipped and mutilated so that it might slip through all the easier ; a Parliamentary Debate and many official and unofficial fine words about Widows' Pensions, but no Chancellor of the Exchequer ready to plank down the price ; more fine words, and more official and unofficial promises about Equal Franchise Rights. But here again words only, not deeds.

Now in 1925, for the fourth or fifth time, the same old repertoire is beginning. But this time we feel considerable confidence that we shall see *finis* written to some of the stories. Equal Guardianship, and Separation and Maintenance Orders, and the Illegitimacy Bill can hardly fail to get themselves on the Statute Book this Session. The forms will not altogether satisfy us

and we shall not abandon the hope of getting something more some day. But clearly a few years will have to be allowed to lapse first, and in the meantime we have the happy consciousness that many of the hardest cases of injustice have been met, and that some hundreds or thousands of women whose names are unknown to us and ours to them will have cause, though they know it not, to bless the National Union for Equal Citizenship. Next year, or the year after that at very latest, should see a measure of Pensions for Widowed Mothers, though again the form may not be precisely that we should have chosen. The future of Equal Franchise is more obscure. The Prime Minister is an honest man—so much is universally admitted—and as such may be trusted to take the obvious steps toward the fulfilment of his parliamentary pledges. The particular path he has chosen is known to be full of pitfalls, and one may say, without cynicism, that when a Government is contemplating a particular reform rather as a fulfilment of an obligation than because its own interests or cherished convictions are at stake, it is likely to be found deficient in the qualities of resource and determination that are necessary to ensure success. Therefore, it may be for us, through our Headquarters and our Societies, to supply the resource and the determination.

Thus it seems probable that within the next few years three of the six reforms on our Immediate Programme will be accomplished. There remain the other three. I believe there are critics among ourselves who are inclined to charge us with showing less zeal and energy in the cause of an Equal Moral Standard, of Equal Pay and Opportunities, and of the League of Nations than in the reforms affecting the franchise and the status of wives and mothers. I do not believe this criticism is justified. It is not zeal or energy that have been lacking. The fact is that these other reforms do not offer the same opportunities for the action of a Society like ours as those which can be embodied in Parliamentary Bills. An Equal Moral Standard is something intangible. It cannot be brought about by one or a dozen Parliamentary Bills, only by a change of heart, of mental outlook, on the part of society and its members. Of course, there are changes in legislation and

in administration that will help it on. One of these was successfully put through by our Union two years ago when we initiated the Matrimonial Causes Act. Others we are working for now. There is the question of Women Police. There are reforms in the laws affecting prostitution and solicitation and child assault which we are always watching for opportunities to promote. But these questions are much more difficult and delicate and controversial than those embodied in the Bills which are approaching their completion. General public opinion is more backward; expert public opinion is more divided; the existence of a strong *ad hoc* Society entirely devoted to these questions and affiliated to our Union restricts the part which a wholly woman's organisation like ours can profitably play.

The question of Equal Opportunities and Pay is even more elusive and difficult. Except as it affects those employed in the Public Services, there is no obvious means of legal attack. We cannot ask for a Bill requiring private employers to engage men and women in equal numbers at equal salaries, or Trades Unions to remove the barriers of sex exclusiveness. It is difficult even to find means of bringing public opinion effectively to bear on such employers and Trades Unions. The actual facts relating to these sex privileges and exclusions are hard to get at. When anything at all can be done to fight them, it can usually be done better locally than through the action of a National Headquarters, because it requires personal influence and contacts. So far, with the exception of the London Society for Women's Service, which concentrates almost entirely on this problem, there have been few symptoms that our Societies have been interesting themselves actively in it. I think we may assume that you feel yourselves, as we do at Headquarters, baffled and rather helpless in face of the forces which tend to limit women's opportunities in the professions and to keep them to a definitely inferior status in industry.

There are those who believe that this problem can be tackled by means of general propaganda based on appeals to abstract justice. If so, let them undertake such propaganda and win fresh recruits by demonstrating its effectiveness. There are

others who fear that exceedingly little can be accomplished by this means. We believe that the inferior status of women in industry and the jealousy which works against them in the professions are only partly the fruit of sex prejudice ; that they have deep-rooted economic causes and that the only effective method of attack is to penetrate to and remove these causes, or at least modify and bring them under control.

Whatever view we take of these questions, I think that everyone who is thinking ahead must realise that the National Union is approaching a stage in its existence when its work will be less obvious and clearly defined and ready to hand than it has been during the last five years. The time has come to take stock and decide what next. It seems to me that, broadly speaking, there are two lines of possible development. We may complete the task of removing from the Statute Book the remaining traces of legal inequality ; we may continue to chant the gospel of sex equality to the inattentive ears of employers and Trades Unionists, comforting ourselves that the fault is theirs if they fail to listen. But it must be confessed that this is a programme not likely to arouse much enthusiasm or attract new recruits, and if that is all, we must be prepared to see the once broad river of the N.U.S.E.C. dwindle till it becomes a trickle and loses itself in the sands. Or we may say : " Now the legal barriers are down ; there is still some debris left which we must clear away. But we need not give ourselves up entirely to that, for women are virtually free. At last we have done with the boring business of measuring everything that women want, or that is offered them by men's standards, to see if it is exactly up to sample. At last we can stop looking at all our problems through men's eyes and discussing them in men's phraseology. We can demand what we want for women, not because it is what men have got, but because it is what women need to fulfil the potentialities of their own natures and to adjust themselves to the circumstances of their own lives. We can do this without any sense of yielding to sex selfishness or antagonism, because we know that it is only in this way that women can make a contribution of real value to the common stock of human good ; can throw on its problems a light which shines from within ; can refute the gibe that while women are

clever as imitators, they are deficient in initiative and originality.

Does this all sound rather vague and wordy ? Let me try to give it concreteness by applying it to a particular problem—the problem of Equal Opportunities and Pay. Hitherto we have contented ourselves with demanding that in the economic sphere women shall be free to attempt the same tasks as men and shall be paid at the same rates *when they are doing men's work*. But under what conditions are they to labour and at what rates are they to be paid when they are doing work which only women can do or for which they have a special fitness ? So far the National Union have made no pronouncement about that. Yet surely it is as important a question as the other. Is it only the women who have adopted callings glorified by the presence in them of men who need security for adequate remuneration and suitable conditions ? Is it not possible that, just because these economic problems have been thought out by men with special reference to the conditions of their own lives, there are spheres of service just as important to the community which have been neglected, left at the mercy of ruthless economic forces without any consideration of the well-being of the human beings concerned in them, though on their efficiency must depend in the long run the efficiency of the service itself ? There is the dangerous service of maternity, the delicate and skilled task of rearing children. There are the services of midwifery and nursing, there are all the questions of houses fit to be workshops for women as well as dormitories for men. Where in this sphere are the equivalents of the Factory Legislation, the Trades Boards and Industrial Councils, the Trades Unions and Employers' Federations which regulate and protect the services which employ men ? Can anyone who begins to contemplate these facts wonder any longer why it is that such questions as Family Endowment, Birth Control, Housing, crop up ubiquitously and irresistibly in the programmes of Women's Conferences ? Whatever the rights and wrongs of these questions, whether we are on the one side or the other, who can doubt that they are questions which women must think out for themselves and mould to their own patterns. When we are trying to do this,

let us not forget that the path in which we are treading is a path which has been trod in by others before us who have been pioneers in asserting the rights of self-determination for their own group or class. When working men first began to struggle for their liberties their demands were at first limited to political privileges and to breaking down of legal disabilities. Only gradually they realised that the privileges and the formulæ that had been shaped to meet the needs of the classes that had hitherto held dominion were not necessarily sufficient in themselves to bring real freedom, real equality of opportunity, to the manual workers, that these must work out for themselves a whole new science and art of living that would enable them not merely to copy the manners and customs of their betters, but to shape their own destinies. We, like they, have to learn that the achievement of freedom is a much bigger thing than the breaking off of shackles. First strike off the shackles, but afterwards give the released prisoner just the kind of nourishment, just the scientific gymnastic, just the free exercise in the open air and sunshine that will enable him to grow to the full measure of the stature which Nature has destined for him.

APOLOGIA PRO VITA NOSTRA.

February 24th, 1926.

It is good to meet again for our annual stock-taking and to have something better to report than disappointed hopes and frustrated endeavours. On previous occasions, I have found myself comparing the National Union's year to a fisherman's day of great expectations but no fish, and again to the labours of Sisyphus. This year I have no need to search for a fresh metaphor to express the old unpleasant truth; for this year there are fish in the basket and some of the stones have been dragged safely to the top of Constitution Hill. I prophesied a year ago that we should soon be able to wipe three reforms off our Immediate Programme—Widows' Pensions, Equal Guardianship, and reforms in Separation and Maintenance Orders law. The prophecy has come true, for although none of the three have been secured quite in the form or to the full extent we desired, yet they are substantial achievements, and we may well let these subjects rest for a time and turn to fresh fields.

Incidentally, the year's record has strikingly justified the policy and methods of the N.U.S.E.C. There have been some critics who thought our Parliamentary methods tame, who have scoffed at our laborious way of drafting and initiating private members' Bills and pushing them through the same stages year by year, and accumulating evidence of the support behind them, until the Government was convinced not only of the demand but that it was possible to satisfy it and so made our reforms its own. These critics would have thought better of us if we had been more spectacular, had spent our time blaring trumpets before the walls of Jericho and ordering them to fall down instead of patiently tunnelling underneath them. In other words they would have had us fling our reforms in their most doctrinaire shape at the heads of the Government, "demanding" and "claiming" them in the name of "the women of the country" and leaving to the Government the responsibility of carrying

them out. That is not the way to get things done. It may have served in the days of the suffrage agitation, when we were asking for a big, elemental, simple reform, which a schoolgirl could have formulated into a Bill. Most of our reforms to-day require difficult re-adjustments of a complicated, antiquated structure of case law and Statute law. We were backwoodsmen in pre-war days; now we need to be skilled artisans. If we go to the Government saying merely, this or that is wrong, put it right for us, they can bluff us as a lazy builder bluffs an ignorant housewife who asks him to cure her smoky chimney, saying, "Madam, what you want is impossible; if we did it the house would tumble down." Our method is to study the faulty structure for ourselves and make our plans. Though they may not be exactly the plans which the builder carries out, yet he sees we know too much to be pacified with bluff.

Even when, in last year's Widows and Old Age Contributory Pensions Act, we are dealing with a subject which does not lend itself to procedure by private Members' Bills, our habit of being good parliamentarians, practical and realistic, which our critics call opportunism, gave us the power of amending the Bill in many unshowy but beneficent ways. There are thousands and soon will be tens of thousands of women—unhappy wives, widows, tired old working spinsters—who have cause to bless the name of the N.U.S.E.C. What does it matter that most of them have never heard that unwieldy name and would not understand it if they heard it. It never perturbs me when our members complain, as some of them do, that the N.U.S.E.C. is bad at publicity and that other societies are better. Let them be better. There is room for all sorts of talent in the women's movement and the special function of the N.U.S.E.C. has never been that of a publicity agent.

Yet it must be admitted that the difficulty of our problems and the unspectacular method suited to them have some disadvantages. The majority of mankind, including womankind, have lazy, unimaginative, preoccupied minds and to such our work makes little appeal. Even now when we have gone back to the old crude simple issue "Votes for women on the same

terms as men" we have not the old public with us. It took years before to kindle the sluggish mass mind into enthusiasm. But even then it was not—it never is in moral causes—the great battalions of followers who brought victory, but the thinking, organising, indomitable few. Now the opposition is infinitely weaker and the obstacles fewer. Indeed there are, I think, only two serious obstacles. One is the belief that there are no obstacles, that the thing will come of itself. That is indeed a mistake, for no parliamentary reform comes without hard work. The other is to rest the case for Equal Franchise too much on the pure theory of equality. The watchword of Equality has lost much of its potency for the younger generation, which has never known the harsher forms of inequality.

We shall be equally in accord with facts, and will obtain more response from this disillusioned, realistic generation if we claim the vote as a necessary measure of protection for the women workers, over as well as under 30, whose interests are not at all represented by married women who regard female competition with nearly as jealous an eye as their husbands and sons. When we put the defensive weapon of the vote into the hands of the women workers, we shall have done nearly all that can be done by legislation to break down sex disabilities. Such disabilities will still exist—social and economic—but they must be attacked by subtler methods, by the study and removal of causes. This will be part of our task; the other part will be the movement which I called last year the new feminism, its formula not equality but self-determination. Already one sees among our societies a growing pre-occupation with the new issues, with Family Endowment, Birth Control, Social Insurance, International Peace—reforms which come within the second half of our formula as "necessary to enable women adequately to discharge their functions as citizens." The same tendency is observable among the other organisations of women, political and non-political, but I believe a little study of dates would show that our consideration of these new issues has not seldom preceded that of others by at least a year or two. If the societies of the N.U.S.E.C. do not shine as publicity agents, they are pretty good pioneers and I hope that will always be our role.

LABOURERS UNTO THE HARVEST.

March 2nd, 1927.

Anniversaries in the lives of individuals and annual meetings in those of Societies have been doubtless devised by humanity as a check on its own proneness to indolence and self-satisfaction. Nothing else seems, in a sense, so to shorten life. Every time the Secretary of a Society is overtaken by the necessity of drawing up a statement of the year's achievements, she probably murmurs to herself: "It surely cannot be a year since the last time I did this"; and the same thought may be with many of us as we meet together at this familiar place for our annual balancing of accounts.

Whether the feeling left in our minds by these occasions is on the whole one of satisfaction or dissatisfaction must depend considerably on the results they reveal. How much has been accomplished by the year's work? What is the state of our profits and loss account? The answer, unfortunately, does not depend only on ourselves. We may have spread our wares ever so enticingly, and tried every lure to bring purchasers, but the public, with pre-occupied minds or empty pockets, may have passed us by.

So far as immediate gains go, the past year has been a politically bad one. That is not surprising, after the unusually good year which preceded it. The Government, having invested largely in N.U.S.E.C. reforms during 1925, felt they could afford to give us the go-by for 1926. The prospects for 1927 are uncertain, but either during this or next year (probably next) we confidently expect to gain Equal Franchise. I will say no more on that subject, because we expect to devote to-morrow evening to it, except that the profit there is such a big one that we must on no account risk losing it through slackness or over-confidence. Equal Franchise must be looked on not so much as one among other reforms, but as the key position which gives access to them all.

What I want to discuss with you for the remainder of the one short occasion during the Council meetings when I can speak to you—not as the protagonist or antagonist of some controversial resolution, but as the President whom you have rightly or wrongly chosen to represent you all—is not our concrete gains or losses, but the spirit and methods of the Union, of its Headquarters, and of its Societies.

I have been spending some time lately in going through the Annual Report, including the reports sent in by our Societies. On the whole, the result has been to quicken my pride and confidence in the Union. Those of us who are old hands in reading reports soon learn to distinguish between those which represent real work and those which merely testify to the Secretary's faculty for window-dressing. I recently overheard a conversation between two very small boys, gazing into a sweet shop. Said one to the other: "I don't like those grand chocolate boxes; there is so much gilt paper and padding in them; I like them better by the pound in a bag." A good many reports are like those chocolate boxes—all tinsel and padding. Others, on the other hand (and the N.U.S.E.C. Report is one of these), have to pack so many solid facts into its pages that the result is almost too desiccated to be interesting. It resembles a box of dried figs or sardines rather than of chocolates.

I suggest to you a little experiment. Take our Annual Report when it reaches you in its printed form. Sit over the fire with it and a red pencil in your hand. Score under every statement which records—not vague assurances as to how active we have been nor grandiloquent principles and claims—but a definite action taken. Then do a few little sums in simple addition. Next do the same thing with the printed reports of any other half-dozen women's (or men's) societies you like to name. I am not afraid that the result will make you blush for the N.U.S.E.C.

The summary of the activities of our affiliated Societies contained in the main report has had to be so severely abbreviated that it is hardly fair to them. But I have seen some of the originals and I can say this: some of them could bear to be submitted to the test I have suggested, others could not.

I am going to be very frank. A few of our Societies seem to feel that they are justifying their pledge "to do all in their power to secure a real equality of liberties, status, and opportunities between men and women" and "to promote the self-education of women as citizens," if on three or four occasions during the year they hold members' meetings for the discussion of a few of our reforms (it being duly recorded that Mrs. Blank kindly provided tea). And if they subsequently send a resolution or letter to their local M.P. asking him to support the reform in question. Such a programme hardly deserves the name of political propaganda and self-education. It is

" A thing of shreds and patches,
Of singing songs in snatches."

There are again a few of our Societies which have a lamentably small membership and apparently only two or three active members, usually its officers. But the activity and zeal of these devoted individuals is so great that the Society reminds one of the old Irishwoman who said that she "had only two teeth in her head but, thank God, they met." Such a Society acts often like a small electric power station in a large centre of population. Insignificant in appearance, its existence scarcely remembered by the inhabitants, it yet manages to transmit light and energy into innumerable homes and places of manufacture. A devoted Secretary does this by using her influence to get her speakers heard, her resolutions passed and sent up to the Government, her M.P. and Town Councillors interviewed and influenced, not merely by her tiny Society but by every organisation in the town which she can manage to reach.

Again, there are among our Societies some which remind one of the old platitude "It is always the busiest people who can find time for more work." Their membership is large and their activities innumerable. They are for ever opening up a fresh ward, centre, or starting a new sub-committee for some special form of propaganda. It is just these busy societies, "up to their eyes" already on their own local affairs, who are usually quickest (so I am told) to respond to our Headquarter circulars, and to undertake work in promotion of our parliamentary reforms.

There are, I know, some of us who look askance at this multiplication of activities, and fear it will distract the members from their fundamental duty of preaching the pure gospel of feminism. I do not deny that there is a real danger in this. The localized, practical activities may be so much more visibly productive that they may become an excuse for neglecting the more difficult, unpopular tasks. But in this matter I speak as a provincial. We provincials know how essential it is, if we are to keep our Societies alive, to give them plenty to do and to let them see some visible and tangible results of their efforts. Dwelling far from Westminster we find it hard to fulfil this latter conditions if the work is wholly confined to propaganda for reforms which must eventually be carried out through Parliament. Further, a Society's effectiveness, even in the matter of Parliamentary reforms, depends considerably upon its membership, standing, and reputation in its own locality. This is likely to be enhanced if some at least of the Society's work directly affects the well-being of the locality. Let me give two practical examples.

The year's report of one of our Societies in a northern industrial town, records the leading part it took in the collection and administration of relief to the wives and children of those affected by the Coal Dispute. *There* was an activity which even those of us who take the most latitudinarian view of equality could scarcely manage to bring within that much-disputed formula. Yet when we remember how difficult we have found it to gain the confidence of wage-earning men and women, to convince them that we are not merely a middle-class organisation, without understanding or sympathy with their special needs and difficulties, does it not seem probable, nay certain, that that very practical piece of work will have done something to bring about a better understanding and a readier hearing for our Society when, engaged in its normal activities, it preaches the feminist reforms of equal opportunities and pay or family allowances?

If our object is to get things done not merely to relieve our own souls by talking about equality, the first essential is that our

Societies must have life and have it abundantly. There must be no stagnation in the waters. They must be kept in constant motion by the inflow of fresh currents.

I may seem to have been judging our work by gross and mechanical tests, as though our Union were a shopkeeper and its Societies bagmen touting for its wares. Whereas in reality many of our results, like the results of the forces which are opposing us, are invisible and intangible. Like the armies of opposing bacilli, which fight one another in the human body, they produce health or sickness in the body politic. We know that we are winning, not by merely reckoning the sum of our actual gains, but by all the symptoms of a healthier attitude towards women, as jurors, as Parliamentary candidates, and potential voters. We are still suffering from acute localized diseases, for example, in the industrial sphere. But they are partly the results of abnormal post-war conditions, which will pass in time.

I cannot end this critical review of our activities without paying a tribute to the devoted work of many of your secretaries of Societies. The "tasks in hours of insight willed" by our Executive Committee and Mrs. Hubback, have to be "in hours of gloom fulfilled" by you, often with very little encouragement and with none of the mechanical aids to production such as a Gestetner pouring forth circulars with the velocity of the proverbial sausage machine. I often wonder how you manage to do it. You could not do it if the flame of the spirit were not kept burning in your hearts by a lively imagination, always dwelling not merely on the concrete events which surround you, but on the deep-lying causes of these events—the selfishness and prejudices of sex and class. But the harvest is great and the labourers are far too few. I appeal to all of you to bring more labourers unto the harvest.

"IT WAS AN OBSTINATE HILL TO CLIMB."

March 7th, 1928.

Just ten years and a month have passed since women achieved the first great instalment of the franchise. Within a few months we confidently expect to reach the goal which our predecessors set themselves sixty-one years ago—"The extension of the franchise to women on the same terms as it is or may be extended to men."

It is worth while looking back and asking ourselves two questions: first, whether the success so far achieved has been worth the immense effort the movement has cost—all the lives of all the women that have been devoted to it, all the "resolute and invincible determination, the deep consuming passion, the amazing endurance" that it has evoked? Secondly, what has been the special contribution to the movement of our National Union; have we been and are we still on the right lines?

As to the first question, even before 1918 I think we had all made up our minds as to the answer. In the course of the struggle for the vote, all the oppressions, restrictions, disabilities that weighed upon women had been revealed as by a kind of volcanic upheaval which breaks up the verdant surface of the earth and lays bare the barren tracts, the sharp rocks, the creeping ugliness that lie beneath. The first speech on women's suffrage ever made in Parliament, by John Stuart Mill in 1867, drew a damning picture of women's liberties, status, and opportunities as men had made them during the period of their unlimited trusteeship. There were then for women neither high schools nor colleges, even the endowments made in the Middle Ages for both sexes being appropriated by men, no authorized entry into elected bodies, nor into any honourable and accredited profession except that of private governessing; no means of training even for that; for married women no rights whatever over their own earnings, nor over their inherited

incomes, unless these were secured to them by the device of settlements ; almost no rights over their own children, practically no protection, personal or economic, against a husband, however neglectful or dissolute. The picture drawn was so black yet so convincing that it forced even John Bright, chief champion of the view that women's interests were completely represented through their husbands and fathers, for the first and only time into the lobby in favour of a woman's suffrage motion. One by one these worst evils were amended, almost entirely through the efforts of men and women who were simultaneously working for women's franchise, the enemy being either defeated or giving way step by step in the hope that they would thus blunt the edge of the demand for the vote. But with a very few exceptions, each success achieved cost years of endeavour. Thus, even such a reform as that requiring the training and registration of midwives, demanded almost wholly as a necessary protection for the lives of mothers and infants, cost twelve years' struggle against the professional jealousy of the baser sort of medical men.

Since 1918, how the pace has quickened ! The prophecies of the opponents of women's suffrage were of two kinds : Either they were convinced with Lord Cromer, that if women had votes, the British Empire would within a few years have to put up its shutters, or they assured us and the world that the women's vote was going to make no kind of difference, and that we were deluding ourselves with pursuing a false light which had already misled men. How absurd even to the survivors among these prophets their prophecies must now look. The actual reforms incontestably won by the use of women's electoral influence are so well known to you that I will not waste your time by recapitulating them. They are summarized in the N.U.S.E.C. pamphlet by Dame Millicent Fawcett, "What the Vote has done." But those of us who are too young in years or in the movement to have been actors in this bit of feminist history or are so old that we are beginning to forget it, should refresh our memories by re-reading not only this pamphlet, but Dame Millicent's two little books, *Woman's Suffrage* and *The Women's Victory—and After*. The last chapter of the latter book sets out the six articles in the first "Immediate Programme" adopted

by the Annual Council of the N.U.S.E.C. after our change of name and constitution in 1920. Summarized, they were as follows :—

1. Equal pay for equal work, and equal opportunities in industry and the professions.
2. Reform of the divorce law and with the law dealing with solicitation and prostitution. An equal moral standard.
3. Pensions for civilian widows.
4. An extension of the women's franchise. The return to Parliament of women candidates holding our equality programme.
5. Equal rights of guardianship for both parents.
6. The opening of the legal professions to women, including their right to become solicitors, barristers, and magistrates.

The greater part of this programme has been achieved, or is on the verge of achievement, and we have in addition done pioneer work in the formation of public opinion with regard to certain reforms added later to our Immediate Programme, especially Family Allowances and the right of married women to obtain information with regard to Birth Control. The only article in respect to which we have made scarcely any progress is the first—equal pay and opportunities : partly because equality in these respects depends on economic and social customs and prejudices rather than on political action ; but partly because the voters enfranchised in 1918 included only a small minority of women in industry and the professions.

Secondly, what has been the special contribution of our Union to the movement ? Does contemplation of our past suggest any lessons for the future ? In the early days of militancy there was some danger, happily avoided, that the strength of the movement would be diverted into controversy over method. "It is notorious," as Mrs. Fawcett then noted, "that differences of method separate people from one another even more acutely than difference of aim." Mr. Nevinson once prophesied that

"If victory is won, it will be the militants who win it, not because they do this or that, but because they have no reservations. I do not mean that it will be theirs to receive the

enemy's surrender and enjoy the fruits of victory. Quite the contrary. When the moment comes, the other suffragists will smilingly enter the field over the wreckage of battle and assure us they always knew reasonable methods would prevail."

But "the other suffragists" have never done this. Looking back over the years, we shall probably agree (though I must only speak for myself) that both wings of the suffrage movement had an indispensable contribution to make. That of the Militants was made (as I see it) during the early stages of militancy when they succeeded in breaking down a Press boycott and in shocking an inattentive public first into attention, afterwards into recognition that here was a great issue for which women were willing to suffer and die. They supplied in short, one more example of Lord Acton's famous saying: "it seems to be a law of political existence, that no great advance in human freedom can be gained except after the display of some kind of violence." Later on, when for "displays of violence" one section of Militants substituted real violence (though of a minor kind) upon persons and property; when its methods were persisted in at a time when they provided numerous politicians with a much desired excuse for breaking pledges which they would otherwise have been compelled to fulfil—then militancy became I believe, not only no aid, but the chief obstacle of the suffrage movement.

Before, during and after the episode of militancy, which lasted from 1905 till the outbreak of war, "The other suffragists" kept on steadily with their task; converting the reason and winning the sympathies of the nation; devising one means after another of convincing politicians that principle and interest alike demanded their active support of our cause. The special contribution of the National Union may, if I read history aright, be summed up in two words: pertinacity and constructiveness. Public opinion has ebbed and flowed. We have sometimes been swimming against the tide and sometimes with it. But the National Union has always obeyed the injunction which Mrs. Fawcett once laid on us to

"Keep on ploughing when you've missed crops,
Keep on dancing when the fiddle stops,
Keep on faithful till the curtain drops."

Further, our pertinacity has not been of the stupid kind, which drops into a routine and maintains it by the mere force of inertia, but rather that of the skilled engineer, who recognises that there are moments when a charge of dynamite is the best way of removing obstructions, but when the explosion is over steps back to the hole it has made and resumes his task of measuring and levelling, plate-laying and riveting, until the whole road is completed. Thus, in the matter of equal franchise, we did not let even a year elapse after the 1918 Act before beginning to work by all the usual methods of Private Members' Bills, deputations, memorials, meetings, etc. Our 1920 Report, as we have seen, mentions the subject somewhat shyly and in a subordinate position. But a year later it had resumed its place of priority on our programme.

As for the other reforms won through the vote, you all know where we have led the way in initiating legislation or forming opinion and where we have merely seconded the efforts of others. We have no cause to be ashamed of the test. By the time the Council next meets we shall have completed another great stage in our movement. What lies beyond it? And by what if any readjustments of aim, constitution, and methods can we best face the tasks of the future? That is the question which during the coming year demands our thought, study, and pooled experience.

VICTORY—AND AFTER?

March 6th, 1929.

Just ten years ago you first chose me as President of the National Union, and now I greet you for the last time in that capacity.

It has been a great ten years, full of achievements of which we may be justly proud, not only because of the share we have had in them, but because they are themselves evidences and first-fruits of that older achievement—the Franchise Act of 1918. We used to be told that we exaggerated the power of the vote, but only ourselves can know the difference—the infinite difference—it has made to our work—in atmosphere, in rate of progress, in solid results.

Yet at times, progress has seemed (to our impatient generation) not fast but very slow. There have been occasional harvests of refreshing fruits, followed by long dry times. Thus in 1919 there was that great Measure, the Sex Disqualifications Removal Act cast up on our shores by the receding wave of the reconstruction movement. Then came a series of years when I find myself at our Council meetings comparing the National Union's year to a fisherman's day of great expectations, but no fish, to the labours of Sisyphus, pushing our hewn rocks of legislation up Constitution Hill, only to see them roll to the bottom again, to the reiterated record of trivial daily happenings, which flashes itself off against the sky in Trafalgar Square.

Yet how abundantly our method of reiterated, steady effort has been justified. When we look back to the list of reforms which we set ourselves to achieve in the first year after the victory of 1918, we find only one heading under which it is not possible to claim either complete victory or substantial advance. But with few exceptions, every advance has been painfully won after years of effort which seemed abortive at the time, but served to educate public opinion and convince Parliament of the strength and justice of our demands.

Take Equal Franchise—our latest, most complete and most important victory. As early as 1919 we were organising public meetings and processions of "women under 30" as a means of coercing the Coalition Government to fulfil its pledge to remove "all existing disabilities in the law between men and women." Each subsequent year had its special effort or device to break up the prevailing lethargy. I have only space to remind you that it was in response to appeals from the National Union that, in 1922, Mr. Bonar Law declared as Prime Minister the favourable opinion which was said to have greatly influenced the present Cabinet; that in 1924 Mr. Baldwin gave his famous election pledge of "Equal Political Rights" for men and women, that in 1925 the Home Secretary repeated and amplified that pledge, which has since been so honourably fulfilled.

In the Equal Moral Standard we have been less successful, because here is a reform which can never be fully implemented by legislation nor by anything less fundamental than a change of heart. But we have at least secured equality in the Divorce Law, through the Matrimonial Causes Act, 1924, our very own progeny, conceived, drafted, and promoted in our office, and carried through Parliament practically without opposition.

Our work for improvements in the status of wives and mothers has resulted in three reforms—Equal Guardianship, amendments to the law relating to Separation and Maintenance Orders, and Widows' Pensions, all three garnered in during the present Parliament, but as a result of long and patient tilling of the soil. The two former reforms were based on Bills of our own, painfully carried through their various stages in several successive Parliaments. For Widows' Pensions, in the shape finally enacted, we were less directly responsible, but we can at least claim priority in stirring up the agitation which made legislation inevitable.

Only in the matter of equal pay and opportunity we have made little or no headway. The reasons are obvious. Exceptional unemployment has intensified masculine jealousy and against the barriers of trade union and professional exclusiveness the methods we are wont to use in Parliament are well-nigh useless. We must think out new ways.

So much for the past. What of the future? I doubt if there are many members of the National Union who believe that we may safely sing our *Nunc Dimittis*, lay down our arms, and depart to enjoy a well-earned rest, or to enlist under other banners. But it is clearly time to review our forces and plan fresh campaigns. That is the business of this Council, and I do not wish to anticipate your decisions. But before taking leave of office in the Union, I will tell you shortly my own conception of its future tasks:

First, we must complete the destructive part of our work, by knocking down the remaining barriers of sex exclusiveness. So far as these are tangible barriers, embodied in laws or regulations—such as the law obliging a married woman to take her husband's nationality, or the regulations in many municipalities and other administrative bodies obliging her to resign on marriage—this should be comparatively easy. Regulations present a harder problem than laws, because there the evil is hydra-headed. It crops up in a thousand places and we have to contend not only with sex prejudices, but with the dislike of Parliament to interfere with the claim of those administering large concerns to regulate their appointments as seems best to them. We shall meet this difficulty best if we recognise that it has its reasonable side and can often only be got rid of indirectly, by getting at its hidden roots. To take one example, I believe that equality of opportunity and pay in the service of local authorities (and it is instructive to remember that in Manchester this service provides the livelihood of a tenth of the inhabitants) will only be achieved when first, the training and recruitment of the Local Government service is nationally provided for on a scientific basis, and secondly, the great economic obstacle to both equal opportunity and equal pay has been met by family allowances.

The same principle is even truer of those intangible barriers to sex equality which exist in the hearts of men. These can only be overcome by cultivating the faculty of regarding obstacles through the eyes of those that raise them, and then seeking to cut away from the obstacle everything that serves

to clothe it in a vesture of reason and respectability and to cover up its core of sheer sex prejudice.

And that brings me to the second remaining task of the women's movement, a task worth while for its own sake, but incidentally essential to the achievement of the first. Much of the difficulty of getting rid of sex barriers arises from the fact that women really do not always fit well into the administrative and economic structure of society as we find it. Naturally they do not, because that structure has been built by and for the sex which has hitherto practically alone inhabited it. We must recondition the structure till it has room and equipment to enable both men and women to do the work they are individually fitted for under conditions which meet the needs of both. It is futile to shut our eyes to the fact that the difference between the functions of paternity and maternity is a far-reaching fact which has its reactions on the whole sphere of economic activity.

I believe it is perception of this truth which has led the National Union, true to its original role of pioneer, to reject the narrower view of the functions of an equality Society, a view which would condemn us to for ever going about the world with a measuring tape, and, whenever a new reform is suggested to us, applying the tape and announcing "This must be good, because men have already ordered 99½ yards of it. We, too, will order 99½ yards, not an inch more or less." That is not equality; it is a slavish imitation of it, and it has its roots in the serf mentality which we have inherited from generations of subjection. Hence the National Union has already begun to use its new tool of citizenship upon those parts of the social structure where improvements are most necessary to meet women's special needs—upon questions such as family allowances, birth control, housing, and social insurance.

Thirdly—and here I know I am venturing on uncharted and probably stormy waters—must the contribution of the women's movement to the common weal, so far as it is a specialised contribution, be limited to those questions which specially concern women and their children? Or should it be

much more far-reaching than that? It would be rash to give a dogmatic answer. Possibly the reactions of the movement may take unexpected forms, some of them hidden from the eyes of this generation. No one can tell what fundamental changes in standards and values it may produce. But there is one idea which has been forcing itself on my mind lately, so I will just throw it out for your consideration:

Can it be merely a coincidence, that during those past generations when it required an immense effort for women to break through the tradition which forbade them to take part in public work, those who did break through were nearly all dominated by the same kind of motive—an overmastering desire to relieve some immense, hitherto neglected area of human suffering and injustice. Elizabeth Fry's work for the prisoners, that of Dorothea Dix for the lunatics, of Harriet Beecher Stowe for the slaves, of Florence Nightingale for the sick, of Josephine Butler for the prostitutes—had all this common characteristics. Is it possible that in the minds of women, more often than of men—as in the mind of the madman in Shelley's "Julian and Maddalo"—there is a

“ . . . nerve o'er which do creep
The else unfelt oppressions of the earth”?

Or to use a more up-to-date metaphor, is there a wave-length set up by human suffering, to which the minds of women give a specially good reception? Or is the explanation not psychological, but to be found in the nature of the work usually done by women, which sharpens certain of their faculties? It is the fact that while at present most men are engaged on jobs concerned with the production, distribution or exchange of wealth, most women's jobs are concerned directly with the human beings for whose benefit wealth is ostensibly produced. They are engaged on bearing and rearing, teaching, nursing, amusing or otherwise serving these human beings. It is a not unnatural consequence that men are more apt than women to forget the end in the means. They are indeed encouraged by tradition and public opinion to an absorption in their professional work which would be thought selfish in women, who

are expected at all times to show “a mind at leisure from itself,” to notice everyone's needs, desires and feelings.

There may be some who, in their reaction against the sentimental conception of women, may resent the idea of utilising rather than combating this traditional difference of outlook. There may be others who will agree that, however much it may have been exaggerated by popular presentation, it corresponds to real facts of human nature and human experience. If so, it may happen that among the results of the new citizenship of women—a result at which the Women's movement might do well to consciously aim—as its third specialised contribution to the common weal—will be a changed attitude on the part of society toward human happiness and suffering, especially towards the happiness or suffering of its less powerful and articulate members, a more scientific study of the reactions of political and economic machinery upon well-being and much more resolute dealing with unnecessary poverty, disease, and ugliness.

In fulfilling these three functions, I foresee a programme for the Women's Movement, and possibly for the National Union, which is not likely to be completed within the lifetime of even its youngest member.

