

# The Common Cause.

The Organ of the Women's Movement for Reform.

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ONE PENNY.

## The News of the Week.

### Editorial.

Human nature appears to be so constituted that it cannot bring itself to do anything until the last possible moment. We bow to Nature, and inform our correspondents regretfully that we cannot in future undertake to publish in the week's issue any communications that arrive later than first post Monday in that week. We had given first post Tuesday as the latest time, with the result that such masses of correspondence come in during Tuesday morning that it is physically impossible to deal with them. A few considerate people send in reports of

we know what they can do and what we can do. We take the hardest work upon ourselves, and no good and just woman can complain of want of consideration, legally or socially." This good gentleman, fresh from the exhilarating task of "weighing up" women, is shocked by "M.A.'s" statement that children and housing are women's questions; she exhibits "a strain of self-assertion which it is not pleasant to behold," and he adds that he discusses "these women's matters, of which 'M.A.' so glibly speaks," with his wife and daughters, and "the advice of 'M.A.' or any woman who has studied at Girton, Oxford, or Cambridge, is of no importance to me." We can picture this gentleman laying down the law to the wife and daughters whom he



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FRU ANNA ROGSTAD.

Graphic Photo. Union.

meetings as soon as they have been held, and forthcoming meetings as soon as they are decided upon, and these people have the Editor's blessing and thanks.

### Correspondence in the "Nation."

We felt sure that Mr. Holford Knight's absurdities could only do good in rousing Liberal women to a sense of their true position. A lively correspondence has ensued in the "Nation." This week a member of the Devonshire Club and Miss Horne and Mr. Frank Marshall, of Keswick, all write pertinent letters. Last week there was a cogent and temperately worded letter signed "M.A.," which has roused a very comic splutter on the part of a patronising gentleman signing "G. S." He remarks, with portentous self-sufficiency, "We have weighed women up with kindness and with justice,

has taught to know their "sphere," and flattering himself that this is "discussion"; perhaps,—it is more than likely—his wife and daughters have "weighed him up," and apply to him the wisdom of the cynical poet: "Men must be taught as though you taught them not, And things unknown proposed as things forgot."

Anyhow we have to thank "G. S." for a good laugh, and if the letter is a hoax we congratulate the author of it.

### Annual Conservative Conference.

The 43rd annual conference of the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations will be held in Manchester on November 16, 17, and 18. One of the resolutions to be submitted "recognises the justice of granting the franchise to all women who, in other respects than sex, are qualified under the existing laws."



promised a Reform Bill before the dissolution of Parliament, barring accidents. The existence of the House of Lords appears to be an accident (one which might have been foreseen, we submit, but "on ne saurait penser a tout," and doubtless Mr. Asquith just forgot the House of Lords when he made his kind promise); this will probably prevent the Reform Bill from materializing, and then, in a new Parliament, of course, a Reform Bill cannot be brought in till near its end; it will then be someone's duty to invent another happy "accident," and so on as long as the game pays.

Meanwhile Lord Crewe gives Liberal women two alternatives: (1) "If the Suffrage was not made an issue by the Liberal party, and if they yet considered that in spite of that the party remained the best engine for progress in the country, they would be prepared to hope for the conversion of the Liberal party to their views. (2) If they thought that the cause of the Suffrage was more precious than the others, then he should even advise them to work only for the conversion of women to Woman Suffrage." It seems as if Lord Crewe could only imagine women as so many Lord Crewes in petticoats. Alternatives will suggest themselves to women other than being "prepared" to "hope" for "conversion," or than devoting themselves to converting those who are as helpless as themselves. We have no fear that women will know how to use rather more powerful weapons, and that they will by-and-by make it as well worth while for a politician to be their friend as to be their enemy.

### The Week's Wage.

By Mrs. Murray Hickson.

A thousand words are a thousand words; one cannot say much in them. But "The Common Cause" is a busy paper whose crowded spaces afford no wider room; therefore, when the Editor kindly allowed me a thousand words in which to write about "A Little Cheque," I was duly grateful, and now, when I am permitted to touch upon another aspect of the same subject, I am more grateful still.

It is hard upon a woman of the upper classes whose husband keeps too tight a hand upon the purse-strings, yet her lot is easy and pleasant compared with that of her poorer sister in the same plight. If the one feels the pinch of curtailed "pin-money," the degradation of having to "coax" for the price of a pair of gloves, what must it be to the other, whose bread, whose very existence, depends upon the character or the mood of the man she has married? In our class many women possess a portion of their own—settled upon them and secured by law. If we choose to let our husbands have the spending of that portion the fault is ours; due to inherent weakness on our part, inherent selfishness on his; it becomes, in fact, a question of character, and for questions of character no law finds a remedy. Laws help those who help themselves; they are powerless to provide for people who will not put them into operation. Of course, many upper-class wives are portionless; for them some provision should be arranged to ensure a certain justice, a certain independence, but their need for protection is nothing when compared with that of the working woman.

Can it be generally known that a man is in no way forced by law to provide for his wife and children? He may keep them without proper money, without proper food; he may desert them, he may cut down the supplies below living point, yet there is no redress. Only this: if wife and children are forced into the Workhouse, the Workhouse authorities may recover the amount of their keep from the husband—if they can find him. The wife has no power to compel her "man" to provide for her or for her children.

This being so, any law apportioning to the wife a fixed allowance, according to her husband's means, would be of service in cases of gross neglect or of desertion. That no such law exists is an amazing thing, luckily, not a well recognised fact. Did the mass of working-men realize their irresponsibility, possibly their families would be worse off than now; as it is, there exist among them—just as amongst men of better class—varying standards

of honour as regards their womankind; some high, some low, some unaccountable; yet few of them falling below a notion that bare, necessary maintenance should be provided. The opinion of their fellows carries weight, as it does with most of us; but the ideas of many working-men about the necessities of life for women and children are not only interesting, but astonishing. In one of the big Yorkshire cities it is quite a common thing for a man earning from two to five pounds a week to give his wife sixteen, eighteen, or twenty shillings upon which to provide for the household, while he spends the remainder on dogs, "sport," gambling, and drink. Now it is not easy to clothe and feed six or seven people, to pay the doctor, and to keep a household going upon sixteen, or even upon twenty shillings a week. The wife works very, very hard to do it. She bears the children, she brings them up, she cooks, cleans, sews, and nurses. She feeds her family, herself, and her lord and master (these North-country skilled workmen like to eat and drink abundantly), and she defrays all household expenses out of this pittance. Presently bad times come; nothing is saved; the woman is obliged to run into debt. Again trade revives; money is plentiful, but frequently the wife does not benefit. She has fallen behind in her weekly payments and she cannot regain lost ground. Then follows the inevitable. The harassed shopkeeper, often a poor widow barely able to keep head above water, resorts to the County Court, and the man—responsible and ostensible head of the family, as he likes to be, as he should be considered—is summoned for debt. He seldom, or never, appears; he sends his drudge—the wife. Arrived in court, she can only plead: "Please, your Honour, I have but sixteen shillings a week: That's what my man gives me." The wages books are turned up; the court finds that the husband is making two, three, or five pounds, and the court says so. The statement doesn't affect the woman, poor thing. She is usually unable to realize that, under these conditions, she ought to receive more, and all she can say is: "My man must have some money for boots and beer." This reply greatly amuses a busy judge in the North; he once remarked that in all his life he had not spent on boots what a Yorkshire workman seems to lay out in a single year. In the end a judgment order is made; but how can the wife pay? She can't, she doesn't, and the matter drags on until finally her husband is ordered to pay or go to prison—not "for debt," as so many believe; imprisonment for debt is obsolete and unknown, but for contempt of court, for refusing to pay just debts while possessing the means with which to discharge them. He seldom goes to prison. In 99 cases out of a hundred he damns—and pays! Then the whole weary round recommences, and so on, *da capo*.

Now, if some law could be framed—it would be difficult, yet surely not impossible,—if some law could be framed to secure a minimum allowance to every wife based upon her husband's earnings, half this misery would be swept away. Surely, with Woman's Suffrage, something could be done. Without it, there seems but little chance, because men, in the bulk, are unable to realize how hardly a shortage of money presses upon their women. They do not mean to be cruel, either the working-men or the men of the upper classes, but it is not they who lack independence; and they simply haven't imagination to put themselves in a women's place. How should they?

A friend urges that such a law would press hardly upon those men whose wives are bad managers, foolish, drunken, or spendthrift. Also that no good man withholds a proper maintenance from his wife and children. This is true. But laws are not framed to shackle good people, but to keep in order bad or faulty ones, and for the protection of the weak who cannot protect themselves, whether "the weak" compose a class or a sex. The drunken, the silly, wife would have but a minimum of money to squander. No husband would be bound to give more than a fixed sum, though, of course, he could give more when he wished to do so, even to the half, or the whole, of his kingdom. And—again it would be difficult, yet possible—some clause could surely be arranged which should protect a husband from his wife's culpable extravagance and, in view of her incapacity, allow him to administer her portion!

In any case such a law would press no more heavily upon a careful, generous husband mated with a bad wife, than its absence now affects the good wife, eager to do her best, but groaning under the oppression of a tyrannical or mean husband—an "owner" from whose injustice she can obtain no redress.

[Note.—This article was in type before the appearance of an article on a similar subject in "The Englishwoman." It is good to think the subject is "in the air."]

### In Parliament.

#### Another Reform Bill Thrown Out.

The House of Commons did not sit all last week. In the House of Lords on the 9th, Lord Denman moved the second reading of the London Elections Bill, and

Lord Derby, in moving its rejection, said that there had been no commotion in the country over the rejection of the Plural Voting Bill, and there would be none over this. Lord Crewe, replying to Viscount Midleton, made a statement about "piecemeal legislation," to which reference is made in our leading article.

The Bill was rejected, 40 voting for and 157 against a second reading.

### Irish Land Bill.

Negotiations are said to be proceeding between the Earl of Crewe, Lord Lansdowne, Mr. Birrell, the Attorney-General for Ireland, Lord Londonderry, and Mr. Walter Long, on the subject of the Irish Land Bill, the whole of the Lords' amendments to it having been thrown out by the Commons.

### NATIONAL UNION OF WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE SOCIETIES.

OBJECT: To obtain the Parliamentary vote for women on the same terms as it is or may be granted to men.  
METHODS: By orderly propaganda and public discussion to place the question before the electors, that they may press it upon the Members of Parliament. The Union is strictly non-party.

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### The Executive Committee.

The whole force and enthusiasm of the National Union must from now be put forth to carry out the great scheme of constructive work at the general election. To start this great campaign, we are holding a meeting in the Scala Theatre on Tuesday, December 7, at 8 o'clock. Mrs. Fawcett, Councillor Margaret Ashton, and Miss Helen Fraser, all speakers from the fighting line, will there set forth our policy and, with the help of Miss Bertha Mason in the chair, put before the members of the Union our practical needs in the way of funds. What we have to do in this coming general election is to make sure the Budget question shall not swamp the equally urgent matter of women's enfranchisement. That is not an easy task. *But it can be done.* We have the beginnings of such a work in the voters' petition. We must make this an overwhelming demand, and send up to Parliament a mandate which cannot be disregarded. The petition is to be one part of our policy. As to the rest, we must wait till the 6th for the Council's decisions, which will be announced at the Scala on the 7th. As for the petition, we must set ourselves to get at least one million signatures, and this work can be started at once. The petition forms are ready at the office, and the register of voters can be obtained at any Town Hall. All that need be done is to get the forms, look out the names of the voters on the register, and then go and see them; at the same time holding small meetings, whether indoors or outdoors, explaining how much men can do to help us by signing our petition, and by asking their candidate questions. In a few days a simple leaflet about the petition will be ready, and if every secretary will send for election literature early it will be a great help. We can make this election a Suffrage election if we put our whole strength forward. We must make it a triumph of constitutionalism and of justice, and show at this moment of political excitement that the women of the nation must no longer be excluded from sharing in the responsibility of a great national decision. Just now what we need most is help for the meeting; people to sell tickets and to buy them, and distribute handbills, to act as stewards, and to give donations. Will everyone who can help send in his or her name as soon as possible to me, at 25, Victoria Street?

MARION PHILLIPS.

### Treasurer's Notes.

Subscriptions and Donations, Nov. 1 to Nov. 13.		£	s.	d.
Mrs. Napier (Don.) General Fund	.....	5	0	0
Mrs. Henry F. Cox (Don.) General Fund	...	0	10	6
Miss Eleanor Rathbone (Don.) General Election Fund	.....	100	0	0
Miss Eleanor Rathbone (Don.) Welsh Campaign Fund	.....	50	0	0
Miss M. B. Thornton (Sub.)	.....	10	0	0
Miss Vida Morris (Don.) General Fund	.....	0	1	0
Miss Margaret Ashton (Don.) General Election Fund	.....	50	0	0
Miss Jessie Green (Don.) 3d.-bit Fund	.....	1	5	0
Cardiff W.S.S., per Mrs. Morgan (Don.) General Election Fund	.....	3	6	10
Miss W. Harold (Sub.)	.....	0	1	0
Brighton W.S.S., per Miss Allum (Don.) General Election Fund	.....	0	14	6
Anon. (Don.) General Election Fund	.....	0	2	6
		221	0	4

BERTHA MASON, Treasurer.

### Women's Suffrage and the General Election.

The general election will be fought on one great issue—the greatest constitutional fight of generations. Where do Women Suffragists stand, and what is expedient for them to do? Since the last general election much has been done for the reform. Conflicting policies have been carried out, and tactics of obstruction and reprisal have loomed large. The anti-Government policy, conceived at its inception to be one that would wrest a pledge speedily from the Government, has gone on till it has degenerated into an anti-Liberal one, till antagonism, riot, and violence have become the order of the day, and its most brilliant exponents have become merely the tools of the vote-catching politician of the Opposition. It was an idea that was the result of a grave miscalculation of the support the demand had in the country. It was a policy that was a failure eighteen months ago, that was admittedly a failure when they cast the first stone, and refused the right of free speech to the Cabinet. If the anti-Government policy were really effective politically, if it exerted the pressure upon the governing party of which we hear so much, *no tactics save the anti-Government by-election policy would be necessary.*

If it really put pressure upon the Government, if it really damaged and defeated its candidates, no women would need to go to prison, no tactics would be required. It does not.













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