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WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE.

SIXTH ANNUAL REPORT

· OF THE

EDINBURGH NATIONAL SOCIETY

FOR

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE.

Adopted at a Public Meeting held in the Bible Society Rooms, 5 St Andrew Square, 25th February 1874.

EDINBURGH: PRINTED BY JOHN GREIG & SON.

MDCCCLXXIV.



EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

MRS M'LAREN, Newington House, PRESIDENT.

MISS BURTON, Liberton Bank. MISS CALDWELL, 2 Victoria Terrace, Portobello. MISS CRAIG, 6 Carlton Street. MISS CRUDELIUS, 14 Inverleith Terrace. MRS FERGUSON HOME of Bassendean. MISS HUNTER, 5 Great Stuart Street. MISS M. HUNTER, 5 Great Stuart Street. MISS E. KIRKLAND, 13 Raeburn Place. MRS Low, 30 Minto Street. MRS MASSON, 10 Regent Terrace. MRS M'QUEEN of Braxfield. MRS NICHOL, Huntly Lodge. MRS ORD of Muirhouselaw. MRS ROBERTSON, 25 Blacket Place. MISS E. STEVENSON, 13 Randolph Crescent. MRS WELLSTOOD, 14 Duncan Street. MRS WIGHAM, 5 Gray Street.

MISS A. CRAIG, 6 Carlton Street, TREASURER.

MISS WIGHAM, 5 South Gray Street,
MISS AGNES M'LAREN, Newington House,
MISS TAYLOUR, 54 Rankeillor Street,

This Society consists of all friendly to its object, and who subscribe to its Funds.

EDINBURGH NATIONAL SOCIETY FOR WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE.

ANNUAL MEETING.

The Annual Public Meeting in connection with this Society was held in the Rooms, No. 5 St Andrew Square, on February 25, 1874. There was a crowded attendance, composed almost entirely of ladies. The gentlemen present included—the Lord Provost, M.P.; Mr Duncan M'Laren, M.P.; Professor Kelland, Dr Donaldson, Royal High School; Mr Fothergill of Keswick, Councillor Wellstood, Mr George Hope (late of Fentonbarns), Mr R. A. Maefie: and amongst the ladies were—Mrs M'Laren (Newington House), the President; Miss Agnes M'Laren, Miss Wigham, Mrs M'Queen of Braxfield, Mrs Wellstood, Mrs Maefie, Miss Taylour, Miss Stevenson, Mrs Robertson, Miss Craig, Miss Hunter, &c. &c.

On the motion of Professor Kelland,

Mrs M'LAREN, President of the Society, took the chair. After a few preliminary remarks, and reading a note of apology on behalf of Professor and Mrs Masson, regretting unavoidable absence, she said—Our agitation has arrived at a point where we think we can anticipate the early crowning of our efforts with success. Very large and important meetings are being held in the principal towns in England. Last night, there was one in the large Free Trade Hall in Manchester. I think there never was an agitation which has proved more calculated to throw light upon a variety of social questions than the one in whose interests we are here met together. It has thrown a flood of light upon the position of women. It has opened our eyes to a number of questions that concern the wellbeing of both men and women; for whatever affects the one affects the other, for good or evil. We have been led to see many deficiencies in our social and political system, owing to the status of women being lower than that of men. Duties that are most obviously fit for women have been withheld from them. There is a large amount of light respecting their capacity for work in this city. One black cloud still hovers over our University, which must sooner or later be

dispelled; but whenever this may take place, "memory will lie heavy on the atmosphere around;" for the fact that the women who sought to learn the healing art within her walls, with an ability so unexpected, that I am not sure whether it did not prove adverse to their success, and being refused, were forced to seek instruction elsewhere, will remain a dark spot on the historic page of that noble institution. It is to Parliament that the women of this country must now appeal for the right to enter our universities; and I need hardly say to an intelligent audience like the present, how much much more readily their claims would be listened to could they urge them through the means of the suffrage. It would seem as though light did not logically attend upon high culture; for I read with surprise the other day that in Boston, in the United States, which is the centre of literary refinement in that great country—a country, too, where women-teachers prevail in their schools—two ladies had been appointed to sit at the School Board, and the men who were elected along with them had refused to allow them the position to which they had been raised by the electors. We may conclude, also, that light and logic do not necessarily attend upon wealth. I saw in the Manchester Examiner yesterday that the School Board there were in want of four officers to act as visitors among the children's parents, and the committee recommended that one of them should be a woman. The lady member of the Board, as a matter of justice, proposed that two of the four visitors should be of the gentler sex. But Alderman Lamb, who, I fear, is only a lamb in name—(laughter)—"scented mischief in the air," and moved an amendment that all four should be men. This was carried by a majority of one-Canon Toole, Canon Whitelegge, and the Rev. J. Munn voting with the majority. I have no doubt these clergymen regularly employ ladies to visit the poor of their congregations. But they had some undefined notion that because a Board was to appoint these ladies to such work, it would put them quite out of their sphere. If I were a Scotch lady I might prove what I am going to say—but English people are not expected to "prove all things" quite so much. I have an intuition that if women had the same political status that men have, these worthy canons would also have had an intuition that these ladies might have performed the task with propriety, of hunting up little children to go to school, even though appointed by a Board. Within the last month we have witnessed a great change in our political relations. The Conservatives are now in power, and I am sorry to say that we have to choose another leader to carry on our cause in Parliament. Manchester has unseated my brother, Jacob Bright, and although I am his sister, I trust you will pardon me when I say, that a nobler man did not sit in the House of Commons. (Applause.) He bore the brunt of the battle in the heat of the day. He was our leader when it required moral courage to lead, and having carried our question with confidence and dignity beyond the region of ridicule

and false arguments, he has now handed the leadership over to another, who may perhaps win the laurels he so much deserved to wear. The standard on which Justice is inscribed may, from force of circumstances, pass from one hand to another, but it is not permitted to fall to the ground. Having been disappointed in obtaining help from the Liberal Ministry, we have now, owing to the great changes which have taken place, to look to the Conservatives to join those Liberals who have stood fast by us in our movement; and as the Premier is with us, we have more hope of gaining our cause this session. (Applause.) I am sorry Mr Gladstone, whose high moral nature led him to confess from the Treasury bench how unjust the laws were towards women, had not the courage to confess that they ought to have the franchise on the same conditions under which it is given to men. (Hear, hear.) Whether man's intellect be higher than woman's, I am not here to dispute. Some say the spiritual nature of woman is higher than that of man, but it will only be when the fetters which law and custom have wound round her shall be broken, that it will be known to what excellence she can rise, or what really are the faculties with which God has endowed her. ("Hear, hear," and applause.)

Miss Wigham read the Report of the Executive Committee

and the Statement of Accounts.

Mr Duncan M'Laren, M.P., moved the adoption of the report. He congratulated the members of the Society on its success, as shewn by the steady increase of its supporters, both in and out of Parliament, since the question was first introduced. It was true, he said, that during the late general election some of their distinguished leaders of the cause in Parliament had lost their seats; but they might hope that, though they did not get men so good in all respects, the cause was so just that even though the new men were not so distinguished, they would be able and willing to carry forward the measure. (Hear, hear.) They were aware that the present Prime Minister, Mr Disraeli, many years ago distinctly declared himself in favour of the principle which they (the Society) advocated; and if as a Minister he felt at liberty to give effect to the opinions he expressed as a private member, that would give it a great impetus, if, indeed, it were not the means of carrying the measure at once. (Hear, hear.) Mr M'Laren then touched on some of the objections which had been advanced to women exercising the franchise. He held that the extremely quiet manner in which the elections of the school board and of the members of Parliament had passed over, amply proved that there was no foundation in the objection that the scenes and the rabble at the polling booths would be such that no lady would venture to go through them in order to record her vote. The scene at the polling booths at the recent election was one of perfect quietness, and such that the most fastidious lady could not have hesitated to go forward and exercise the privilege of voting, if she had been entitled to do so. Then it had been

objected that the admission of ladies to the franchise would be a Conservative measure—that it would strengthen the Tory party in the country and in Parliament. He (Mr M'Laren) did not see how any man could either prove or disprove that opinion. It was a matter that admitted of debate. But if it were the settlement of a question of justice, he did not see what they had to do with party considerations at all. (Hear, hear, and applause.) He held it was a right and proper measure; and they had no right to do an injustice by depriving the whole female householders of the country of the power of voting, lest it should have a particular effect—a strengthening effect on one political party, and an injurious effect on another party. (Hear.) It was said, for example, by many, that the passing of the Ballot Act would strengthen the Liberal party; that it would keep down coercion on the part of the landlords; that, in fact, the effect of it would be to give much greater influence to the Liberal party. For his own part he (Mr M Laren) never believed that. (Hear, hear.) And the result of the first Parliamentary election by ballot had blown to the wind all these theories, because it proved that the Ballot Act had strengthened the Conservative party if it had done anything. (Hear, hear.) And it might be the same in the case of the measure, if once passed, for the enfranchisement of women. (Hear, hear.) He held, however, that justice ought to prevail, no matter what might be the consequences to any party. (Applause.) Mr M'Laren concluded by again moving the adoption of the report.

Dr Donaldson seconded the motion, which was carried.

The Lord Provost moved that the following Memorial be forwarded:—

"To the Right Hon. Benjamin Disraeli, M.P., First Lord of the Treasury.
"The Memorial of Inhabitants of Edinburgh, in Public Meeting assembled

"Showeth,—That in grateful remembrance of the fact that you were the first Member of the House of Commons to declare within its walls your assent to the justice of the claim of women to representation, and remembering that under your leadership the House of Commons recognised household suffrage to be in accordance with the constitution of this country, we beg to remind you that this principle was not carried out in its integrity in the Reform Bill of 1868, as the franchise was only conferred upon those householders who were men.

"As it did not include women who are householders or owners of property in their own right, we venture to hope that you who were a pioneer in the cause of women's suffrage, will take the earliest opportunity of remedying this injustice, now that you are again leader of the House

"We feel that it would be a fitting and graceful conclusion to our agitation that you should bring your powerful aid to crown it with

"And also that this meeting resolve to petition both Houses of Parliament to pass a measure extending the suffrage to women ratepayers on the same conditions as it is extended to men."

The LORD PROVOST then remarked that the country must congratulate the ladies at the prospect of bringing this movement to a happy conclusion, for the House of Commons must soon grant this act of justice to women. He proceeded to point out that women, with the same qualifications as men, could be got for about half the money to act as clerks in connection with the Post Office telegraphs, and to this cause was due, he was ashamed to say it, a large amount of reduction in the expenditure!! Those female clerks who were employed in the Post Office were so efficient and so imbued with the esprit de corps, that the service was never better performed than at present. He had been told on authority, that in the telegraph service there had never, on the part of one of the women, been one single breach of secrecy in regard to telegrams. (A laugh.) He hoped they would not look upon that as a joke. It was a fact that out of two thousand female clerks, there had never been one complaint. (Applause.) He went on to remark that there were about five thousand women in Edinburgh who occupied houses in their own right, and had no votes. He asked in vain for a valid reason why they should not have the privilege which their occupancy of houses and payment of taxes entitled them to. He congratulated them on having a Minister in the country who, whatever his politics were, was pledged to endeavour to carry this movement out, and from the great weight and power which he must necessarily have in Parliament, they might reasonably expect their efforts to be crowned speedily with success.

Mrs Stephen Wellstood seconded the motion. She said the memorial to the Prime Minister would, she was sure, commend itself to all the friends of the movement for obtaining female franchise, and she could not but feel very hopeful that its forcible, just, and temperate tone, would appeal convincingly to the heart and understanding of that eminent statesman who has so long declared himself a warm friend and advocate of the measure therein set forth. Their claim seemed to her such a simple and just one, that they could not but marvel that it was not at once conceded. They merely asked that all women who pay an equal amount of rent and taxes with men should share with them in the election of municipal and parliamentary representatives. If women have no part in the formation of the laws, surely they ought to have a voice in the selection of those to whom this power is entrusted, especially when so many of these laws relate to women, their persons, their property, their time, and their labour. (Applause.) The agitation for removing the electoral disabilities of women has been a long and earnest one, but when success shall have crowned the efforts put forth, those who have worked the hardest will reap the fullest reward, and enjoy the greatest amount of happiness and satisfaction. (Hear, hear.) Women themselves have been impelled by a strong feeling of justice and righteousness in the cause to come forward and plead their own question. They do not desire the franchise

merely for the sake of possessing a right to vote. They are actuated by nobler and clearer motives. They believe that their voice in the legislature would be an important element; that upon many questions their knowledge and instinctive penetration would be of great service. In finance, sanitary, and educational measures, religious and moral reforms, their opinions would be useful, weighty, and intelligent. Are there not many women, by their education, position, and natural cleverness, far more capable than some men of judging of the merits or demerits of opposing candidates? These men may be drunkards, idle, vicious—bad husbands and fathers, bad brothers, bad members of society helping on no reforms, but drags upon them. They, nevertheless, possess a right to vote. Their near neighbour may be respectable, sober, and industrious, training up sons to be useful citizens and good helpers to their country. She may pay a much larger amount of rent and taxes; but then, being "only a woman," she is little considered, because she has no vote to make her of importance. Is not this unjust? Then, too, women are classed together with lunatics, imbeciles, idiots, infants, and felons. The sooner this classification is dissolved the better, and they looked to all true men and women to do all in their power, and not to rest until both sexes have an equal share in elective prerogative. (Applause.) In conclusion, she would repeat a sentiment which she had recently met with from the pen of the late Joseph Mazzini, that friend of all true liberty. In an autograph book he thus wrote, "Women's emancipation must now be the watchword of all those who believe in the oneness of God's children." (Applause.)
The motion was passed.

Miss Burton moved—"That this meeting warmly thank our members of Parliament for the support they have already given us, and for their promises of future support." She reminded the meeting that they had also those friends to thank whom the sudden tide of affairs had excluded from the present House of Commons, particularly their great champion, Jacob Bright. She had every confidence that those friends would be as watchful out of the House as they had proved themselves in it, to give their valuable aid as opportunity might offer. But coming nearer home, they had much reason to be thankful for the assistance they had got; in particular, she must say, from their tried friend and representative, Mr Duncan M'Laren. She expressed her satisfaction that the new member for the city of Edinburgh had come forward so readily on this occasion to their assistance.

The motion was unanimously carried.

On the motion of Mr George Hope, late of Fentonbarns, a vote of thanks was then passed to Mrs M'Laren for presiding, and the meeting separated.

REPORT.

THE conclusion of our financial year finds the country occupied by the almost overwhelming interest of a General Election, the results of which must have a material bearing on the prosperity of many of the measures which have been brought before the late Parliament, and must involve our position for the present in some degree of indefiniteness. But our question has never been one of party; for it has been ably supported by the most advanced Liberals in the House, as well as by leading Conservatives. It may be recollected that before the first motion was introduced by John Stuart Mill, Mr Disraeli had arrived at the logical conclusion, with which his course has been consistent. We quote his words:—"As far as abstract reason is concerned, I should like to see anybody in this House get up and oppose the claim (of the other sex to the suffrage). I say that in a country governed by a woman—where you allow women to form part of the other estate of the realm—peeresses in their own right, for example—where you allow a woman not only to hold land, but to be a lady of the manor, and hold legal rights where a woman, by law, may be a churchwarden and overseer of the poor—I do not see, where she has so much to do with the State and the Church, on what reasons, if you come to right, she has not a right to vote."

But although thus the Woman's Suffrage Question is not one dependent on the general political opinions of Electors, yet we cannot but deeply feel the absence from Parliament of some of our most faithful and tried friends who have ably and fearlessly advocated our cause from year to year. Chief among these is Mr Jacob Bright, to whom our warmest gratitude is due. We trust his absence from the House may be only temporary; and we feel assured we shall still have his aid and influence operating on the country and its representatives, both in and out of Parliament, whether for the present his voice is heard in the House or not. We should also wish gratefully to mention the names of our unfailing friends the late members Messrs Miller and Macfie and Sir A. G. Maitland. We cannot, as yet, estimate our general strength in the new Parliament; but the returns from Scotland shew 31 pledged friends, 17 doubtful, and 12 opponents. We have much satisfaction in recording that the members for our City and University and for Leith, are pledged

supporters, and that our most decided antagonist is excluded from Parliament, namely, the leader of the Opposition, the late member for the Kilmarnock Burghs, the Right Hon. E. P. Bouverie.

And now it is right we should review our last year's operations, and give a little sketch of them to our constituents. These operations have been similar in character to those of previous years. Meetings have been held, addresses given, petitions prepared, committees formed and stimulated, and efforts made in every direction to enlighten public opinion as to the justice and expediency of our cause. Members of our Committee have travelled throughout Scotland, and have laboured earnestly and faithfully; 91 public meetings have been held; and 188 petitions, signed by 34,967 persons, have been prepared for Parliament; and there are in Scotland 62 allied Committees.

Our past year commenced with a very successful and interesting Annual Meeting in Queen Street Hall, on the 27th of January 1873. This year, instead of having one large public meeting, we have adopted the plan of ward meetings, eight of which have been held in different parts of the city. These have been presided over by the Magistrates or Town Councillors of the various districts, and have had the effect of diffusing interest and information, and in many cases local sub-committees have been formed to aid in the canvas for signatures to petitions, &c. We are very anxious to have well-signed petitions ready to support the next parliamentary action on this question. An extension of Household Suffrage to the Counties has been proposed, and Mr Gladstone has admitted that petitions in favour of that measure have been so important, that these claims of the agricultural population must receive attention. Now the petitions referred to on that matter were signed by 1,889; while those for women's suffrage had last year alone 329,206 signatures. The former measure was only brought to notice last year, while Women's Suffrage has been eight years before the House. The one would require a very large alteration in the distribution of seats, while the extension of the suffrage to women requires only the explicit consent of Parliament that all householders should be placed on the electoral roll, as women are already registered as rate-payers; so we would submit, that in any extension of the suffrage, the claims of women rank first.

Although hitherto the *Bill* has been rejected in the House, the *principle* of extending the electoral right to women is rapidly gaining ground. The Education Act for Scotland came into force during last year, entitling women to vote for members of the School Board. The elections proved not only that women were able and willing to vote, but that they encountered no practical difficulties in exercising this right; and it is of significant importance, that these elections shewed the popular confidence in the fitness of women to fill places of trust, for no fewer than eighteen women were elected as members of School

Boards in Scotland, and in eight instances they were placed at the head of the poll, while one woman was chosen to preside over the School Board of which she is a member.

Another concession to the principle of the eligibility of women as citizens, has lately been witnessed in the conferring of the freedom of the city, by the vote of the Town Council, and with the popular sanction, on the Baroness Burdett Coutts. She is the first woman who has been thus enrolled as a citizen of Edinburgh, and we hope it will not be long before full citizen rights will be extended to others.

As in previous years, we have to make record of loss to our cause by the removal of those who have stood firm in its defence. Chief among those of whom death has deprived us, is John Stuart Mill, whose appreciation of the right of women to share in the popular representation, and of the value to the nation of the co-operation of women in legislative and responsible positions, excites the gratitude of all who are interested in the development and advancement of women.

Standing as we now do between the old Parliament and the new, it is natural we should take a backward glance over the parliamentary progress of our question.

In 1866 Mr John Stuart Mill presented a petition signed by 1500 women of England and Scotland. In 1867 the same member brought forward the first motion for the enfranchisement of women, and presented petitions in its support signed by 13,457 names of men and women. This motion was pressed to a division, and eighty-one members, including tellers and pairs, voted for it. In 1868, 50,000 signatures were attached to the petitions, praying that the new Reform Bill, on its own principles, should include women in the extended representation of the country. Of these signatures 14,000 were from Scotland. In 1867 Women's Suffrage Societies began to be organised throughout the country, and public meetings were held, and ladies themselves came forward to plead the justice of the cause. London, Edinburgh, Dublin, Manchester, Bristol, and Birmingham, were early prominent in such organizations, and their efforts have met with much sympathy and support from the general community. In 1869, 126,475 signatures appealed to Parliament, and of these 19,000 were from Scotland.

In that year the municipal franchise was extended to women in England. This measure of justice was gained mainly by the tact and perseverance of our Parliamentary leader, Mr Jacob Bright. In 1870, petitions, signed by 134,566 names, of which 24,805 were from Scotland, were sent up in support of Mr Bright's Bill, which was carried on the second reading by a vote of 124, but was afterwards rejected on a motion to go into Committee, only 119 voting for it. In that year Mr Forster's Education Bill entitled women to vote in the election of the School Boards, and not only so, but to be themselves eligible for election on these boards.

In 1871, when Mr Jacob Bright, in a telling speech, moved the second reading of his Bill, 151 members voted for it—209 against it. The petitions were signed by 186,976. In 1872 the division shewed a still larger number in favour of the Bill, when 163 voted for it. The petitions in support were signed by 350,093, including 44,749 from Scotland. In that year the passing of the Ballot Act, and the extension of the Education Act to Scotland, were each important measures, and by their coming into operation, as we have already shewn, examples and proofs of the good sense of our demand are furnished.

Last year, when Mr Jacob Bright moved the second reading of the Bill, in an admirable speech, he was supported by Mr Eastwick, Mr Sergeant Sherlock, Lord John Manners, Mr Fawcett, Right Hon. J. W. Henley, and other influential members of Parliament. The speeches in opposition were, as usual, neither forcible nor dignified in character. The division shewed 170 members, of all political opinions, voting in favour of the Bill. Twenty-seven of the thirty-one friendly Scotch members were included in this vote, while only thirteen were included in the 222 against it. There were 949 petitions sent to support it, signed by 328,206.

It is of course to us matter of regret that the late Parliament had not the honour of carrying this measure of justice, but with such evidences of rapid progress as we have detailed, we have no ground for discouragement. The educational influence of our movement is manifest, and we look forward with confidence in the hope that it will not be long before women will have conferred on them the electoral right and privilege, and that in exercising it they will always bear in mind that it is to be used as an instrumentality for the promotion of that Righteousness which alone exalteth a Nation, and of that impartial Justice which can alone secure the confidence and prosperity of the People.

Note.—Just as we are going to press, we are informed that Mr Forsyth, Q.C., Conservative member for Marylebone, has kindly consented to lead the Women's Suffrage Question in the House of Commons.

Publications Sold Collections at Meetings and Donations NCO 2 E Testimonial to Miss Beedy, in cons Expenses of Secretary Expenses of getting up Petitions Expenses of Ninety-one Public Meetings and Publications

£498

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Balance in Treasurer's hand:

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TREASURER'S

STATEMENT

FOR

YEAR

ENDING 31st JANUARY 1874.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS AND DONATIONS DURING 1873.

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Anderson, Mrs G. G. Anderson, Mrs W.		5	0	Friend, A 0 1	0
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Neill, Mr J. Nelson, T., & Sons . Nichol, Mrs Noble, Mr . Norton, Hon. Miss . Oliver, Mr J. S. Ord, Mr and Mrs	0 3 1 0 10 0 0 2 10 0	0 0 0 0 0 0	Walker, Mr A. Walls, Miss. Walls, Mr Walls, Mr James Wallace, Mrs Warren, Mr and Mrs Wellstood, Mrs S. Wellstood, Mrs J.	$ \begin{array}{cccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccc$	5 5 1 0	0 0 0 0 0 6 0 0
Orme, Miss	0 2 3 3 0 4 0 2 0 5 5 0 0 2 0 10 0 2 0 3 2 0 5 0 3 0 0 10	6 0 0 6 0 6 6 0 0 6 0 0 0 0 0 0	Western, Mr P. White, Mrs . Whitelaw, Mr J. Wigham, Mrs . Wigham, Miss Wilson, Bailie Wilson, Mr, Cowley Hill Wilson, Miss Wright, Mrs. Collected by Wright, Mr J. Wright, Mrs . Wyld, Miss A. W. N. Yeaman, Mr, M.P Young, Captain	2 0 1 0 1 0 1 0 1 0 1 0 0 0 0	0 5 0 0 0 0 7 2 2	6 0 0 0 0 6 0 0 6 0 0 6 0 0 6 0 0 0