

NATIONAL SOCIETY FOR WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE.

CENTRAL COMMITTEE.

The object of the Society is to obtain the Parliamentary Franchise for Women on the same conditions as it is, or may be granted to men.

The Society seeks to achieve this object:—

1. By acting as a centre for the collection and diffusion of information with regard to the progress of the movement in all parts of the country.
2. By holding Public Meetings in support of the repeal of the Electoral Disabilities of women.
3. By the publication of Pamphlets, Leaflets, and other Literature bearing upon the question.

RULES.

PASSED AT THE GENERAL MEETING OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE AND SUBSCRIBERS TO ITS FUNDS, HELD JULY 17TH, 1872.

1. The Central Committee shall consist of the present members and such others as the Executive Committee may, from time to time, elect.
2. The Executive Committee shall consist of members of the Central Committee, to be elected at the Annual General Meeting, and of single delegates, the same being members of Local Committees, appointed by Local Associations to represent them; the Executive Committee having power to add to the Central Committee, and to its own number, and to appoint the Officers.
3. A subscription of any amount constitutes membership of the National Society.
4. A General Meeting of the Central Committee shall be held once a year to appoint the Executive Committee, to receive the Annual Report and the Financial Statement, and to transact any other business which may arise.
5. The Executive Committee shall, at its first meeting, appoint the Officers.
6. A Special General Meeting may be called by the Executive Committee at any time; or, at the written request of not less than twenty-five members of the Central Committee the Secretary or Secretaries shall call a Special General Meeting to discuss such matters only as are mentioned in the notice of such meeting.
7. Eight days' public notice shall be given of all General Meetings.
8. The above rules shall not be altered except at a General Meeting, after fourteen days' notice of the proposed alteration given to the Executive Committee.

615465755 (8) ✓

1896

 ANNUAL REPORT.

It is with regret that your Committee have to record the failure to secure during the present session any consideration by Parliament of a measure for extending the Parliamentary Franchise to women.

Shortly after the opening of the session a Conference of friendly Members was convened by Mr. George Wyndham in one of the Committee Rooms of the House of Commons.

The following Members of Parliament were present:—Mr. Jebb, Mr. Atherley Jones, Mr. Lewis Fry, Mr. C. B. McLaren, Sir W. Arroll, Mr. Rankin, Mr. Platt-Higgins, Mr. Drucker, Mr. W. Johnston, Mr. J. H. Johnstone, Major Wyndham Quin, Mr. Jacoby, Mr. Alexander Wylie, Mr. Ernest Gray, Mr. Thos. Skewes-Cox, Mr. Yoxhall, Mr. M. Vaughan-Davies, Major Pryce-Jones, Mr. Francis S. Russell, Mr. Guy Pym, and Mr. J. A. Rentoul.

The following ladies were also present by invitation:—Lady Frances Balfour, Mrs. Fawcett, Mrs. Russell Cooke, Mrs. Ashworth Hallett, Mrs. Phillp, Miss Blackburn, Miss Cozens, Miss Edith Palliser and Miss Gertrude Stewart.

The announcement was made by Mr. Wyndham that, among the Members who had balloted for the Women's Franchise Bill, the best place had been secured by Mr. Faithfull Begg, M.P. for the St. Rollox Division of Glasgow. He had obtained the twelfth place out of over 400 Members who had balloted that day for numerous Bills; and it was subsequently announced that a first place on Wednesday, May 20th, had been secured.

The following is the text of the Bill, which was introduced by Mr. Faithful Begg and backed by Mr. Wyndham, Mr.

Jebb, Mr. Justin McCarthy, Mr. Maclure, Mr. C. B. McLaren, Sir Albert Rollit, Mr. Atherley Jones, Mr. Rankin, Mr. Macdona, and Colonel Cotton Jodrell.

PARLIAMENTARY FRANCHISE (EXTENSION TO WOMEN) BILL.

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

1. This Act may be cited as the Parliamentary Franchise (Extension to Women) Act, 1896.

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

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

Hopeful prospects were entertained that the second reading of the Bill would be carried. The joint Committee which had been formed for Parliamentary action and consultation, consisting of members of the Central Committee of the National Society for Women's Suffrage, the Central National Society for Women's Suffrage, and the Manchester National Society for Women's Suffrage, has co-operated with the various Women's Suffrage Societies throughout the country, and all have been active in promoting work in support of the Bill and in doing all in their power to ensure its success. Meetings were held in Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool, Rochdale, Halifax, Leeds, Birkenhead, Nottingham, Bristol, Leicester, Southampton and other towns.

Memorials and Resolutions were forwarded to Members asking them to give their support to Mr. Faithfull Begg's Bill. Mr. Radcliffe Cooke, M.P. for Hereford, who had undertaken to move the rejection of the Bill, received a petition signed by a large number of leading residents in Hereford in favour of the Bill. But as the time drew near for the second reading, the Government announced their intention of taking the three Wednesdays before Whitsuntide for Government

business, thus precluding all chances of the Bill coming forward.

A Memorial signed by a large number of influential and representative women was forwarded to Mr. Balfour, asking that if possible the day might be preserved. In replying to a request that he would receive a deputation of ladies to ask him to reserve the day, Mr. Balfour wrote "Nothing that they could say would increase my strong desire to reserve Wednesday for the Suffrage Bill, and nothing that they can do, could, I fear, render such a consummation possible." Later, in reply to a question put to him in the House, Mr. Balfour said that it was a "matter of lively regret" to him that the Bill could not be brought forward.

Though disappointed by the loss of the day for the second reading of the Bill this Session, your Committee feel that there is much ground for encouragement and hope in the future. The result of the General Election has been to return to the House of Commons over 300 members who are known to be friendly to the movement; while on the other hand the number of known opponents in the House has diminished.

The increased activity of women in practical political work was strikingly manifested during the General Election of last year. Members and candidates of all parties have given cordial testimony to the usefulness and efficiency of the electoral work done by women, and have also given full recognition to the fact that women are immediately concerned in all matters relating to the good government of the country.

The Prime Minister speaking on this point on April 29th, at the meeting of the Grand Habitation of the Primrose League, at Covent Garden, said that the active work of women in politics represented "the discovery of a latent force never before used in support of the institutions of the country." He said that the quiet influences of private life, the influence of mind acting on mind in conversation, had recently become one of the most potent factors in determin-

ing the political history of the country, and that this had made available in political life the influence of those who were most deeply interested in the fundamental institutions of society, *viz.*, the women of England.

He also once more expressed the opinion "that women had not that voice they ought to have in the selection of the representatives of the English people."

There is further cause for congratulation in the presentation this session of the Appeal from women in favour of the Suffrage. This Appeal, of which mention was made in our Annual Report last year, was signed by over a quarter of a million of women of all ranks and classes from nearly every constituency of Great Britain. It contained the signatures of many women of note engaged in social work; of leading women in Education, Literature, Art and Medicine. It was placed in Westminster Hall on Tuesday, May 19th, for inspection by members of the House of Commons.

The general interest created by the presentation of this Appeal will it is hoped tend to dispel the idea that women do not desire the Suffrage.

Invitations to a *Conversazione* were issued by the Executive Committees of the Central Committee of the National Society for Women's Suffrage and the Central National Society for Women's Suffrage, on Monday, May 18th, at the Galleries of the Royal Institute of Painters in Water Colours.

The following ladies formed the reception Committee:—The Lady Frances Balfour, Mrs. Faithful Begg, Mrs. Russell Cooke, Mrs. Fawcett, Lady Penrose Fitzgerald, Mrs. Haweis, Mrs. Priscilla Bright McLaren, Mrs. Charles McLaren, Mrs. Wynford Philipps, Mrs. Roller, The Countess of Selborne, Mrs. Sterling, Miss Louisa Stevenson and Mrs. Henry Sidgwick. A large number of friends and workers attended. In the course of the evening the Countess of Selborne took the chair, when short speeches were made by Mr. Faithfull Begg, M.P., Mrs. Fawcett and Mrs. Russell Cooke.

Your Committee note with satisfaction the passing into law in the early part of this session, of the Poor Law Guardians (Ireland) Bill which renders women eligible to act as Poor Law Guardians in Ireland. The Bill was introduced by Mr. W. Johnston (Belfast) and passed through both Houses of Parliament, practically without opposition.

In South Australia the first General Election in which women took part as voters was held on April 25th, 1896. The women voted in very large numbers, and the utmost order and good feeling prevailed. *The South Australian Register* of April 27th stated that the gloomy forebodings of those who had opposed Women's Suffrage had proved entirely groundless. The result of the election indicated that the weight of the women's vote had been cast in support of the Government which had enfranchised them. On June 11th, at the opening of the South Australian Parliament, the Governor's speech referred to the successful working of the Women's Suffrage Act (see *Times*, June 12th).

The second General Election since the passing of the Women's Suffrage Act in New Zealand will take place in November next.

Your Committee have to record with sorrow the loss they have sustained by the death of Miss Boucherett (Louisa), who was a valued and life-long supporter of the cause of Women's Suffrage. The death of Lord Knightley of Fawsley has also deprived the cause of an earnest supporter in the House of Lords.

In conclusion, your Committee observe with satisfaction that there never was a time when the various societies for Women's Suffrage were more harmonious. Steps are about to be taken still further to promote united action and co-operation between the Societies; and it is confidently anticipated that this will lead to a wide extension of active and efficient work throughout the autumn and winter, and will produce practical political results of a satisfactory character in the near future.

NATIONAL SOCIETY FOR WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE, CENTRAL COMMITTEE,
10, GREAT COLLEGE STREET, WESTMINSTER, S.W.

STATEMENT OF RECEIPTS AND EXPENDITURE FROM 1ST JULY, 1895, TO JUNE 30TH, 1896.

RECEIPTS.		EXPENDITURE.	
	£ s. d.		£ s. d.
To Balance brought forward, July 1st, 1895.	...	By Rent	40 0 0
General Fund	23 5 7	" Office Expenses	3 18 2
Election Fund	65 14 6	" Salaries	124 1 6
Subscriptions	89 0 1	" Meetings & Advertisements	61 16 9
" Donations	216 8 6	" Stationery, etc.	4 7 7
General Fund	67 4 0	" Printing & Publications	84 3 3
Election Fund	85 8 0	" Postage and Telegrams	36 5 4
Sale of Publications	152 12 0	" Newspapers & Parliamentary Papers	10 15 4
	4 2 9	" Election Expenses	70 7 4
	<u>£462 3 4</u>	Balance at Bankers	22 14 1
		" Cash in hand	3 14 0
			<u>£462 3 4</u>

Examined, compared with the books and vouchers, and found correct.

13, Victoria Street,
Westminster, S.W.
June 30th, 1896.

M. HARRIS SMITH, Auditor.
(Public Accountant.)