WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE.

FOURTEENTH ANNUAL MEETING

OF THE

Edinburgh National Society for Women's Suffrage,

HELD IN

THE BIBLE SOCIETY HOUSE,

5 ST ANDREW SQUARE,

3d MARCH 1882.

EDINBURGH

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1882.

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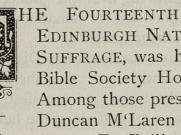
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EDINBURGH

NATIONAL SOCIETY FOR WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE.

ANNUAL MEETING.



THE FOURTEENTH ANNUAL MEETING of the EDINBURGH NATIONAL SOCIETY FOR WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE, was held on 3d March 1882, in the Bible Society House, No. 5 St Andrew Square. Among those present were Mr David Dickson, Mr Duncan M'Laren jun., Mr Hugh Rose, Rev. John Glasse, Ex-Bailie Lewis, Mr J. H. Waterston, Miss

Wigham, Mrs Shearer (Miss Helena Downing), London, Miss Blyth, Miss Burton, Mrs Nichol, Miss Stevenson, and others.

On the motion of Miss Wigham, who intimated that Mrs Duncan M'Laren, the President, who was to have occupied the chair, was prevented from being present owing to indisposition, Mr DAVID DICKSON was called upon to preside.

The CHAIRMAN, after expressing his sympathy with the objects of the movement, said they all regretted in every respect that Mrs M'Laren was unable to be present. Not only did they regret her absence, but they also regretted exceedingly the cause which had made her absence necessary. He was sorry to say she was much indisposed, and not able even to send them a communication of the nature which she was so well able to do. He considered their cause was very much won; the battle was fought and won, but the conditions of peace were yet to be signed. There had been no legislation carried through on the subject, but it was in the position of a question on which there was only one decided opinion, the difficulty of which was to put it into legislative shape. In short, the good ship was at the mouth of the harbour, but had not got into harbour yet. They must, therefore, use every exertion until their object was attained. One good result had come of it. They would have an end put with regard to the lethargy in the public mind as to the responsibility of exercising the right to vote. He had been ashamed of the people who, after voting once or twice, thought they had no responsibility in the matter, and that it was a privilege which they might exercise just as they liked. A minister in the church in New York, he had heard of, included as one of his subjects for confession the sin of the non-use of the electoral suffrage; and he thought his worthy friends the ministers might include that as a subject, for the neglect of which their people should feel deeply sorry.

Miss Wigham intimated letters of apology from Professor Calderwood, Professor Masson, Rev. Mr Sandeman, Mr Charles Guthrie, Rev. Mr Forrest, Mr John Trayner, Mr Francis Brown Douglas, Mrs Nairn, Mrs Bain, Miss Maitland, and others. Miss Wigham also read the Annual Report as follows:—

"We cannot but admit while glancing over the proceedings of the year just completed, that it has been one of remarkable hopefulness in reference to the Women's Suffrage question.

"Although the Bill for 'Removing the Electoral Disabilities of Women' was not introduced into Parliament, and there was no debate or division, yet tokens of cheer were so manifest, that we cannot but take courage while we press on and claim the help of our friends in the completion of our work of fifteen years.

"The principle that the votes of the governed should elect the governors, that the votes of the ratepayers should elect those who are to levy the rates, has had a manifest token of progress in the concession to women householders of the Municipal Franchise in Scotland. This privilege has been in the possession of the women of England for ten years, but it was only granted to women of Scotland in the year 1881; and women ratepayers are now recognised as electors in the same way as men are, and the same persons who now vote on the School Boards may henceforth vote in municipal elections. This is a very important concession, and a decided step towards the Parliamentary Franchise, while the vantage ground thus gained affords a firm position in the work of securing the greater electoral rank. It must be the business of all interested in this question, to endeavour to press on the new electors their responsibility to make use of the privilege granted them in such a way as shall most truly benefit the community. For this great gain the women of Scotland are mainly indebted to Dr Cameron, M.P. for Glasgow, who brought in the bill, and carried it through all its stages to successful issue, notwithstanding the great difficulty in carrying any measure in the House of Commons last year, and it received the Royal assent and became law on the 3d of June 1881.

"Owing to the state of Parliament, so disturbed by the Irish question, and hindered in all other matters that should have engaged the attention of our rulers, there was no opportunity to bring forward our question in the House; and therefore the efforts of our committee were not so much directed to bear on Parliament, as to the dissemination of information with a view to enlist public sentiment in the question, and to give an educational impulse to that portion of it who should shortly become electors in the country. We sent to Parliament only fifty petitions from Scotland, which were presented, bearing 6,181 signatures. As most of these were from women householders they possessed a significance and weight which the mere numbers could not indicate, and were much more valuable than a greatly more extensive signature of promiscuous names.

"A parliamentary election for the City of Edinburgh took place last year, also various changes in the representation of Scotland. The committee felt bound to wait by deputation on the new Lord Advocate, and on Mr Buchanan the new Member for Edinburgh, laying before them the object of our Association, and claiming their support in Parliament. These gentlemen received the deputations very courteously, and promised to consider carefully the right of women to the electoral franchise. It is to be hoped that the votes of these members will be recorded on the right side when the next division takes place in the House of Commons.

"Mr Hugh Mason is anxiously watching for an opportunity to ballot for a day to bring in his resolution. The electoral privilege was exercised by women in the Isle of Man on the 31st of March, when the General Election took place, and was open to the votes of 700 women, owners of houses and lands, as conferred by law and Royal assent the previous year. The interest manifested was so great, that at three of the polling places the first votes recorded were those of women.

"The work of agitation in our cause in England goes on vigorously. The sixth of the great demonstrations, of which five were mentioned in our last Report, took place at Bradford on November 22d; it was presided over by our own President, and our committee was also represented by three others of our members. The meeting was quite as important as its predecessors; the attendance was very large, and the resolutions were carried enthusiastically by the thousands of intelligent women who composed it; and the Liberal paper, the Bradford Observer, strongly supported our case. These resolutions were sent by Mrs M'Laren, by direction of the meeting, to the Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone, and to the Members for Bradford, the Hon. W. E. Forster and A. Illingworth, Esq. Courteous responses were returned.

The Premier gave a promise that when the county franchise should come up for consideration, the claims of women ratepayers should be also considered; and Mr Illingworth gave a hearty pledge that the Women's Suffrage Bill should, as heretofore, have his support in Parliament. The response of the Right Hon. W. E. Forster was not so favourable, and we cannot help a feeling of surprise that a demand so just and simple should fail to commend itself to any just and intelligent politicians of the Liberal side.

"The seventh of these remarkable demonstrations has just taken place at Sheffield, with complete success, and it seems to have proved even more interesting than its predecessors. Another large gathering is to be announced in April in London; and we look forward to having similar gatherings in Scotland in the course of the summer or autumn. We hope similar enthusiasm and success will attend them.

"The fourth School Board Election has taken place in our city, and again two women have offered themselves for candidates, in the interests of education, especially the education of girls, and we are glad that the result of the voting has been to place Miss Flora Stevenson and Mrs Bain at the top of the poll with a single exception, and if the voters are counted rather than the votes these two ladies take the first places.

"Another subject which is claiming the awakened attention of women, is the great importance of having women as members of the Board of Poor Law Guardians,—to watch over the interests of the women and children, and the economical departments of the parochial administration. In many of the cities and towns of England ladies have been asked, and in many instances elected, to serve on these boards, and the experience following such elections has uniformly proved their value. We hope that in another year such an appointment may be made in the parish elections of this city, and that ladies who have votes as ratepayers will not hold back from their exercise with this important object.

"And we wish again to remind all our lady householder friends, that they are entitled to vote for members of the Town Councils in the month of November next; and we anxiously desire that they will conscientiously exercise this privilege as a Christian duty for the good of the community, that they will carefully study the test questions which are brought forward at municipal elections, and look into the interests which are at stake, and so record their votes in such a manner as to influence for good the Town Councils of our Scottish towns, and through them benefit all classes of citizens and dwellers in our midst from the highest even to the lowest, and thus go on in educational fitness to exercise the more extended franchise

which justly pertains to them. When we consider that the number of women in the United Kingdom exceeds that of men by more than a million, and that one-third of these women are actual bread-winners, earning wages; and when we add to this number that of those who in their own homes are self-supporting by their industry, this proportion is greatly increased, and their labour increases also the capital of the country to seven-tenths of the whole,—surely there is a just claim for their direct representation, and surely the effort to obtain this is not unworthy of every man and woman who profess to be interested in the general well-being of the nation."

Mr Hugh Rose, in moving the adoption of the Report, said he had always felt ashamed, that in a country which was governed by a lady, who was, he unhesitatingly said, the best Sovereign that ever sat on the British throne, they should have to do what they were now doing, to bring before the people and educate the people as to the rights of women to have a share in the choosing of the legislators for our country. It was a maxim that was never departed from in this country, that taxation was entitled to representation. There was an exception to this rule by our law as it stood. There were three classes who were not entitled to their share in that representation. The first were the criminals, the second the idiots, and the third the women. Such was the law against which these ladies were protesting, and on which they were anxious to obtain the opinion of the country. All the ladies asked was, that those who were householders should be entitled to go to the ballot-boxes and say they had a right to elect the men who spent the money they paid towards the rates. That was a most reasonable demand, and fifty years hence people would be ashamed to believe that such an agitation as at present being carried on was necessary. The case was one of such common justice that he was ashamed to argue it, and was one which must come home to the common sense and good feeling of all those who looked at the question. He would waste the time of the meeting were he to attempt to argue in favour of such an Act being passed. The richest lady in the land was deprived, by the present state of the law, of the right to say who were to distribute the taxes she paid, while her coachman was favoured with the privilege to vote. He hoped the ladies would be sustained in the good work they were doing, and that ere long this ridiculous and unjust state of things would pass into oblivion.

Mr David Lewis seconded the resolution. He concurred in everything that had been stated by Mr Rose, and in the very admirable report. This was a question which would not suit argument. The first time he looked at it, many years ago, it was a question

which might have been submitted to some argument, but it was now past the region for discussion. The suffrage had been extended to females in regard to their municipal administration. They had also got the suffrage extended to the administration of educational questions. The suffrage was based upon a property qualification, and he did not see why women householders should not, as well as men, have the necessary Parliamentary qualification. Next November the Town Councils would be elected under the extended suffrage. Did they think there was any person in Edinburgh out of Morningside Asylum that could be got to believe or assert, that any Town Council elected in 1882 would not be as good as, if not better than, any of its predecessors elected under the former suffrage? Reference had been made in the report to the desirability of having ladies occupying positions in the administration of the poor laws. He could tell them, as one having a considerable experience as a poor law guardian, that he could not conceive they could have a greater advantage to the community than the practical adoption of this suggestion in the report. They had to consider the large number of women, and the immense number of dependents such as mere children, and in this they could conceive of a very good argument for the representation on the Parochial Board of ladies. He ventured to say that if this question was mooted at next election, it would be one of the most important questions which had been brought before the public.

Rev. JOHN GLASSE moved, "That in the opinion of this Meeting, the Parliamentary franchise should be extended to women who possess the qualifications which entitle men to vote, and who in all matters of local government have a right to vote, and that a petition based on this resolution be signed and forwarded to the House of Commons from this Meeting." He experienced difficulty in regard to getting up any enthusiasm on behalf of this resolution, as the thing seemed so utterly self-evident. The justice of this demand was so manifestly apparent, that really one could say nothing but the merest commonplaces in support of it. Dealing with some of the arguments urged against the proposal to give women the privilege of exercising the franchise, he said they were told that it was getting in the thin end of the wedge; they were asked where they were going to stop. Now, there was a good deal of sentimentalism in this argument. Persons who enjoyed the privilege of voting alone would be compelled ultimately to abandon that monopoly. Another argument one often met with from philosophic people, was in regard to the relative merits of the two sexes. The result of this argument was that women would never be men. Men, no doubt, were better fitted than women to serve society in one way, but that was no reason why

they should not be able to serve society at all. What they wanted was, that women should have the privilege of electing members of Parliament in precisely the same way as men. It was manifestly unjust to exclude women from this privilege, because any reasons which existed for giving men the franchise existed with equal force in giving women the franchise. They had a peculiar influence in the community, the same as men had. They saw this every day. As a matter of fact women had been wronged by the community, and they still maintained they were yet being wronged, and the only constitutional way in which they could redress those wrongs was that they should be privileged through their Parliamentary representatives to elect the Government that dealt with the affairs of the country. Some people said they had no interest in these matters, but he contended that there were matters of trade and also matters of morals in which women had an interest. It might be quite true that men could deal more justly with these things than they used to do, but at the same time they required, as matters of fact, to see that in those things that, however good their intentions might be, they did not overlook the interests of the women; and it was well that those who were specially interested in those things should have the power to bring them specially before the community. Then there was another thing which must be evident to them, and that was the fact that the Government had been waking to a sense of the injustice which women had hitherto suffered, and that there was really no justification for continuing what was the greatest of all injustices, namely, that the women were not competent to interest themselves in these matters, and bring them to a proper settlement. Women at the present time were under the government of a beneficent despot. Under certain circumstances he might be a useful individual, but in this country they never could apply to women what they were so unwilling to apply to themselves, and every one must see that they were not likely to receive rights and privileges at the hands of any despot, however beneficent. There was again another argument, that women had so much to do with household affairs and other things that they had not time to attend to political matters. He thought the argument was all the other way. He thought, as a rule, that women had more leisure than men; and one of the things which made him so much pleased with this modern movement for the emancipation of women was this, that the very fact that women were called upon to interest themselves in great public questions, gave them a training that raised them intellectually and morally above what they would otherwise be if shut out from their consideration. He thought the reason why the movement had not succeeded as well as it might have done might be seen in two ways. It was under the bann of the Conserv-

ative influence, the men of that political party believing in maintaining the present order of society. Then there was the objection on the Liberal side, that if they gave the women the franchise, they would be giving a strong Conservative vote,—that women by their very nature were Conservative. There was a little truth in that, but, as a strong Liberal, he appreciated the Conservatism that clung round old associations. The ladies, he knew, would manifest that kind of Conservatism in a way which one regretted to see so frequently absent in Liberalism, viz., by being more conscientious. It was easy at the present, he concluded, to convince the community that things were wrong; but having convinced them they were wrong, it was more difficult to induce them to abandon these things than put them right. He hoped that day he was assisting at the obsequies of the Society, and that ere another year had gone the Society would have fulfilled its functions, and obtained for the ladies what they deserved.

The Chairman then called upon Mrs Shearer, of London, to address the meeting. He remarked that Mrs Shearer would be better known to the meeting as Miss Downing.

Mrs Shearer said, that throughout England large meetings had been convened in support of the movement, and that these gatherings had been arranged and conducted by women alone, thus showing that members of their sex could perform active work. It certainly was a wonderful sight to see great halls in London, Manchester, Sheffield, Bradford, Nottingham, and Birmingham crowded with eager and enthusiastic women, all unanimous in favour of asking this extension of the franchise. These demonstrations, she considered, were a conclusive answer to the argument that the women of this country did not want the suffrage. Even Sir Henry James, the Attorney-General, had practically admitted, that if the women of the country were anxious for the suffrage, he for one would be prepared to grant it. She maintained that the women of the country did desire it, and mentioned among those most prominent in the demand, Miss Carpenter, Miss Martineau, the late George Eliot, and other intellectual women of the time. Even drawing-room ladies were now beginning to take the subject into consideration, 'and it was becoming fashionable, so there was every hope of the subject being brought to a satisfactory conclusion. The thanks of the Society, and of women generally, were greatly due to Dr Cameron, who, since she was last in Scotland, brought in the Municipal Franchise (Scotland) Bill, which gave to the women ratepayers of Scotland the same rights which their English sisters had possessed since 1869. Next November every woman householder living in a municipal burgh in Scotland, would be entitled to vote in the election of the town councillors for the burgh in which she resided. She hoped that the women of Scotland would exercise that privilege in large numbers. It was no light matter, because the good local government of the towns depended chiefly on what kind of men were returned at municipal elections. She did not know what money was collected annually in rates in Scotland, but it was estimated that in England and Wales the amount was somewhere about forty millions, while the Imperial taxation amounted to about seventy millions. By the municipal franchise women were allowed to have a voice in the expenditure of the forty millions, on the ground that women contributed to the rates, and that they, as well as men, were directly concerned in the good government of the town in which they resided. But surely this was applicable to the larger franchise as well. Women contributed their quota to the Imperial taxation as well as to the rates, and surely they were directly interested as well as men in the good government of the country. Was it not absurd—she would like to say illogical, only that want of logic was supposed to be specially a womanly defect, and she did not therefore like to accuse men of it—to grant the one franchise on the grounds which she had stated, and refuse the other, though based on precisely similar grounds? Some opponents said that women were not concerned in the great Imperial questions dealt with by Parliament. Where was there an Imperial question, she asked, which did not interest women as well as men? Take peace or war. There was no war in which the taxes of the people did not go up, and she was old enough to remember that during the Crimean war the bread went up to a shilling a loaf. That, of course, was a great matter to the women of the country. She was not one of those who advocated "peace at any price," but she maintained that no great war should be entered into by the Government without the voice of the women as well as that of the men being heard. There were, besides, thirty thousand female landowners in England and Wales,—she did not know how many there were in Scotland and Ireland,—but surely when rents were to be raised or lowered it was a matter of consequence to them. It was said there was every probability of a Scotch Land Bill being introduced before long, and she would ask, was it fair—she did not care whether they were Liberals or Conservatives—that so important a question should be settled without the opinion of the female landowners being heard on the subject? Turning from imperial questions to matters affecting women exclusively, Mrs Shearer contended that men were not competent to deal with them unaided by the help of women. Indeed, women's questions, like those of unrepresented classes generally, got shelved. A great Liberal statesman had said, in opposing the bill for the extension of the Parliamentary franchise to women ratepayers, that women were not a class apart from men in the same way as the agricultural labourer was from the farmer, or the farmer from the landlord, but that women's interests were as near and dear to them sitting there in the House of Commons as they were by their hearths and firesides. This was very beautiful in theory, but when she turned from that speech and read the daily accounts of the brutal outrages upon women, she was reminded of that passage—

"It was all very well to be told of your love, But why did you kick me down stairs?"

She would read to the meeting an extract taken from an article in the March number of *Macmillan*, by Mr Macfarlane, and let them judge for themselves whether women's interests were always safe in the hands of men:—

Crimes.	Sentences.
Kicking a wife to death	6 weeks hard labour.
Picking a woman's pocket of 9s. (second offence)	
Knocking down a wife and kicking her savagely	
in the face	3 months hard labour.
Stealing coals value 2s	8 months hard labour.
Trying to kill a wife with razor (second offence)	12 months hard labour.
Stealing watch value 30s. (second offence) .	5 years penal servitude.
Stealing a knife and keys	5 years penal servitude.
Striking violently in the face and indecently	
assaulting a woman	40s. fine.
Knocking down and kicking a woman twice .	£4 fine.

Evidently the law is very much more careful of property than of life, at least when the life happens to be that of a woman, and particularly that of a wife. Remember that probably all of these men are voters, and can at the next election go up and record their votes, and so help to frame the laws, which women are bound to obey as well as men. They have a voice in saying what punishment shall be meted out to wife beater or wife murderer, yet no woman is permitted to record a vote which might in some small degree help to alleviate the lot of these outraged and miserable women. If they had women taking a public interest in the affairs of the country some remedy would have been found long before this to such administration of justice. If men were only put in the position of women for one week, she was perfectly sure there would be a revolution in the land.

Take again the position a wife was placed in who was deserted by her husband. She had been elected a guardian of the poor last year, and a few months ago a respectable young woman called at her private house to ask her advice under the following circumstances. Her husband was earning £15 or £16 a month, and a few weeks before she called at Mrs Shearer he left her and her

little child. The woman knew where her husband was living, and the small amount she had in hand being exhausted, she wished to know could she not compel her husband to contribute to her maintenance. The only remedy the woman had, as Mrs Shearer found on inquiry, was this,—to come on the parish, enter a workhouse, be separated from her child, put on a pauper's dress, and take a pauper's fare, and then the Board of Guardians could recover from the husband. Now she, Mrs Shearer, contended that this was a monstrous state of things, and that this decent respectable married mother, should at least have the same remedy as the unmarried mother had, viz., be able at once, before the nearest magistrate, to sue her husband for a maintenance, without being made a pauper first. Surely women's interests were not protected here. Other instances could easily be adduced. Even legislation, which had for its object the benefit, or supposed benefit, of women, often did more harm than good, as she believed was the case with the last Factory Act. At any rate, questions affecting the labour of women should not be decided without the opinion of women being heard on the

In conclusion, Mrs Shearer urged upon all those present to take an increased interest in the movement, to spread a knowledge of their work throughout the length and breadth of Scotland, so that when she came in the autumn, as she hoped to do, to aid their committee in a Scotch demonstration, she would find the women of Scotland as earnest and as anxious about the matter as their English sisters were in the large manufacturing towns where she had been. They must of course be prepared for some opposition, perhaps for scoffing and ridicule, but their measure, like every good measure that was ever passed, was worth labouring for, was worth suffering for. If they believed in it, and yet shrank from upholding it, they must be prepared to be classed with those of whom the poet said:—

"They are slaves who dare not choose
Hatred, scoffing, and abuse,
Rather than in silence shrink
From the truth they needs must think;
They are slaves who dare not be
In the right with two or three."

Miss Burton moved a vote of thanks to Mrs Shearer, who had proved most completely that women were not only able to vote, but to legislate pretty well on these matters. Mrs Shearer had stated her opinions, and would be able to maintain them both manfully and well. She thought they might certainly feel proud of having women able to express themselves so well and so cleverly on these subjects.

Mrs Nichol seconded the motion, and in doing so said that

although they might not anticipate the realisation of the wish that they were all attending the obsequies of the Society, she hoped that the day was not far distant when the anomaly would cease to exist of women being allowed to vote at school board and municipal elections, and yet be debarred, whatever their position might be, from giving a vote for Parliamentary representatives.

Miss Wigham thought before they separated they should, as a women's meeting, express how thankful they were that the chance shot fired at Her Majesty, from whatever direction it came, was not fatal to the most beloved woman in the land.

The thanks of the meeting having been awarded to the Chairman, on the motion of Miss Louisa Stevenson, the proceedings terminated.

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10th April 1882.—I have examined the Treasurer's Statement, with the relative Accounts and Vouchers, for the past year, and find the ALEX. MATHESON, W.S.

ADDRESS

REV. CHARLES GREEN,

BY THE

Vicar of St. Paul's, Beckenham,

ON

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

DELIVERED IN

CHRIST CHURCH, LECTURE HALL,

TUESDAY, MAY 16th, 1882.

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