

The Woman Suffrage Question in England

(A Reply to Miss Hurlbatt)

The very able article which appeared in the last issue of the *Martlet* stated at the outset that the object of the Female Suffrage Movement in England to-day was to obtain the vote for women on the same basis as men. It must be admitted that a woman has, theoretically, the same right to vote as a man, and thus the first question to be asked is, what classes of women will be enfranchised if the present proposals succeed, and what will be the resultant good or harm?

In the first place, the author of that article admitted that many of the new female electors would be the wives of men who are already in possession of the franchise; and she justifies this by the statement that it would "increase the weight of the family vote." Presumably this means that the wife would vote for the same party as her husband, a proceeding which would simply double the married vote for either candidate without changing the present state of affairs in the least. This is obviously needless, and can do no possible good to women as a whole.

In the second place, it must be borne in mind that the test of wealth or property, which would hold good for women under this scheme, would be just the means of giving the vote to the rich, who do not want it, and of denying it to the women of the labouring classes, who do. This is the position recently adopted by the English labor party, and hence it is useless to bring up demonstrations of working women as evidence in favor of the present movement. In Aus-

tralia it has always been found that the well-to-do women are unwilling to go to the poll, and the same reluctance is shown in the Council Elections in England and Canada. Thus we can truthfully assert that most of the voters to be created under the present proposals look either with dislike or indifference upon the attempts of a minority of their class to force on them a responsibility which they do not want, and which will do them no good. This is the attitude of the Anti-Suffrage League just formed under the leadership of Mrs. Humphrey Ward, and supported by many other women throughout the country.

In the third place, the disgraceful behaviour of the Suffragettes, many of whom have been brought up in the best homes, or are University Graduates—witness Miss Pankhurst—prompts the question whether even educated women are fit to vote. What good can we expect from enfranchising creatures who invade churches, who assault policemen, and who shew themselves unable to keep their heads even in the most trifling matters? Is it not courting danger to expect them to give a fair decision on national problems of war or finance?

These three considerations may be summed up in a few words. Surely no scheme of Female Suffrage can be sound which does not take into account the interests of the poorer as well as of the richer women; which increases, with no object, the already excessive vote; and which places in the hands of those who have no use for it, or would misuse it, the most powerful weapon in the State.