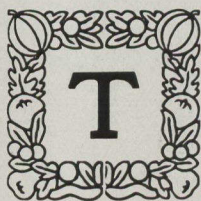


WOMAN AND HER INTERESTS

The Suffrage in England



THE National Council of Women of Canada, at its annual meeting in Halifax, in July, placed itself on record as in favor of the enfranchisement of women. Canadian women on the whole, however, have not as yet taken any very active steps towards securing the Parliamentary franchise for themselves. But they have watched eagerly—with sympathy or without, according to their own proclivities or convictions—the struggles of their sister women in the Mother country, where at present the fate of the Conciliation Bill claims general attention. The Bill has been drafted by members of Parliament of all parties, and aims to steer a middle course by giving an instalment of the suffrage. It contains two clauses. By the first, the Parliamentary vote is to be conferred on every woman-householder being assessed at a rental of £10 or over per annum. The second clause provides against the disallowance of married women on the score of their marriage, but husband and wife will not be both qualified in respect of the same premises.

The bill is the culmination of forty years of constitutional agitation for a vote in the country's affairs. During that time some thirty-seven bills asking for votes for women have been brought before the Houses of Parliament, and thousands of petitions have been sent to the Government. In the last four years the Women's Social and Political Union (dubbed the Suffragettes), have pursued the policy of harassing the Government, which has drawn attention throughout the Empire to the question.

A Canadian woman in London, writing on July 7th, gives some interesting glimpses of the movement at the present stage of affairs. A notable meeting attended was held by the Women's Suffrage Societies to ask the Government to fix an early date for the second reading of the Conciliation Bill. "I found myself," writes the Canadian visitor, "in a large, brilliantly lighted hall, filled to the back of the second gallery. A score of pretty girls in white dresses were moving quietly about ushering late comers to their seats, and there was a life and stir that impressed one. Mrs. Millicent Fawcett (the wife of England's late blind Postmaster-General, who was assisted by his wife in his work) was speaking, and every point she made was answered by voices from different parts of the house. She was followed by the Earl of Lytton, Mr. MacLaren, M.P., and others, and each speech was punctuated by the same running fire of remarks, all showing an intimate knowledge of the subject and all very much to the point. There was a large sprinkling of men, and quite half of the remarks seemed to be from them. But it was all very far removed from the hysteria one had been led to expect.

"Pending the second reading of the Bill, myriads of meetings are being held, anywhere from twelve to twenty-six by actual count every day by the Women's Social and Political Union alone. Then the biggest demonstration of all is being planned for July 23—a procession which is aimed to make double the size of that of last month. In this, as before, all the suffrage societies are to be represented and women of all classes and conditions. The watchword of all the societies is 'The Bill must go through.' At a great meeting in St. James' Hall last week the feeling was described as 'tense.' Mrs. Pankhurst, however, begged the women to wait yet a little longer to see what the Government's decision might be, but at the same time assured them that they 'could count upon her not waiting too long.'

"At the aforementioned Queen's Hall meeting, Mrs. Fawcett, a woman not accused of extreme conduct, said they would never be content with a barren second reading debate and division—they meant that the bill should be carried into law this session.

"The Earl of Lytton followed Mrs. Fawcett and, in a vigorous speech, declared the Conciliation Committee of the House of Commons desired him to say that they did not accept the declaration of the Prime Minister as the last word on the question. Mr. Asquith's answer, he said, really meant that the Government had for so long fallen into the habit of trifling with the question that they were going to trifle with it a little longer. But, the Earl maintained, the tide behind this movement had for many years been rising with increasing force and had become of such magnitude that it was not going to be turned back by any Parliamentary manoeuvre.

"Last Sunday afternoon, in Hyde Park, we came on two different suffrage gatherings—one was under the auspices of the Women's Social and Political Union. Miss Eva Dugdale was talking enthusiastically with the rain drenching her pretty dress and black picture hat. I asked a question or two of a girl standing near.

"Oh," she replied, 'I don't dislike Mr. Asquith. He is a square opponent. He has always been openly against us. It is men like John Burns who are fair to our faces and knife us when our backs are turned. I have heard him say in a meeting, when we asked a question: 'If that young creature belonged to me I would know what to do with her. I have had a woman for years, and I know how to manage them.'

"Have you been in jail?" I asked.

"Yes, but my mother does not know it. Mother was out of town at the time and I gave an assumed name."

"Was it very bad?" I asked.

"She shrugged her shoulders indifferently, and her mind seemed to be somewhere else. 'Will you tell me about the jail,' I asked.

"Why the jail is nothing!" she looked almost impatient. "Nothing to playing

Asquith's goat and interrupting a meeting.'

"What!"

"Oh, that is just our slang,' with a little deprecating smile. 'Playing Asquith's goat is dressing up in evening dress and asking a question at a dinner party.' The little smile fled and her face grew pitiful and almost tragic.

"Have you done that?" I asked as if of a child who had been caught stealing jam.

"Yes," she almost whispered, 'and I would rather go to jail!'

"That was in one part of the park. Near the Marble Arch was gathered another group under the auspices of the Men's League for Woman Suffrage. Here a girl in a modish black frock, broad black hat, and long black gloves, with a gold bracelet on her left wrist, was talking in easy, reasoning, conversational style to a large crowd of men, among whom were sprinkled a dozen or so women. Her complexion was creamy, her cheeks glowing with health, and her black eyes danced and snapped alternately. Only one man was rude. We could not hear what he said, but we could hear her reply, 'If you will put your question properly, sir, it will be answered; but we will not be bullied.' A dozen men, many of them with rough clothes and unpolished boots, said 'Hear, hear,' in a most approving fashion. One man with a faded cap and boots that had long forgot what blacking looked like, spoke low to his fellow:

"Can you see, Bill, why they won't let the likes of her have a vote? Of course I wouldn't let a silly woman 'ave it, but her!'

"As the girl ended and bowed and smiled her thanks, a man stepped forward and gave her his hand to help her down the four or five narrow steps of the two-foot square platform. She shook hands with half-a-dozen others who pressed forward, stood a moment, then turned swiftly and disappeared in the crowd. The next instant she was speeding along over the wet grass to another group.

"What are the prospects should the bill fail to pass? 'For forty years,' said one of the lecturers, Miss Eva Myers, addressing a crowd in Hyde Park, 'our workers had been constitutional and quite ladylike. Would the question have been the live issue it is to-day but for our measures? What did you men do forty years ago when you were refused the suffrage for a mere accident of birth, for which you were in no way responsible? And are you the men to blame us if we, before long, follow the same tactics? Remember! We are going to have it!'

"In the meantime the headquarters of the W.S.P.U. at Clement's Inn is buzzing like a hive of bees before the swarming. It is a very quiet kind of buzz, but, as Carlyle would say, it is 'significant of much.'

Since this London letter was received, the Bill has passed its second reading and been referred to a Committee of the whole, which shelves it for this session at least.



Miss Christabel Pankhurst, LL.B.
Organizing Secretary
Women's Social and Political
Union.

Mrs. Fawcett
President of the
National Union of Women
Suffrage Societies.

Lady Frances Balfour
A sister of the Duke of
Argyll, and a
prominent suffragist.

Mrs. Pankhurst
President of the
Women's Social and
Political Union.

Mrs. Pethick Lawrence
National Treasurer
W.S.P.U.; Joint Editor of
"Votes for Women."