

complaint, the denial of all rights of property to married women who are not protected by settlements. This subject has powerfully drawn the attention of the public, since the great petition of above 2000 women was presented to both Houses of Parliament, by Lord Brougham in the Lords, and Sir Erskine Perry in the Commons. A meeting very numerous attended was holden in the month of June; and it plainly appeared, both from the declarations of public men of various parties, among others Sir John Pakington, who presided, and from the proceedings of the Law Amendment Society, that immediate attention must be given to the strongly expressed wishes of the community.

The Society referred the subject to a committee, which entered into a full and comprehensive examination of it in all its relations, and received important information respecting the law of foreign countries. The law of France has since been very fully investigated by Mr. Macqueen, who repaired to Paris for the purpose of obtaining accurate information respecting its provisions and their practical operation; his principal object being to throw light upon the subject of separation and divorce, when the Report should come under consideration of Parliament, from the commission of which he had been secretary. The House of Lords ordered his paper to be printed, and it is found to contain very important information also upon the rights of married women as to property. The Committee of the Society was probably possessed of a portion at least of this information, and certainly had access to all the particulars of the changes in the English law, which have been adopted by the greater number of the American States. Upon these materials, and especially after a mature consideration, of the manner in which the new system works in the most important of these communities, the report was framed, and a bill carefully prepared; which Lord Brougham so far approved as to present early in February to the House of Lords, explaining its principles, and showing the necessity of some such amendment of our law, in a speech already in the hands of our readers.

It must, however, be remarked, that both the argument of the speech, and the resolutions which were moved as introductory to the bill itself, are by no means confined to the provisions of the measure as the only remedy for the evils complained of. That these provisions would prove the most effectual remedy may possibly be admitted. : ut if we consider for a moment what is the great practical evil, we shall be satisfied that something far short of the bill may be sufficient. It was not easy either for the Society or for Lord Brougham, who had the year before presented the great petition, proceeding from all classes of married women, to confine their attention to the hardships endured by one particular class, although these are the most crying by far of the grievances denounced. The hardship may be great of a dissolute husband taking possession of property given to his wife by bequest or donation, and leaving her in distress. But this is not only a more rare case, because of the general disposition to control the husband by the terms of the gift; it is a much less hard case than that of a wife, earning by her skill and her industry that which she has by law no right to call her own, and which may, at any moment, be carried off by the man who has deserted her, or who, continuing to live with her, yet leads an idle and dissolute life, supported by her gains,

while he leaves her and her children in want. The most striking examples of this were laid before the meeting to which we have alluded:—One respectable manufacturer, who employed for a many years a great number of young women at considerable wages, from 20s. to 30s., and some as high as 40s. a week, declared that this had the effect of attracting husbands who, in very many cases, proved idle and dissolute, living upon the poor women's earnings, and leaving them and their children in want. He gave a detailed account of these instances, specifying the professions and trades of the men. But the Society's committee had evidence respecting persons in a still humbler rank; women labouring in the manufacturing districts of Yorkshire and Lancashire. It appeared that you had only to approach the premises of any spinner or weaver on a Saturday night, to be conviuced of the control exercised by the husbands, and the futility of the objections made against giving the wife some right to her own earnings, on the ground of the domestic dissension which might be the result. Enough of that is apparent when the wife comes from the pay-table, and is seized by the husband to compel a surrender of her week's wages. They who have constantly witnessed these scenes, affirm that there is little risk of greater jars being occasioned by the proposed mitigation of the husband's rights. We may here only stop to note, that although the woman's petition was signed by persons well known in the world of letters and of arts, and although Lord Brougham adorns his statements by naming the "Linwoods, whose needle rivals the pencil of the Kaufmanns," the real practical grievance in plain terms is that of the ordinary working class—that class to which the evidence before the meeting and before the committee refers, as we have now briefly stated it.

Now, in dealing with this grievance and devising a remedy fit to remove it, two courses were manifestly open; one was suggested at the meeting by Mr. Commissioner Hill, with a singularly happy allusion to the law of succession; that, as where a party neglects to make a will, or elects to die intestate, the law makes a will for him; so, where parties are married without a settlement, the wife should be regarded as a *feme sole* in respect of both former and after acquired property, of course protecting the husband against her debts whether contracted before or since the coverture, the support of the children resting upon both parties in the case of the wife having separate funds. The objections made to this plan are answered in the committee's report by referring to the actual expense of the United States: in the greater number, it has for many years been the law of the country, including the Northern and Central States. The concurrent testimony of the ablest lawyers, as well as of persons unconnected with the profession, is entirely in favour of this great change introduced into their jurisprudence; and they deride the apprehensions sometimes expressed, of its tendency to produce domestic quarrels. Indeed, they observe, naturally enough, that were such its tendency, we should experience it in the ordinary case under our English system of ante-nuptial settlement, or of property given to the wife's sole and separate use; whereas those arrangements are universally allowed to prevent rather than promote discord.

But it is manifest that there may great relief be afforded without having recourse to this, the most effectual remedy,