

EQUAL FRANCHISE LEAGUE

ORCHARD HILL RD., TORONTO

What Equal Suffrage Has Accomplished

BY SONIA LEATHES

The Age of Consent has been raised to 18 in all states and countries where women obtained the parliamentary franchise, and mostly within the first legislature following upon their enfranchisement, i.e., New Zealand, all the States of Australia, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Idaho, Finland and Norway. Bills are already pending in the newly enfranchised States of Washington and California to raise the age from 16 to 18.

Where women do not possess the power to directly control legislation the age of consent varies between 10 and 16 years. The only exceptions are Kansas, which possesses a very wide municipal franchise for women and where the age of 18 was secured by them, without the parliamentary vote, and New York, where the age was 18 was established as the age of consent after twenty-five years of struggle, not, however, without a considerable reduction in the penalty provided, and it is difficult to obtain convictions.

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In Canada the legal age of protection is 16. A considerable difference is made, however, in the punishment of offences committed against girls of over or under 14, treating the former in the nature of a misdemeanour only.

Equal Guardianship of Father and Mother Over Their Legitimate Children.

In countries where women have the vote the mother has been made equal co-guardian with the father of her own children. Such legislation was enacted in most cases at once after women obtained the ballot.

It took the unenfranchised women of Massachusetts fifty-five years to secure such a law, which the enfranchised women of Colorado obtained in the very next Legislature following upon their enfranchisement. The women of New York obtained this right in 1860 after ten years of persistent effort, and it was quietly repealed in 1862. After another thirty years of agitation it was again granted to them in 1893. In Canada the father is the only recognized legal parent of his legitimate children to the exclusion of the mother. This right extends even to the "infant at the breast." He has absolute control over their religious and secular education, place of residence, etc., and his consent alone is necessary for the marriage of his minor sons or daughters.

Children.

The school age in Colorado is from 8 to 16. In New Zealand and Australia there is compul-

sory attendance at continuation schools for children between 14-16 years. It is a criminal offence, punishable by imprisonment to employ children under 14 in any trade or industry in Colorado. A special law in Wyoming forbids the employment of children under 14 in any public exhibitions. There are free State-supported kindergartens in Wyoming. In Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, New Zealand and Australia there is State provision made for the care and custody of deserted or orphan children, also for children of infirm, indigent or incompetent persons. There is a State Industrial Home for Girls in Colorado, and State provisions for the care of the feeble-minded. In New Zealand and in Australia the State pays a subsidy to widows who have to support children under 16, so as to enable them to remain at home and so look after their families.

A system of municipal nursing is also established in Finland. A system of State-paid nurses spread all over the country has helped to reduce infant mortality in New Zealand and Australia to 61.6 and 67.3 per 1,000. The infant mortality in Ontario in 1910 was 125 per 1,000.

Juvenile courts were established in Colorado in 1903.

Illegitimate Children.

In Norway the father of an illegitimate child has equal responsibility with the mother for its education and maintenance.

In Australia the father of an expected illegitimate child can be prevented from leaving the country without making adequate provision for its support.

There are State-supported maternity homes in Australia and New Zealand.

The Maintenance Acts in New Zealand makes provision for enforcing the maintenance not only of wife and family, but it also applies to a father's illegitimate children, and maintenance orders can be enforced in adjacent colonies.

Patriotism and Imperialism.

Australia and New Zealand are the only two parts of the British Empire which have adopted compulsory military training for their men, and these measures were passed after half the electorate came to consist of women.

At the last Imperial Conference it was the representatives of these two Dominions who alone urged seriously the establishment of Imperial Councils and Imperial Appeal Courts, and both Australia and New Zealand have contributed Dreadnoughts to the British Navy.

Crime.

Legislation and administration directly controlled by women has succeeded in diminishing the proportion of crime in the respective States by raising the age of protection for girls, by insisting on adequate punishment for all sexual offences, by better measures for the pro-

tection of neglected children, of the feeble-minded, and by extension of the school age. The proportion of female delinquency, especially, has been reduced and practically abolished in some of the States.

In Colorado it has been made a criminal offence to contribute to the delinquency of a child.

The United States census prison statistics of 1904 state that of all the prisoners in the States of California only 3 per cent., in Colorado and Utah 2 per cent., in Washington four-fifths of 1 per cent., and in Wyoming and Idaho none were women.

Gambling

Is illegal in Colorado, Idaho, Wyoming, and there are strictly enforced laws dealing with gambling in Australia, New Zealand and Tasmania.

Equal Pay for Equal Work.

In the suffrage States of Wyoming, Utah, California, New Zealand, Australia, Norway and Finland there is equal pay for male and female teachers of the same grade and qualification. In New Zealand and Australia there is equal pay and an eight-hour day for male and female factory workers who do the same grade of work. In New Zealand there is a minimum wage of £1 5s. 0d. a week for female workers in factories or workshops, and all "sweating" has become illegal.

On November 17th, 1910, the Senate and Commonwealth of Australia passed the following resolution:

1. That this Senate is of the opinion that the extension of Suffrage to the women of Australia for States' and Commonwealth Parliament has had the most beneficial results. It has led to the more orderly conduct of elections, and at the last Federal elections the women's vote in a majority of the States showed a greater proportional increase than that cast by men. It has given a greater prominence to legislation particularly affecting women and children, although the women have not taken up such questions to the exclusion of others of wider significance. In matters of defence and Imperial concern they have proved themselves as far seeing and as discriminating as men. Because the reform has brought nothing but good although disaster was freely prophesied, we respectfully urge that all nations enjoying representative government would be well advised in granting votes to women.

Resolution passed by the House of Representatives in Wyoming:

BE IT RESOLVED:—That the possession and exercise of Suffrage by the women of Wyoming for the past quarter of a century has wrought no harm and has done much good in many ways; That it has largely aided in banishing crime and pauperism and vice from this State, and

that without any violent or oppressive legislation; That it has secured peaceful and orderly elections, good government, and a remarkable degree of civilization and public order; and we point with pride to the facts that after nearly twenty-five years of Woman's Suffrage not one county in Wyoming has a poorhouse, that our jails are nearly empty, and crime, except that committed by strangers in the State, almost unknown; and as the result of experience we urge every civilized community on earth to enfranchise its women without delay.''

On May 5th, 1911, in the British House of Commons the second reading of the Conciliation (Women's Franchise) Bill was carried with a majority of 165 in its favor.

Mr. Balfour, the Conservative leader, said on that occasion:

“My view is that democracy properly understood is government by consent broadly speaking. When you get to the point that a class feels itself as a class excluded and outraged by being excluded, then those who believe as I do, that democracy properly understood is the only possible government for any nation at the stage of political evolution which we have reached must consider whether it is not their business to try and see if a government which is by hypothesis not a government by consent can be turned into a government by consent when women, or any section of women

have begun to feel that they suffer under an hereditary disability it is your business to see if you cannot remedy that grievance.”

The Chief Justice and all the Judges of the Supreme Court of Idaho have published a statement saying in part: “Woman suffrage in this State is a success; none of the evils predicted have come to pass, and it has gained much in popularity since its adoption by our people.”

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