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THE STORY OF THE
WOMENS' SUFFRAGE
MOVEMENT

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Anne Clifford, Countess of Dorset, Montgomery and
Pembroke (1589—1675).

From an old print of the picture in the collection of the Duke of Dorset.

The Story of the Women's Suffrage Movement

BY
BERTHA MASON

With an Introduction

BY THE RIGHT REV.

THE LORD BISHOP OF LINCOLN



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LONDON
SHERRATT AND HUGHES
Manchester: 34 Cross Street
1912

TO THE MEMORY OF
MY FATHER
THIS LITTLE BOOK
IS DEDICATED

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AUTHOR'S NOTE.

This little book has been written in response to the request of friends who have expressed a wish that the lecture I gave in many towns and cities in Great Britain and Ireland in 1909-10 might be preserved in an extended and permanent form.

Its aim is a simple presentation of the main incidents of the Women's Suffrage Movement.

The material for the earlier chapters has been gathered, first from history and old records; and, in the second place from the lips of those many pioneers with the families of whom my parents were closely associated before I myself became a worker in the Movement in 1890.

The books and records studied and consulted have been many and varied, but grateful mention must be made of—

- “The Enfranchisement of Women,” Sidney Smith.
- “On Some Supposed Constitutional Restraints upon the Parliamentary Franchise” (1867), T. Chisholm Anstey.
- “Notes Upon the Representation of the People Act, 1867,” T. Chisholm Anstey.
- “The Women's Suffrage Journals” (1870—1900).
- “The Englishwoman's Journal” (1866—1908).
- “Record of Women's Suffrage,” Helen Blackburn.
- “British Freewomen,” Mrs. Carmichael Stopes.
- “The Status of Women under the Law” (1066—1909), Beatrice Wallis Chapman, D.Sc., and Mary Wallis Chapman, B.A.

My cordial thanks are due to Mrs. Isabella Petrie Mills, to Mrs. Anna Maria Haslam and to Miss Agnes Garrett for their ready response to my appeal for reminiscences; to Miss Esther G. Roper and Miss Eva Gore Booth for permission to use original matter; to Mr. Hughes, of Manchester, for useful hints and suggestions; to Rosalind, Countess of Carlisle, Miss E. E. C. Jones, to Mrs. Jacob Bright, to Mr. George Butler, to Miss Esther Becker, to Miss Emily Davies, to Mrs. Wolstenholme Elmy, to

Mrs. Fawcett, to Mrs. Ashworth Hallett, to Mr. Hollyer, to Mrs. Haslam, to Mr. W. S. B. McLaren, to Miss Reddish and to the authorities of the Bristol University, for permission to reproduce the photographs which appear in these pages.

Especially am I indebted to Mrs. Liliash Ashworth Hallett for generously placing at my disposal her memories of early days and her collection of Women's Suffrage records and photographs; and to the Rt. Revd. the Lord Bishop of Lincoln for valuable criticism, suggestion and encouragement.

In particular I desire to thank Miss E. G. Wheelwright of Bath for assistance, freely and sympathetically given, in connection with the preparation of the book for the press.

B. M.

February, 1912.

FOREWORD.

The author of this little volume has invited me to prefix a few words by way of introduction or recommendation; I suppose, because she and I have many a time worked together not only on behalf of Votes for Women, but of other causes no less beneficent and as stoutly opposed.

I readily accede to her request, although indeed she bears an honoured name which needs no man's recommendation. The daughter of Hugh Mason may well be the supporter of all progressive movements, and her father's services to the cause of Women's Suffrage receive a plain and unvarnished record in the following pages. These I have read with sustained pleasure and interest. The story of the long agitation is told with brevity, but with perfect clearness, and with a restraint which intensifies the feeling of writer and reader. The book has the qualities in which the poet of the Thames desired to emulate the river:

“ Though deep, yet clear: though gentle, yet not dull:
Strong without rage; without o'erflowing full.”

I confess, that when I see the splendid powers, intellectual and spiritual, so well organised and so lavishly expended by women in their struggle for enfranchisement, I lament the diversion of such a force from the support of other great social reforms—temperance, peace, the conditions of labour, and much else,—which concern men and women alike. Social Reform is at present deprived of a large part of its noble enthusiasm and of much sagacious counsel, while our women are still compelled to keep the field and do battle for their own elementary rights.

I hope the day of their redemption is as near as the writer foretells.

EDWARD: LINCOLN:

January 10, 1912.

PREFACE.

In the records of the House of Este it is written :—

“ A daughter was born this day to Duke Ercole, and received the name of Beatrice. And there were no rejoicings because everyone wished for a boy.”

And yet this noble Italian house is chiefly remembered in the 20th century by the two great women, Beatrice and Isabella, whose influence upon their time, in art and politics, was greater than that of the Princes of their day.

And just as the warm, flowing tide of the Renaissance quickened the lives of those women into more vigorous growth, so the great social movements of the last century brought about the evolution of the women of our day.

The widespread agitation on the part of women for parliamentary enfranchisement, which during the last fifty years has been steadily gaining ground, is only one part of the general evolution in the history of women, and cannot be regarded as a thing of independent origin or growth.

To understand the full significance of the fact, and the attitude of the modern woman regarding it, we must look back to the forces which shaped her; more especially we must remember that she is reaping where others have sown. Therefore this little book is mainly concerned with the sowers, because though many of them have passed away, it is their hands which are still moulding the forces of the present. It is through them and their efforts that we come to recognise the “Women’s Movement” for what it is: a record of the progressive spirit; an expression of the human soul towards freedom and self-development.



Mary Wollstonecraft (1759—1797).

Photograph after picture by Opie.



Barbara Leigh Smith (Mrs. Bodichon)
1827—1891.

From a photograph of the painting at Girton College.

CHAPTER I.

LOOKING BACK.

LEST WE FORGET.

Whether women ever had the right to the Parliamentary franchise and exercised it is a disputed point. In the appeal of the Scotch women graduates, heard before the House of Lords in 1908, Lord Robertson said :

“From time immemorial men only have voted in Parliamentary Elections :”

and his view is supported by two great exponents of early English law, Sir Frederick Pollock and the late Professor Maitland, who state

“That as regards private rights, women are on the same level as men : public functions have they none.”*

On the other hand, history and old parliamentary documents provide abundant evidence that in the ancient organization of society, women held a recognised relation to the State, and occupied a high position in political affairs.

In Anglo-Saxon times, for instance, women qualified by birth and position, sat in the Saxon Witenagemote, which was the governing body of that time, and the mother of our Parliament. They had the same political and administrative duties and privileges as men. Their rights of person and property were beyond dispute.

From the time of the Norman Conquest to about the middle of the Stuart period, similar conditions prevailed. In Plantagenet and Tudor days many high offices and official positions, which have long since been relegated to men, were held by women. In the time of Henry II, “Adeline de Broc held possession of her Guildford estate

* Pollock and Maitland’s “History of English Law,” Vol. I. p. 485.

by the service of being *Marshal* in the King's Court." Nicolai de la Haye, who defended Lincoln Castle on behalf of King John, was *appointed* by the King, Sheriff of that city, circa 1165-75. Ella, Countess of Salisbury; Cicely, Duchess of Warwick; and Anne Clifford, Countess of Dorset, Pembroke and Montgomery, were respectively, by *virtue of inheritance*, High Sheriffs of Wiltshire, Worcestershire and Westmoreland, 1236, 1449, 1650. In the reign of Henry VII, Lady Margaret, Countess of Richmond, was appointed Justice of the Peace; while in the days of Queen Mary, the Lady of Berkeley held the same post.

Other offices, such as that of High Constable, High Steward, High Chamberlain and Champion, were also held by women.

Military service was exacted from all who owed service to the Crown; and *counsel was sought, without distinction of sex*, from all who were bound, by person or by proxy, to render such service. In 1277, for example, women were summoned to furnish service to Edward I in his wars against Wales; amongst them the four Abbesses of Wilton, of St. Mary of Winchester, of Shaftesbury and of Barking. In 1300, sixty-three women and certain Abbesses were called to join the King against the Scotch Rebellion.

In 1306, the Abbesses of Barking, Wilton, Winchester and Shaftesbury were cited "together with Prelates, Magnates and Nobles of the Kingdom" to the great Council of the King, held at Westminster, to grant an aid on the knighting of the Prince of Wales.

In 1362, ten peeresses were summoned, with other nobles, to a special Council of the King to consider the need for sending an army to Ireland. From the writs sent out it would appear that the personal attendance of the ladies was expected, although it was permitted to send some confidential person to represent them.*

Further, electoral rights and privileges were held and exercised by women as well as by men. The first

* Palgrave, "Parliamentary Writs," Vol. I. p. 164.

Act making provision for the election of Parliamentary representatives was passed in the reign of Henry IV, and expressly mentions, "that all that be present at the County Court," "as well as suitors duly summoned" (suitors being free men who owed suit to the County Court) "shall be electors." Women were expected to attend the County Court; and there are old Parliamentary documents still extant in which are to be found not a few returns made by women electors and accepted.

Prynne, in an interesting account of the elections of "Knights of the Shire" (as parliamentary representatives were then called) for the County of York in 1412 and 1415, states that the indentures or returns of the newly-elected Knights were signed and sealed by attorneys on behalf of the Archbishop, certain nobles, and by Lucy, Countess of Kent, in the first case, and Margaret, wife of Henry Vavasour, in the second.*

In the latter days of Henry VI the right of voting in the election for representatives of counties was for the first time restricted to persons (and in those days the word "person" applied to woman as well as to man) "possessing freeholds of the annual value of forty shillings," "a law," says Milner, "which continued to mark the boundary of the franchise for counties, down to the passing of the Reform Bill in 1832."

In 1554-5, at an election of two burgesses for Gatton, we find a certain "Mrs. Copley" (presumably the lady of the Manor of Gatton) "and all the inhabitants returning two Members for that borough"; while in 1572, the famous, and often quoted dame Dorothy Packington, owner of the town of Aylesbury, "appointed her trusty and well-beloved Thomas Lichfield and George Burden, Esquires, to be the parliamentary representatives for that town." Her return stated that "whatsoever the said Thomas and George shall doe in the present Parliament, I, the same dame Dorothy Packington, do ratify and approve *to be my own act*, as fully and wholly as if I were, or might be, present myself."

* "Brevia Parliamentaria Rediviva," vol. i, pt. ii, pp. 152-4.

No objection, so far as we can ascertain, was raised to the action of these ladies, either by Parliament or by any other authority, on the score that they were women.*

The fact that only very few women voted does not affect the main argument; for at that time electoral rights and privileges belonged exclusively to the wealthy and influential, and the number of men voters was also very small.

During the time of the Commonwealth, when women were practically (though never *legally*) disfranchised, we have instances of women exercising electoral privileges. The most remarkable case occurred in 1640, in an election in the County of Suffolk, Sir Simon d'Ewes being High Sheriff. "On the Tuesday morning (the election began on Monday and lasted four days) *some women* came to be sworne for the two Knights and Mr. Robert Clarke did suddenly take them." The sequel shall be given in Sir Simon's own words:

"It is true," he says, "that by the ignorance of some of the clerkes at the other table, the oaths of some *single women* were taken without the knowledge of the High Sheriffe; who, as soon as he had notice thereof sent to forbid the same, conceiving it a matter verie unworthie of anie gentleman, and most dishonourable in such an election to make use of their voices, *although in law they might have been allowed*. Nor did the said Sheriff allow of the said votes, upon his numbering of the said poll, but with the *allowance and consent* of the said two Knights (*i.e.*, the candidates) did discount them and cast them out." †

After the Restoration (1660) women seem to have been re-admitted to the poll. "But between that era and the year 1739" (says Mr. Chisholm Anstey) "the returning officers, upon whose suggestion it is not stated, began not to admit women's votes at Parliamentary elections; the reason alleged is said to have been because of the judgment and improved understanding required for it." Another reason

* See Lansd. MSS. 545. Mrs. Stopes's "British Freewomen," p. 70.

† See Sir Simon d'Ewes' papers, Harl. MSS., 158.

given was that elections, being already too popular, "to allow women to vote" would open the door to greater confusion. "In this way apparently, the ancient constitutional right of women to be represented in Parliament was withheld by the illegal act of the returning officers, until the custom of women's voting became obsolete, and the memory of it passed away."

But, though neglected and disused, the *legal* right still remained. Proof of this is supplied by the interesting and often quoted case of *Olive v. Ingram*, which was heard in 1739 before Sir William Lee, Chief Justice, and two other Justices. The points under dispute were the right of a woman to exercise the "Scot and lot franchise" of the City of London in elections of City Officers, and the legality of the election of a certain Sarah Bly, who had stood for the post of sexton of St. Botolph's Without. Sarah Bly received the votes of 169 men and 40 *women*, against 174 male votes and 22 *female votes* recorded for her opponent, and was declared duly elected. The unsuccessful candidate (a man) disputed the decision of the Returning Officer on the ground of the illegality of the women's vote, and took the case into court.

It was argued that women could not vote in municipal elections, as they did not vote in parliamentary elections. The judges upheld Sarah Bly's election, and though they did not expressly say so, for the point was not before them, they indicated that there was nothing in law to prevent a *woman*, if duly qualified, from exercising the parliamentary franchise also. In giving judgment, Mr. Chief Justice Lee, while prudently declining to express any opinion in regard to "Parliament men," referred to an earlier case of the time of James I (*Holt v. Lyle*). "It was the opinion of the judges of that time," he said, "that a *femme sole*, if a freeholder, may claim a voice for Parliament men." Mr. Justice Page, in concurring with the judgment, added, "I see no disability in a woman voting for a Parliament man." The third Judge, while holding the opinion that though the exercise of the franchise might require an improved understanding,

could find "nothing in law to legally exclude a woman from voting." His opinion was that "those who pay should have a right to nominate those whom they pay to." Herein Mr. Justice Probyn showed common sense and wisdom.*

The instances given—a few only out of many which might be quoted—will serve to show that in olden days hereditary offices descended, military and parliamentary service was exacted, and the power of the electoral franchise was exercised, without distinction of sex.

While admitting frankly that instances of women holding office, serving in the army and in Parliament and taking part in elections, may not have been frequent, they were certainly not unknown; and when they did occur they were accepted as incidents in the natural order of things. There can be no question that in bygone times women's influence, both in Church and State, was admitted and accepted. The causes which led to the loss of these rights and privileges will be considered in the next chapter.

* See Chisholm Anstey, Notes on Reform Bill, 1867.



Florence Nightingale.

From a photograph by I. Palmer Clarke of the Statuette at Claydon.



Harriet Martineau (1802—1876).

Photo by Livingstone, taken from engraving after portrait by Margaret Gillies in Bristol University.



Miss Emily Davies.

Photograph from painting at Girton College.

CHAPTER II.

LOSS OF PRIVILEGE (1640—1840).

FORERUNNERS.

The disabling process which had its rise in the 17th Century increased as years rolled on. From that time onwards, down to the middle of the 19th Century, the record, so far as the social and civic position of women is concerned, is one of privileges lost, avenues for useful service and economic independence closed, and electoral rights and opportunities filched away by legal decisions on the score of sex. It is beyond the scope and purpose of this book to examine in detail the causes which led to the general lowering of women's position during this period. Those who wish to study in full the history of "The Long Ebb" cannot do better than turn to Chapter VII of Mrs. Carmichael Stopes' "British Freewomen," in which the story of that time is vividly portrayed.

There are, however, two important influences, both of which specially affected the status of women, to which brief reference must be made.

(1) The disappearance of the trade guilds which played so important a part in mediæval times and the suppression of religious houses in Tudor days, deprived many women, not only of honoured positions and educational advantages but also of opportunities for useful service and economic independence which had been theirs in previous centuries.

(2) The austerities of the Puritans which taught that all Nature's gifts to body and mind were so many snares; and after the Restoration, the immoral tendencies of the Court and Society—tendencies which led many pure-minded and honourable women to live secluded lives in their own homes—affected the whole national life injuriously, and seriously curtailed the freedom and independence of women.

Further, the trend of political reform in later Stuart and Hanoverian days was unfavourable to women. New forces were at work which later led to the enfranchisement of great masses of men, and to a fresh system of government "by and for the people," *i.e.*, by and for "men"; for during this period women were regarded, not as free and independent beings, but as a class, whose interests—political, social and moral—were involved in those of their fathers and their husbands.

Yet, even in these days, there were to be found women who, with visions of higher and better things, protested against the conventional restrictions imposed on the women of their time and declined to accept the sweeping assertion that "women were under natural incapacities," and "unable to exercise a sound discretion or to have a will of their own in the choice of a candidate." Chief amongst such we find:

(1) *Anne Clifford* (1590—1676), Countess of Dorset, Pembroke and Montgomery, Hereditary Sheriff of Westmoreland, a woman of learning and ready wit, "able," says Dr. Donne, "to converse on any subject, from predestination to slea silk." True to her family motto—"Preserve your loyalty, defend your rights"—she refused to allow even King James himself to interfere with her rights of inheritance, and later on defended her castle against the troops of Cromwell. Her spirited refusal to be dictated to in the choice of a Parliamentary representative, the nomination of whom was in her hands as High Sheriff, and the assertion attributed to her by a contemporary, that "rather than yield she would stand herself" are well known.

Though troubled by much litigation consequent on the infringement of inheritance law, she was able, in the evening of her days, to record her "inexpressible thankfulness" that—

"she was born a happy creature in mind, body and fortune, and that the two Lords to whom she was afterwards by the Divine Providence married, were in their several kinds worthy noblemen as any were in the

Kingdom," even though "it was her misfortune to have contradictions and crosses with them both."

(2) *Anne Astell* (1668—1731), a writer who, had she lived in the present day, would have been in the foremost ranks of workers for the advancement of women.

In her "Serious Proposal to Women" and her "Essay in Defence of the Female Sex," published in 1694—1696, she draws attention to the disadvantages under which the women of her time laboured, owing to their lack of education, and outlines a scheme for the foundation of a Women's College.

"Were men," she writes, "as much neglected, and as little care taken to cultivate and improve them, perhaps they themselves, so far from surpassing those whom they now despise, would sink into the greatest stupidity and brutality."

And she pleads that the women of her own country may be given educational advantages "like the Dutch women who not only manage all the household affairs, but keep the books, balance the accounts and do all business with as much dexterity and exactness as their or our men can do."

The following extract from a letter written by Bishop Attenbury to his friend Smallbridge in 1706 will serve to show the surprise felt by men—even by Bishops—of that time at any display of literary ability in a woman:—

"I happened," says the Bishop, "about a fortnight ago to dine with Mistress Astell. She spoke to me of my sermon" (a sermon delivered in connection with the election of the Lord Mayor) "and desired me to print it, hinting that she would be glad of perusing it. I complied with her request, and sent her the sermon next day. Yesterday she returned it with this sheet of remarks, which I cannot forbear communicating to you, because they come from the pen of a woman. *Indeed one would not imagine a woman had written them. There is not an expression that carries the least air of her sex from the beginning to the end.*"

"Had she," he adds, "as much good breeding as good sense, she would be perfect, but *she attacks me very home,*"

from which we may conclude that Mistress Astell's criticism of the sermon was not altogether flattering.

(3) *Mary Wollstonecraft* (1759—1797), who in her "Vindication of the Rights of Women," that classic of the Women's Suffrage Movement, published in 1792, inveighs against the artificialities and prejudices of the age and claims for women a better education, more economic independence and the right to share in the advantages of parliamentary representation.

But these women were exceptions. They were forerunners; and, as is ever the case with such, their protests and demands had little effect upon the age in which they lived.

The lowest period in the condition of women, morally, intellectually and politically, seems to have been reached in the 18th and the early part of the 19th Centuries. Gone were the "single women that were freeholders," who, in 1640, presented themselves in the polling booths to record their votes; gone, the city dames, who with white silk ribbons in their hats, repaired (1643) in great numbers to the House of Commons to present a petition on behalf of peace; gone, the brave housewives who (1649) assembled in great crowds before the door of the House of Commons bearing a petition praying for a redress of grievances "from gentlewomen, tradesmen's wives and many other of the Female Sex," which petition, unlike women's petitions of later days, was "*read* in the House of Commons and "*thankfully accepted of*"; gone, too, were the Puritan women who had "suffycient understanding" to realise the defects and hardships of the laws concerning imprisonment for debt, and were brave enough to draw the attention of the Protector to them, exhorting him to take action thereon as "a faithful Joshua with the zeal of Nehemiah."

All these had passed away; and their successors, brought up in an atmosphere of secluded interests, taught that it was "unwomanly" to hold opinions on serious subjects; deprived of education and the means of economic independence, regarded by men as playthings, rather than comrades;

pressed back from all interest in or care for public life, were on the whole narrow-minded, frivolous, sentimental, ignorant of their political rights and privileges, and of no account in the civic life of the nation, though of back-stair influence there was no lack.

“Women,” wrote the famous Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, in the bitterness of her after-life, “signify nothing unless they are the mistress of a prince, or Prime Minister, which I would not be if I were young; and I think there are very few if any women that have understanding or impartiality enough to serve well those they really wish to serve.”

“Women,” says a writer of the time, “destined by nature to be obedient, ought to be disciplined early to bear wrongs, without murmuring.”

“Female exertions,” says another, “should be always strictly subordinate.”

“The more women show their need of support, the more engaging they are.”

“Women,” says yet another, “are not formed for political eminence or literary refinement. The softness of their nature, the delicacy, of their frame, the timidity of their disposition, and the modesty of their sex, absolutely disqualify them for such difficulties and exertions.”

And yet even at this time it was not considered derogatory for a “lady” to take her share and use her influence in election work, always provided that she did so on behalf of a relative or of a party.

“You cannot,” says Lady Davenant, one of Maria Edgeworth’s characters, “satisfy yourself with the common namby-pamby phrase, ‘Ladies have nothing to do with politics.’ Female influence must exist on political subjects as well as on all others; but the influence should *always be domestic* not *public*; the *customs of Society have so ruled it.*”

These extracts accurately represent the opinion of the time in regard to women, and go far to explain why, in the struggle for political freedom which marked the early years of the 19th Century, women’s claim to participate was overlooked and ignored.

In framing the Reform Bill of 1832, legislators simply followed tradition and the spirit of their age; and thus it came to pass that in spite of William Thompson's spirited "Appeal of One Half the Human Race," published in 1825, and in spite of the appearance of women side by side with men in the storm and stream of the Reform agitation, when the hour of victory came and thousands of men entered into their political birthright, women were not only ignored, but actually deprived of political privileges which had been theirs by statute law for centuries, and of their right to vote for members of Parliament.

In considering the history of the Women's Suffrage Movement these facts must be borne in mind, for they help to show that in the demand of to-day there is nothing new or revolutionary. Women are simply asking for the *restitution of an ancient right* taken away by Act of Parliament less than a century ago. But not altogether without protest. Two months after the Reform Bill received the Royal Assent (June 7, 1832) one woman at least was alert and brave enough to remind Parliament of the claims of women. Hansard thus describes the circumstance ("Parliamentary Debates," August 3, 1832):

"Rights of Women. Mr. Hunt said, he had a petition to present which might be a subject of mirth to some honourable gentlemen, but which was one deserving of consideration. It came from a lady of rank and fortune, Mary Smith, of Stanmore, in the County of York. The petitioner stated that she paid taxes, and therefore did not see why she should not have a share in the election of a representative; she also stated that women were liable to all the penalties of the law, not excepting death, and ought to have a voice in the fixing of them. . . . The prayer of the petition was that every unmarried woman, possessing the necessary qualification, should be entitled to vote for Members of Parliament."

About the same time Mr. W. Johnson Fox, a member of Parliament, drew attention, in a magazine article,

"to the egregious anomaly that in the constitutional process of events a woman would become vested with the supreme political authority, and yet women were

denied the simplest political functions. . . . In claiming," he concludes, "science, politics, philosophy and all the higher regions of thought for himself, and warning off intrusions by placarding them with the word *unfeminine*, man has deprived himself of the best sympathy, the most efficient aid, the mightiest stimulus, and the noblest reward of his own most honourable toils."

Though the earlier Reformers fully recognised the abstract right of women to vote, and statesmen who resisted the demand of men for representation made use of the argument that the grounds on which the claim was based were as applicable to women as to men, they paid little or no attention to isolated arguments and protests. The petition of Mary Smith was consigned to the waste paper basket of the House of Commons, and the measure disfranchising women became the law of the land.

CHAPTER III.

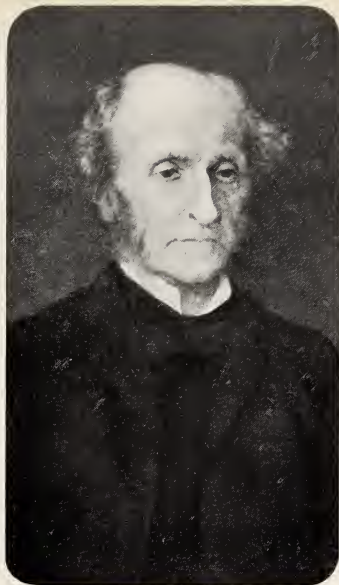
THE LIGHT OF DAWN (1840—1866).

PIONEERS.

Experience teaches that sex prejudice and "the customs of society" die hard. A dynamic force stronger than argument based on justice was required to break down the barriers of tradition and public opinion, and to arouse women from the intellectual and moral stupor into which they had fallen. This was supplied in 1840, in which year there was held in London the great Anti-Slavery Convention. To it came delegates from America; amongst them certain women, who, by the overwhelming vote of men, were excluded from taking part in the work of the Convention on the ground that "the presence of women would be contrary to English custom," "would subject the Convention to ridicule, and injure the cause of human freedom." It was this refusal and the spirited action of William Lloyd Garrison, who declined to take part in a meeting which relegated duly accredited women to seats in the gallery behind a curtain, which gave the first impetus to the Women's Suffrage Movement in America and led many thinking people in England to enquire into the cause of such humiliation.

Meanwhile, in Great Britain, the "Anti-Corn Law" agitation (1840-6) was calling women to the front: into that movement women unreservedly threw themselves, working side by side with their husbands, fathers and brothers. They formed committees, collected funds and attended meetings. The services they rendered to the cause received a glowing tribute from the pen of Frederick Bastiat,* the French economist, who drew attention to the part women could play in public life, if allowed, and were

* See Prentice, "Hist. of Anti-Corn Law League." Vol. I., pp. 171-3.



John Stuart Mill, M.P.

From a photograph by Hollyer, Kensington, after the painting by G. F. Watts, R.A. (National Portrait Gallery).



Benjamin Disraeli, M.P.

(Lord Beaconsfield, 1804—1881).

Photo by Walker, Regent Street.



Lydia E. Becker.

Photo by Livingstone, from a photograph about 1880 of a picture in Bristol University.



Mrs. Wolstenholme Elmy.

Photo by A. & G. Taylor.

warmly acknowledged by Richard Cobden in a speech delivered in Covent Garden Theatre in 1845. In the course of his remarks, Mr. Cobden quoted the anomalous fact that, though women could not vote themselves, they had the power of conferring votes on others.* "I wish," he added, "that women had the franchise, for they would often use it better than their husbands."

After the Repeal of the Corn Laws, women settled down to their ordinary quiet life; but the part which they had taken in the agitation had taught them how closely politics affected their own lives, and led them to realise that the government of the country as that of the family required the influence, the hand and the voice of women as well as of men.

The twenty years which followed prepared the way for further progress (1846—1866). During this time there were to be found scattered over the country little groups of young women of progressive views and passionate enthusiasm, many of whom were destined to become the leaders in after years of the movement for the advancement of women. They, like many other women of that time, had been thrilled to the depths of their nature by the reform struggles of the "thirties and forties," which claimed women as well as men for their own, and which helped to break down the artificial distinctions set up in an age when educational advantages for women were extraordinarily restricted and when even it was considered "rude to talk politics to ladies." The *personnel* and aims of one of the groups, a fair type of others, are well described by Mrs. Isabella Petrie Mills, one of the members, and known in the north of England as a keen and ardent worker for the advancement of women.

"It was," writes Mrs. Mills, "twenty years before the first Women's Suffrage Society was founded, that, in a little parlour at Greenbank, Rochdale (the home of the

* Mr. Cobden here referred to the case of a woman owning freehold property, who had consulted him as to the legal possibility of transferring this property to a "male," in order that the vote belonging to it might not be lost at this crisis.

Brights), I learnt my lesson, receiving a baptism, the grace of which I trust has never failed me. In the little informal meetings of a few friends seeds were sown which have borne fruit a hundredfold. There was Priscilla (afterwards Mrs. Duncan McLaren), whose lifelong devotion and help all know of: Esther, alas! taken in the prime of life, or she would have been a tower of strength; Martha Mellor (Mrs. Paulton) and myself, the youngest, learning and thinking. There was Jacob Bright, to whom the cause owes so much, always on our side. Slavery, temperance and the need of the vote for women were the subjects most often studied and discussed.

“There was Elihu Burritt, who whenever a guest at Greenbank, wanted the vote of the women to help him in his crusade on behalf of peace.

“Oddly enough, Frederick Douglass, the escaped slave, (whom, during his stay at my father's house, I took to call at Greenbank), who made later such a grand fight for the abolition of slavery, shook his black curly head over ‘votes for women,’ and would not be convinced. Later he changed his views, realising during the Lloyd Garrison days what women could and did do to help him in his campaign.”

The same period witnessed the founding of classes for the higher education of women, by Professor Nicolay, F. T. Maurice, Mrs. Hugo Reid and Miss Buss, the opening, in 1848 and 1849, of Queen's College and Bedford College, and the establishment of a Training Home for Nurses.

Florence Nightingale, soon to become the heroine of the Crimean War, and others were preparing for the work of nursing the sick in their own homes and in hospitals.

Louisa Twining was beginning her work on behalf of the sick poor in workhouses.

Mary Carpenter, assisted by Frances Power Cobbe, was opening schools for ragged urchins and juvenile offenders.

Mrs. Jameson was lecturing on the need for women's help in the social reform work of the world.

Harriet Martineau, in the quiet of her home, was writing articles for the *Daily News*.

Mary Somerville was publishing works on scientific

research; and Josephine Butler, influenced and aided by the whole-hearted support and sympathy of her strong and gentle husband, was preparing for the great crusade against sin and vice, to which her life was afterwards devoted.*

Interest in the question of Women's Suffrage was being fanned into flame by articles and letters in the public press, and through the writings of Herbert Spencer, Thomas Hare and John Stuart Mill.

Another notable pioneer of the time was Anne Knight, a Quaker lady, of Quiet House, Chelmsford, who

“never lost an opportunity of interposing remarks in defence of women's rights whenever, in meetings convened to promote other subjects, these principles might be assailed or ignored. She was always on the alert, whether in company of the members of the Society of Friends, or of statesmen and politicians in France or England, to speak a word or distribute her leaflets in advocacy of a cause which she considered to be important above all others save Christianity.”†

One of her letters, printed, as was the custom of the time, on a little slip of paper, has been aptly described as “the first Suffrage leaflet ever printed.” It runs as follows :

“Never will the nations of the world be well governed until both sexes, as well as all parties, are fairly represented, and have an influence, a voice and a hand in the enactment and administration of the laws. One would think the sad mismanagement of the affairs of our own country should in all modesty lead us men to doubt our own capacity for the task of governing a nation, or even a State, alone, and to apprehend that we need other qualities in our public councils, qualities that may be found in the female portion of our race. If woman be the complement of man, we may surely venture the intimation that all our social transactions would be incomplete, or otherwise imperfect, until they have been guided alike by the wisdom of each sex. The wise, virtuous, gentle mothers of a State or nation might

* See “Personal Reminiscences of a Great Crusade.” Josephine Butler.

† See *Englishwoman's Review*, January, 1889.

contribute as much to the good order, the peace, the thrift of the body politic, as they severally do to the well-being of their families."

This was in 1847. Four years later, in 1851, we find the same gentle lady, who, judging from her letters and writings, must have possessed not only strong convictions but the saving grace of humour and a lively wit, advocating at Sheffield, at a public meeting, the extension of the Parliamentary franchise to women on the ground that "as women paid rates and taxes and were called upon to obey the laws the same as men, they were entitled to equal rights and a voice in the appointing of the men by whom the laws were made."

In the same year (1851) there appeared in the "Westminster Review," at that time the organ of advanced thought, an article on the "Enfranchisement of Women," which was afterwards reprinted in the form of a pamphlet with the signature of the writer, Mrs. John Stuart Mill, and widely circulated.

This was followed (1855) by a pamphlet on "The Right of Women to exercise the Elective Franchise," by Mrs. Henry Pochin.

About the same time W. J. Fox, M.P., in acknowledging the gift to him by the women of Oldham of a signet ring, bearing the inscription, "Education, the birthright of all," spoke strongly in support of women's enfranchisement, and prophesied that the time would come when woman would be something more than an "adjective" to man in political matters; she would become a "substantive" also, and why not?

In this way and by these methods the ground was quietly prepared for the organised agitation of later years.

In 1856, further impetus was given to the movement by the circulation throughout the country, of petitions drawing attention to the property and earnings of married women and the necessity for reform. These petitions were mainly organised by two gifted and brilliant girls—Barbara Leigh Smith (afterwards Madame Bodichon) and Bessie Rayner Parkes (now Madame Belloc).

Barbara Leigh Smith, who died in 1891, will always be remembered as one of the champions of the women's movement. "Endowed," so writes one who knew her well, "with beauty, wealth and talent, she was the inspiring genius of the early efforts for women's advancement." As a daughter and a granddaughter of successive members for Norwich, she had political opportunities which enabled her to bring the question of the legal position of women before Lord Brougham and Mr. Hastings, who were at this time actively engaged in promoting the amendment of the law in regard to this matter. Her little book on the laws relating to women, published in 1854, was the forerunner of the Married Women's Property Act. The part she took in the Anti-Corn Law agitation brought her into close intimacy with a girl of her own age—Bessie Rayner Parkes, a granddaughter of the well-known Dr. Joseph Priestley.

During the next ten years—"years," described by Bessie Parkes, "as bright with the light of dawn"—the young girls worked together, arousing interest in their subject and gaining converts to their cause. As a result of their efforts, two petitions—one signed by 3,000 women, the other by 26,000 men and women in all parts of the country, asking for enquiry and reform—were presented to Parliament.

In 1858 the two friends started the "Englishwoman's Journal," the first women's paper ever published, to which Madame Belloc, up to the time of her marriage, which led her to make her home in France, was a constant and brilliant contributor.

Meanwhile, another gifted girl, the descendant of an old French family, which had settled in Lincolnshire in 1664, was studying in the quiet of her country home the economic disabilities to which women at that time were subjected. Jessie Boucherett longed to help, but she was young, alone and helpless. The chance purchase of a copy of the "Englishwoman's Journal" provided her opportunity. She went to London, and made the acquaintance of the editors, who, to her surprise, were

young and beautiful. With their assistance and in co-operation with Adelaide Anne Procter, the poet—at this time one of this little pioneer group—she founded the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women, and for the systematic training of women on business lines. From this time forth, and for many years these four friends were closely identified with every movement for the progress and elevation of women.

While this group of clever and charming women were striving to provide varied, profitable and well-paid employment for educated women whose main resources, up to that time, had been needlework and teaching, others, no less gifted and attractive, were actively engaged in promoting the higher education of women and girls.

Foremost amongst these, in addition to Madame Bodichon and Miss Boucherett, we find Miss Helen Taylor, step-daughter of John Stuart Mill, Miss Dorothea Beale and Miss Buss, founders of Cheltenham Women's College and the North London Collegiate School for Girls; Miss Emily Davies whose unwearied labours in the cause of education in connection with Girton College and as one of the first members of the London School Board, give her a place of honour among the memorable women of our time; Miss Elizabeth Garrett (Mrs. Garrett Anderson) at that time studying for the medical profession, of which in after years she became so distinguished a member; and Miss Wolstenholme (Mrs. Wolstenholme Elmy), whose name will ever be held in grateful remembrance on account of her devoted and persistent labours in connection with the carrying of the Married Women's Property Act.

As might be expected, the question of the Parliamentary enfranchisement of women was often discussed by these pioneer women, who only awaited a favourable moment to put it forward. The occasion arose in 1865, with the return of John Stuart Mill to Parliament.

In his election address, as previously in his writings, Mr. Mill had openly avowed his faith in Women's Suffrage, and another Reform Bill was in preparation. This was the women's opportunity and they did not fail to use it.

Mr. Mill was asked by the promoters of Women's Suffrage if he would present to the House of Commons a petition from women asking for parliamentary enfranchisement. He replied that if one hundred women could be found to sign it he would present it.

FIRST WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE PETITION.

A small committee was formed, which met daily at the house of Miss Elizabeth Garrett. A petition was drafted by Madame Bodichon, Miss Boucherett and Miss Emily Davies, praying the House of Commons "to consider the expediency of providing for the representation of all householders, without distinction of sex, who possess such property or rental qualifications as your Honourable House may determine," and quickly circulated. The result justified the effort. In less than a fortnight not 100, but 1,499 signatures were obtained. Amongst the signatories were the names of many who at the time and in after years took a prominent place, not only in Suffrage work, but in other movements for the elevation of women and the common good, notably, Lady Amberley, Liliash Ashworth, C. A. Biggs, Frances Power Cobbe, Amelia B. Edwards, Matilda B. Edwards, Mrs. William Gray, Anna Maria Haslam, Florence Davenport Hill, Margaret Bright Lucas, Lady Anna Gore Langton, Priscilla Bright MacLaren, Agnes MacLaren, Harriet Martineau, Martha Merrington (the first Woman Poor Law Guardian), the Misses Priestman, Mrs. Sherriff, Mary Somerville, Anna Swanwick, Mentia Taylor (Mrs. Peter Taylor), Augusta Webster, Eliza Wigham, Susanna Winkworth and Mrs. Josephine Butler.

Such are a few among the 1,499 names attached to the petition of 1866—names surely in themselves sufficient to suggest then and now that a stronger reason is necessary than any yet advanced to justify the exclusion of women as such from the exercise of the Parliamentary franchise.

When the day came for the presentation of the petition, Madame Bodichon, who had been deputed to place it in

Mr. Mill's hands, was ill and unable to go; so Miss Emily Davies and Miss Elizabeth Garrett took it in a cab to Westminster Hall. There they met Mr. Fawcett, who went at once to find Mr. Mill. When Mr. Mill arrived he asked for the petition, and the ladies had to confess that they, being ill-at-ease with their big roll in that great hall—crowded as it was in those days with people going to and fro to the old Law Courts—had hidden it beneath the stall of an old apple-woman near the door. It was quickly drawn from its hiding-place, and Mr. Mill, on seeing it, exclaimed, "Ah! this I can brandish with effect."*

On June 7, 1866, amid the laughter of the House, Mr. Mill presented the petition, and at the same time gave notice of his intention to move as an amendment to the Reform Bill a clause to include women.

Thus was the little barque of Women's Suffrage definitely launched out upon the perilous sea of "practical politics"; a little barque in those days, piloted by a few choice spirits, but destined to become a "Dreadnought" as the years went by.

* "Record of Women's Suffrage," Blackburn, p. 55.



Priscilla Bright McLaren (Mrs. Duncan McLaren).

After a Photograph taken about 1872, Scotland.



The Rt. Hon. Jacob Bright, M.P.

From a photograph by Banks, Manchester.

CHAPTER IV.

INTO PRACTICAL POLITICS (1866—1870).

INITIAL STAGES

The moment for raising the question of the enfranchisement of women was opportune. Discussions on electoral reform filled the air; and only a few weeks before the presentation of the petition (April 27th) Mr. Disraeli, in a speech in the House of Commons, had referred to the subject in these words:

“In a country, governed by a woman, where you allow women to form part of the estate of the realm—peeresses in their own right for instance—where you allow a woman not only to hold land, but to be a lady of the Manor and hold legal courts,—where a woman by law may be a churchwarden and overseer of the poor—I do not see, when she has so much to do with the State and Church, on what reasons, if you come to right, she has not a right to vote.”

In January of the same year an article, entitled “The Claim of Englishwomen to the Suffrage Constitutionally Considered,” by Miss Helen Taylor, appeared in the “Westminster Review,” emphasising in a telling and forcible manner the fact that for political purposes women were placed in the same category as “minors,” “idiots,” “lunatics” and “criminals.” “These, and these only,” she wrote, “are classed politically with women. But none of these are so classed in anything but politics.”

On March 6th, 1866, the “Times” commented on the situation in these words:

“The approaching controversy on Reform promises to be enlivened by an episode of a singularly interesting character. Mr. Mill will appear as the representative—not of constituencies which are or which would be—not of two or three hundreds of thousands that have been

flattered with a glimpse of the Suffrage—but of half the human race—the better half—entire womankind—or, to speak more particularly, every adult woman in the country.”

On October 6th, a paper by Madame Bodichon, on “Reasons for the Enfranchisement of Women,” was read before the Social Science Congress. The address attracted a crowded audience and was well received. Amongst the audience was Lydia Ernestine Becker, then in the prime of life and intellectual vigour. From that day until her death in 1890, “she was,” so writes one of her contemporaries, “the leader of the vanguard at the beginning and its chief supporter through the first difficult years.”

The movement thus begun soon spread. On January 11th, 1867, six persons—Mr. Jacob Bright, Mrs. Gloyne, Mr. Max Kyllman, the Rev. S. A. Steinthal and Miss Wolstenholme met at the house of Dr. Louis Borchardt, Manchester, and the Manchester Women’s Suffrage Committee was formed. At the next meeting, in February, new members were added, and Miss Becker was appointed Secretary.

About the same time, the London Provisional Petition Committee was re-organised with the following members: Dean Alford, Miss Boucherett, Professor Caines, the Rev. W. L. Clay, Miss Emily Davies, Lady Goldsmid, George W. Hastings, James Heywood, F.R.S., Mrs. Knox, Mrs. Manning, and Mrs. Wedgwood. Mrs. Peter Taylor, often described as “the mother of the movement,” was appointed Treasurer; and Mrs. J. W. Smith, one of the able and talented Garrett sisters, whose death during the year deprived the Committee and the Women’s Suffrage Movement of an attractive and influential supporter, became its Hon. Secretary.

These two Committees, assisted by friends in Edinburgh, immediately set to work to gain support for Mr. J. S. Mill’s amendment by means of petitions, one to be signed exclusively by women who were legally qualified to vote in all respects except that of sex; the other by men and

women. The text of the women householders' petition was as follows :

“The humble petition of the undersigned, sheweth :

“That your Petitioners fulfil the conditions of property or rental prescribed by law as the qualification of the electoral franchise, and exercise in their own names the right pertaining to such conditions; that the principles on which the Government of the United Kingdom is based imply the representation of all classes and interests in the State; that the reasons alleged for withholding the franchise from certain of Her Majesty's subjects do not apply to your petitioners. Your petitioners therefore humbly pray your Honourable House to grant to such persons as fulfil all the conditions which entitle to a vote in the election of Members of Parliament, except only that of sex, the privilege of taking part in the choice of fit persons to represent the people in your Honourable House.”

The Amendment of 1867.

On May 20, 1867, “The Representation of the People” Bill went into Committee. In the course of the debate, Mr. Mill moved to omit the word “man” and insert “person,” thereby including “woman.” The speech, described by one of the leading newspapers of the day as “a model of clear English and moderate in tone,” was listened to with courtesy and respect, and the whole debate was full of interest. One sentence from it gives the exact nature of the women's position :

“There is no other example,” said Mr. Mill, “of an exclusion which is absolute. If the law denied a vote to all but the possessors of £5,000 a year, the poorest man in the nation might—and now and then would—acquire the franchise; but neither birth nor fortune, nor merit nor exertion, nor intellect, nor even that great disposer of human affairs—accident—can ever enable any woman to have her voice counted in those national affairs which touch her and hers as nearly as any other person in the nation.”

On the question being put, there voted 73 for and 194 against the amendment, majority against the inclusion of women 121.

Writing afterwards to a friend, Mr. Mill said :

“ We are all delighted at the number of our minority, which is far greater than anybody expected the first time, and would have been greater still had not many members quitted the House without pairing, in the expectation that the subject would not come on.”

Work now began in earnest. During the autumn the Committees were dissolved, and separate Women's Suffrage Societies were formed in Manchester, London and Edinburgh. On the Committee of the Manchester Society were to be found, amongst others, Mr. Jacob Bright, M.P., soon to become the leader and advocate of the movement in the House of Commons; the Rev. S. Alfred Steinthal, a lifelong champion of this and other good causes; Mrs. Wolstenholme Elmy, Mrs. Winkworth and Miss Wilson.

So far as can be ascertained, the Committee of the London Society was composed at first exclusively of women : Miss Frances Power Cobbe, Mrs. Fawcett, Miss Hampson, Miss Lloyd, Mrs. Lucas, Miss Emily Davies and Mrs. Stansfeld. Mrs. P. A. Taylor was again appointed Treasurer, and the duties of Hon. Secretary seem to have been shared between Mrs. Taylor and Miss Caroline Ashurst Biggs, an arrangement which apparently continued to 1871. Amongst others who subsequently joined the Committee were Mrs. Sheldon Amos, Mrs. Bell, Mrs. Burbury, Mr. Thomas Hare, Professor W. A. Hunter, Mrs. Frank Malleon, Miss Orme, Mrs. Pennington, Professor Croom Robertson and Mrs. E. D. J. Wilson.*

The Edinburgh Society elected as its first President Mrs. Priscilla Bright McLaren, sister of John and Jacob Bright and wife of Duncan McLaren, the senior Member for Edinburgh. Mrs. McLaren possessed not only political ability and common sense, but charm of manner, personal beauty, and the eloquence which belonged to other members of her family. The combination of these rare qualities at once marked her out as a leader of women; and for many years she was the life and mainspring of the movement in Scotland.

* See *Englishwoman's Review*, July 15th, 1898, p. 148.

On November 6th of the same year, for the better prosecution of the work, the three Societies were formed into one National Society for Women's Suffrage, with independent centres of action.

Early in 1868 a Society was formed in Bristol, with Professor F. W. Newman as Hon. Secretary, and another in Birmingham, with Mrs. William Taylor and Miss Johnson as President and Hon. Secretary respectively. These quickly joined the Union.

On April 14th, the first public meeting ever held in support of Women's Suffrage took place in Manchester, in the Assembly Room of the Free Trade Hall. The occasion was one of great interest, and marked "an era in the history of the movement." It was also the first meeting addressed in this country by *women*. The Mayor of Salford, Mr. Henry Pochin, presided. The first resolution, moved by Miss Becker, seconded by Archdeacon Sandford, and supported by Mr. T. B. Potter, M.P., is here given in full, as it formulated the policy of the Women's Suffrage Movement at that time, and shows that the demand of Suffragists to-day is the demand made by the pioneers forty-three years ago. The resolution runs as follows:

"That the exclusion of women from the exercise of the franchise in the election of Members of Parliament, being unjust in principle and inexpedient in practice, this meeting is of opinion that the right of voting should be granted to them on the same terms as it is, or may be, granted to men."

Up to this time it had been generally assumed that women were outside the constitution, and that their admission to electoral rights must be granted by legislation.

A different view was now advanced by Mr. Chisholm Anstey, a barrister, described by Professor Newman as "the champion of the Suffrage cause in law, as Mr. Mill was in Parliament." Mr. Anstey, in a paper read before the Social Science Congress, presented arguments to show that the constitutional restraints on women did not in fact exist. Briefly, the arguments were these: Women had exercised the function of returning Members to Parliament

without dispute in former years; that there was neither statute nor judicial decision declaring women incapable of voting in parliamentary elections; that women were, in common with all the people of the realm, included in the ancient laws regulating the franchise, and legally entitled to vote in virtue of every statutory qualification not granted specifically to "male" persons.

The Reform Act (1832), it was admitted, restricted the franchise to "*male*" persons, but (1) the instruction applied only to the new class of electors enfranchised under that Act, and not to old electoral qualifications; (2) in "The Representation of the People" Act (1867) the word "male" was discarded for the word "man," which in good Latin and English includes man and *woman*. Further, that the Act, commonly known as Lord Brougham Act, passed in 1857, provides :

"that in all Acts words importing the masculine gender shall be deemed and taken to include women unless the contrary be expressly provided."

As the new Act of 1867 contained "no express provision to the contrary," it seemed clear, as far as words went, that women were entitled to claim votes under the provision of the 1867 Act. Attention had been drawn in Parliament to this possibility when the Bill was under consideration, but it was passed over.

An incident which occurred in the previous year added practical force to Mr. Anstey's arguments. At a bye-election in Manchester, in November, 1867, a certain Lily Maxwell, a shopkeeper, whose name was discovered to be on the Parliamentary Register, presented herself at the polling booth and appropriately recorded her vote for Mr. *Jacob Bright*, who happened to be one of the candidates. No objection was raised either by the Returning Officer, or by the candidates, and voters who happened to be in the booth at the time signified their approval by raising three hearty cheers. In returning thanks, the successful candidate, Mr. Bright, referred to "the remarkable circumstance":

“This woman,” he said, “is a hard-working, honest person, who pays her rates as you do (hear); who contributes to the burdens of the State as you do (hear, hear), and therefore, if any woman should possess a vote, it is precisely such a one as she.” (Cheers.)

This circumstance, though of no legal value, was of importance in that it aroused public attention and interest in the question, and showed that women were able and willing to vote, when the opportunity presented itself.

Appeal to the Courts, 1868.

The Suffrage Societies, being now convinced that under existing law women had a right to vote, decided to make a test case. Consequently, great numbers of women throughout the country, including 5,346 women householders in Manchester, claimed to be put on the parliamentary register. Great uncertainty prevailed as to how the applications were to be treated. In Salford and in many other parts of England the overseers interpreted their duty by the *wording* of the Acts of Parliament, and placed all ratepayers on the register, without distinction of sex. In the majority of cases, Manchester included, the overseers refused to put the names of women ratepayers on the register, but placed them on the list of claimants to be dealt with in the Revision Courts. In four courts the women's claims were admitted. In Salford and many other places the Revising Barrister struck off the names of the women, and disallowed the claims of those in Manchester. In Leeds a Quaker lady was fined 10/- for making a “frivolous claim.” But the matter did not end here. The Manchester women consolidated their claims and appealed.

“The Times” of November 3rd, commenting on “the glorious uncertainty of the law as to whether a woman under certain conditions might or might not vote for a Member of Parliament,” concluded with these significant words:

“If anyone supposes it was ever the intention of the Legislature to give the women a vote, and if they do

get it, it will be by a sort of accident, in itself objectionable, though in its practical consequences perhaps harmless enough. On the other hand, *if they are refused it, the nation will no doubt be formally and in the eyes of day committing itself, through its judicial tribunal, to the dangerous doctrine that representation need not go along with taxation.*"

A few days later, (November 7th) the case of the women (Chorlton v. Lings) came before the Court of Common Pleas. Mr. J. D. Coleridge (afterwards Lord Chief Justice Coleridge) and Dr. Pankhurst were the counsel for the appellants. The Judges upheld the decision of the Revising Barristers, on the ground that neither by common law nor by Act of Parliament could women vote, and that until the right was expressly conferred on them by Act of Parliament they must stand outside the constitution.

From this it will be seen that the exclusion of women rests, not upon statute law, but upon a judicial decision, from which, under the provisions of the Act, there was no appeal.

This decision did not of course affect the women whose names had been placed on the list of Parliamentary voters; and at the General Election which occurred immediately after, many women actually voted—little remark being made thereon, and no disturbance arising.

As it had now been decided that under existing law women could not vote, the only alternative was "to appeal to the Legislature without delay."

Unhappily Mr. Mill had lost his seat in the Election of 1869, but a parliamentary champion was found in the person of Mr. Jacob Bright, who, after consultation with other friendly members of Parliament, promised to introduce a Women's Suffrage Bill at the earliest moment possible.

Meanwhile steps were taken, by means of a vigorous and organised campaign throughout the country, to awaken interest in the question of the enfranchisement of women and win support for the Bill.

Amongst the many public meetings organised in connection with this campaign, one held in London (July 17, 1869) deserves—and for three reasons—more than a mere passing notice: (1) It was probably the first occasion on which a woman had presided over a public meeting of men and women in London; (2) it was the occasion on which Mrs. Fawcett, a bride of three months' standing, made her first public appearance on a platform in support of a cause which for over forty years she has advocated, in season and out of season, with such conspicuous ability, earnestness and patience; (3) on the platform were many noble and well-known men of the time: Thomas Hare, Boyd Kinnear, John Stuart Mill, the Rev. Charles Kingsley, Lord Houghton, Professor Masson, P. A. Taylor, M.P., James Stansfeld, M.P., John Morley (Lord Morley) and Henry Fawcett, whose unwavering and active support brought stimulus and cheer to his wife and strength to the movement generally.

“At many meetings,” writes a contemporary, “cheers were called for Mr. Fawcett, because of his unselfish kindness in sparing his wife—on whom he was specially dependent—to go forth to plead for the new gospel. It was felt that there must be a deep meaning in a cause which could thus command his sympathy.”

Mrs. P. A. Taylor was in the chair. Her logical address, delivered with dignity and persuasiveness, concluded with these words:

“Women are accused of acting from impulse, and not from principle. That is not our case: we are in earnest, and will prove before the world that when in earnest, we are capable of persistent energy, which in the end will prove successful.”

It was about this time that Mr. Thomasson, of Bolton, gave the first of the series of magnificent donations to the Manchester Society which helped to put the work in the North of England on a firm and permanent basis.

A notable event of this year which brought hope to the hearts of Suffragists, was the inclusion in “The Municipal

Corporations Amendment Bill, 1869," of a clause, moved by Mr. Jacob Bright, "that all words importing the *masculine* gender should be held to include *women* for all purposes connected with and having reference to the election of or power to elect representatives of any Municipal Corporation." In this way the municipal franchise, taken away in 1835, was restored to women, and the *principle* of Women's Suffrage was unhesitatingly conceded. The Bill, which received the Royal Assent in August, 1869, drew from a well-known statesman the remark: "This is a revolution; this vote means still another, and there never was so great a revolution so speedily accomplished."

CHAPTER V.

IN PARLIAMENT (1870—1884).*

MORE VOTES FOR MEN.

FIRST WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE BILL (1870).

In 1870, Mr. Jacob Bright, encouraged by the events recorded in the last chapter, gave notice, on the re-assembling of Parliament in February, of his intention to introduce a Bill to "Remove the Electoral Disabilities of Women."

The text of the Bill was as follows :

"Be it enacted by the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords, spiritual and temporal, and Commons in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows :

"First: That in all Acts relating to the qualification and recognition of voters or persons entitled or claiming to be registered and to vote in the election of Members of Parliament, whenever words occur which import the masculine gender, the same shall be held to include females for all purposes connected with, and having reference to the right to be registered as voters, and to vote in such elections, any law or usage to the contrary notwithstanding."

On May 4th the second reading of the Bill, which stood first on the orders of the day, was moved by Mr. Jacob Bright in a logical and persuasive speech, concluding with these words :

"The women who are interested in this subject are only acting in the spirit of one of the noblest proverbs in our language—'God helps those who help themselves.' Is it a matter of regret to

* For the purposes of quick reference the events of the next 16 years, 1870-1884, are divided into two chapters under the headings "In Parliament" and "In the Country."

us that they should have these aspirations? Ought it not rather to be a subject of satisfaction and pride? That this Bill will become law, no one who has observed the character of the agitation and who knows the love of justice in the British people, can doubt. I hope it will become law soon, for I have a desire, which will receive the sympathy of many in this House, I have a strong desire that when our children come to read of the story of their country's fame, it may be written that the British Parliament was the first great legislative assembly in the world which, in conferring its franchises, knew nothing of the distinctions of strong and weak, of male and female, of rich and poor."

The second reading was carried by 124 votes to 91, being a majority in its favour of 33. The Government was neutral on the occasion, and members were left free to vote as they pleased. But a week later (May 12th), when the Bill went into Committee, strong pressure was exerted by the Government to defeat the measure, a speech by the Prime Minister—in which he said that the Government were "strongly of opinion that it would be a very great mistake to carry the Bill into law"—telling heavily against it. On a division being taken, the Bill was rejected by 220 to 94.

The "Women's Suffrage Journal," in its June issue, commented on the situation as follows: "The Bill is lost for this session, but it will be heard of again."

At a meeting of the Women's Suffrage Societies, held shortly afterwards, it was unanimously decided to ask Mr. Jacob Bright to re-introduce the measure during the following session.

In 1871 Mr. Jacob Bright again introduced his "Women's Disabilities Removal Bill," and moved its second reading on May 3rd. Again it was defeated, the votes on this occasion being 220 for, and 151 against—a hostile majority of 69. But the number of Mr. Bright's supporters had increased, the opposition had declined, and Mr. Gladstone, who had greatly modified his opposition, left the House without voting.

A few days before the debate took place, an important

Conference of Women's Suffrage workers was held in London. From that meeting a memorial pressing for the immediate extension of the Parliamentary franchise to women householders, signed by 2,000 women, was sent to Mr. Gladstone. Amongst the signatories were *Mary Carpenter*, the founder of the first school for destitute children and juvenile offenders, and *Florence Nightingale*, whose heroic and practical efforts on behalf of the wounded soldiers in 1856 "not only saved the British army from destruction, but effected a mighty reform in the care of the sick and an opening for women into the region of serious business," and concerning whom Queen Victoria, in 1865, wrote: "We are delighted with her (Miss Nightingale) wonderful, clear and comprehensive head. I wish we had her at the War Office."

In 1872 (May 4th) Mr. Jacob Bright for the third time moved the second reading of the Bill, and was ably supported. It was again thrown out; 142 votes being recorded for the Bill, 222 against it; majority against, 79.

In 1873, for the fourth time, Mr. Jacob Bright brought forward his Bill. For the fourth time it was rejected, but on this occasion the votes in support of the measure rose to 155, the largest number yet recorded, while the opposition remained stationary at 222, giving a majority against the second reading of 67. A notable feature of this debate was the speech of Mr. Henley, the Conservative member for Oxfordshire, and the "Father of the House." In it he said that he had always voted against the measure; but after careful study of the way in which women used their local votes, he had come to the conclusion that an extension of the principle would be useful, and he should give the Bill his hearty support.

The General Election of 1874 deprived the Women's Suffrage Movement for a time of the services of many staunch supporters; amongst them the indefatigable and devoted Parliamentary champion, Mr. Jacob Bright who lost his seat as Member for Manchester.

Early in the first session of the new Parliament Mr. William Forsyth, Q.C., the Conservative Member for

Marylebone, who had consented to take charge of the measure, brought in a Women's Suffrage Bill, which expressly excluded married women from its provisions. This alteration in the wording of the Bill was regarded as a fatal error by Suffragist workers, who were convinced that they should limit their efforts strictly to the removal of sex disqualification and leave the marriage question alone. Owing to pressure of Government business the Bill was withdrawn in July.

In 1875 the Bill, with a slight modification, was re-introduced, and on April 7th Mr. Forsyth moved the second reading in an able speech. When the division was taken, it was at once evident that, in spite of the loss of many influential supporters from the cause already explained, parliamentary support had not decreased, the vote for the Bill on this occasion being 152, against 187—hostile majority, 35. The narrowness of the majority seems to have alarmed the opponents of Women's Suffrage, for at a meeting in the House of Commons on June 23rd it was resolved:

“That a Committee of Peers, Members of Parliament, and other influential men be organised for the purpose of maintaining the integrity of the franchise, in opposition to the claims for extension of the Parliamentary Suffrage to women.”

But the efforts even “of Peers and other influential men” failed to lessen the numbers of Mr. Forsyth's supporters when, on April 26th, 1876, he again brought forward his “little Bill of mighty consequence” (“W. S. Journal,” 1876), though they probably helped to swell the numbers who voted against it, the hostile majority on this occasion being 87. A still more important factor was the speech of Mr. John Bright, who, for the first time, spoke and voted against the principle of Women's Suffrage.

In 1877 the Bill was introduced by Mr. Jacob Bright, who had regained a seat at a bye-election. The second reading was taken on June 6th. Everything pointed to a good division. This, however, was frustrated by the introduction of new tactics, often repeated since, which

do not tend to uphold the dignity of the House. While Mr. Leonard Courtney had the floor, the opponents burst into a tumultuous roar of shouts and howls which effectually drowned his voice, and lasted until the hour of six had struck, after which it was no longer possible to take a division.

The Parliamentary history of the next few years may be recorded in a few words. In 1878 Mr. Jacob Bright, owing to failing health, was obliged to resign the charge of the Bill. The Parliamentary leadership of the question was accepted by Mr. Leonard Courtney, Liberal Member for Liskeard, who, on June 19th, moved the second reading of the Women's Suffrage Bill, concluding his speech in these words :

“The political reasons for granting the prayer of the Bill appear to me to be undeniable, but I confess they are not the reasons why I most strongly support it. I believe it will develop a fuller, freer and nobler character in women by admitting them into the sphere of political thought and duty. Some may say, ‘But what is to be the end?’ I do not know that we are always to see the goal towards which we are moving. If we are moving on right principle, if we are actuated by a feeling of justice, if the hand which moves above us and leads us on, is a hand in which we can place implicit confidence—then I say, trust to that light, follow that hand, without fear of the future.”

On a division being taken, the Bill was defeated by 220 against 140; but the hostile majority, in spite of a systematic canvass against the Bill, was less than of the previous year, having fallen to 80.

The following year witnessed an important change in procedure. As Parliament was drawing to a close, it was considered wiser to test the opinion of the House by means of a Resolution rather than by a Bill.

The Resolution, which was introduced by Mr. Leonard Courtney on March 7th, was as follows :

“That in the opinion of this House it is injurious to the best interests of the country that women who are entitled to vote in municipal, parochial and school

board elections, when possessed of the statutory qualifications, should be disabled from voting in Parliamentary elections, although possessed of the statutory qualifications, and that it is expedient that this disability should be forthwith repealed."

On a division being taken, there voted for the resolution 103, against 217—majority against the Resolution 114, the division being the smallest on record since 1870.

Shortly before the opening of Parliament in 1881, Mr. Courtney accepted office under the Government, and was therefore unable to continue in charge of the Bill. Acting on his suggestion, a deputation representing the whole strength of the Society waited on Mr. Hugh Mason, (Liberal Member for Ashton-under-Lyne) to ask him to accept the leadership. In acceding to the request of the deputation, Mr. Mason stated that some of his constituents remonstrated with him for having ventured to give a promise to take up this cause; as, judging from the votes recorded by the women in his constituency at municipal elections, he would lose his seat if the Parliamentary franchise were extended to them.

"My answer," said Mr. Mason, "to this remonstrance was very prompt and decided. I simply said that women had a right to the franchise; that they were as capable as men of forming a judgment on political questions; and that I had just as much confidence in the women as I had in the men. I added, 'Whether the result would be that the women will vote against me and turn me out of Parliament or not, is a matter of perfect indifference to me so long as they exercise the franchise honestly as I believe they would.'"

In 1883, writes Miss Blackburn, "Mr. Hugh Mason's prolonged endeavours to secure a day for a debate on his Resolution prevailed at last."

The Resolution was thus worded :

"That in the opinion of this House 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 the right of voting."



Millicent Garrett (Mrs. Henry Fawcett).

*Photo by Livingstone, from a picture about 1872 in
Bristol University.*



(Lilias Ashworth) Mrs. Ashworth Hallett.

Photo by Barrand, from a photograph about 1872.

An animated debate followed, and the result of the division was encouraging. The hostile majority of 1879, the last time a division had been secured, fell from 114 to 16. "The resolution," says Miss Blackburn, "was a preliminary skirmish before the Reform Bill of the following year, and the result brightened the hopes of the workers for the coming battle."

Amongst the Members of Parliament who, during this period (1870—1884), and in addition to those already mentioned, came down to the House of Commons time after time to speak and vote in support of Bills and resolutions for the removal of the electoral disabilities of women, were to be found the Rt. Hon. Russell Gurney, the Rt. Hon. Henry Fawcett, the Rt. Hon. James Stansfield, the Rt. Hon. Sir Stafford Northcote, Dr. Lyon Playfair, Sir Robert Anstruther, Sir Wilfrid Lawson, Mr. Eastwick, Sergeant Sherlock, Mr. Thomas Mellor, Lord John Manners, Mr. Heron, Sir John Trelawney, Mr. Duncan McLaren and his two sons, Mr. J. P. Thomasson, Mr. Frederick Pennington, Mr. William Woods, Mr. William Summers, Mr. P. A. Taylor, and Mr. Charles Hopwood.

GOVERNMENT REFORM BILL (1884).

The opportunity for which Women Suffragists had waited and worked was now at hand.

At a Conference of friendly Members of Parliament, held on February 7th, 1884, it was decided that should the Government Franchise Bill not include women, an especial amendment should be moved at some stage in the debate. Owing to ill-health Mr. Hugh Mason had resigned the Parliamentary charge of the question in 1883, and it was now in the hands of Mr. William Woodall, Liberal Member for Stoke-on-Trent. On February 20th the Prime Minister moved for leave to bring in the Government Bill. It contained no mention of women. During the adjourned debate on the second reading Mr. William Woodall gave notice of his intention, when the Bill went into Committee, to move as an amendment a clause to include women.

The clause ran thus :

“For all purposes connected with and having reference to the right of voting in the election of Members of Parliament, words in the ‘Representation of the People’ Bill importing the masculine gender include women.”

Mr. Woodall, in giving notice of this amendment, stated that the fundamental principle of the Bill as it was described by the Prime Minister, was to give a vote to every household, but as there was no provision for giving the franchise to such householders if they happened to be women, he intended to propose a clause to cover the omission.

The Government at once made known that they intended to bring their whole weight against the new clause, and that they expected their followers to vote against it. On June 10th, Mr. Woodall, in an able speech, moved his addition, which was seconded by Baron de Worms. He was followed by the Prime Minister, who emphatically stated that the Government would decline all further responsibility for the Franchise Bill if the clause were adopted. “The cargo,” he said, “which the vessel carries is, in our opinion, a cargo as large as she can safely carry.”

On the motion of Lord John Manners, the debate was adjourned until June 12th. The division took place at a late hour on the evening of that day, when Mr. Woodall’s clause was defeated by 271 votes to 135, a hostile majority of 136. The postponement of the further stages of the measure to an autumn session gave opportunity for further agitation, but to no purpose. The Bill passed into law, and thus—in the words of Miss Blackburn—

“the curtain fell on the second Act of the drama. The Court of Common Pleas had brought the first Act to an end when it closed the door to the old franchises. Now the Act which created large, new classes of voters ended the second Act by shutting the door of the new franchises against women. They had used every legitimate and constitutional means open to them, yet they were left in the residuum.”

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE COUNTRY (1870—1884).

IN UNION IS STRENGTH.

Turning from Parliament to the work outside, we find the period between 1870 and 1884 marked, to quote a writer of that time,

“by an intensity and unity of action then without a parallel among women. They had hitherto laboured in isolation, the period of associated action had now set in, bringing along with it new ties of friendship and common interest for the common good, between men and women as well as between women themselves.”

The action of the Government on May 12th, 1870, in opposing the Women's Suffrage Bill, convinced the friends and supporters of the movement in the country that they were in for a struggle which would require not merely patience, courage and self-sacrifice, but much political sagacity. They realised, too, the importance, if success was to be attained, of securing the approval and support of public opinion.

Now began the systematic and constitutional agitation on behalf of the enfranchisement of women and in support of the Bill which was unremittingly carried on till 1884.

Existing organizations and societies were strengthened and new ones formed; lectures were given, great meetings were held, petitions were circulated, and literature was distributed broadcast. By these methods public opinion was steadily educated, and thousands of adherents were gained for the cause. So energetic was the campaign that there was hardly a town of any importance from John o' Groats to Land's End where the principle of Women's Suffrage was not discussed and explained.

In March, 1870, the first number of the "Women's Suffrage Journal" made its appearance. This journal, which for twenty years was the official organ of the movement, was edited by Miss Becker with care and spirit, and continued to appear every month until the day of her death. Its pages present a faithful and exact account free from any touch of sensational journalism, not only of the Women's Suffrage agitation, but of all other important events connected with the emancipation of women during that time.

Another memorable feature of this year, by which the principle of Women's Suffrage was further conceded, was the passing of the Elementary Education Act which not only admitted women to vote for School Boards, but expressly declared them eligible for election to these bodies. This, following so closely on the passing of the Municipal Corporations Amendment Act, was a great gain, and the women were not slow to make use of the opportunity offered.

In Manchester, Miss Lydia Becker came forward as a candidate under the new Act, and was triumphantly returned at the head of the poll. In London, "The return at the head of the poll of Miss Elizabeth Garrett (now Mrs. Garrett Anderson)," says the "Times" of that day, "was an extraordinary phenomenon in the history of electioneering. In this astounding victory, thorough organization and indefatigable exertion, as well as the high personal character of the candidate, played an important part." In Greenwich a small band of women worked, "as only women can work,"—again to quote "The Times," for Miss Emily Davies; and the electors showed their appreciation of her merits by returning her at the head of the poll.

In 1871 Mrs. Fawcett undertook a series of meetings in the West of England, visiting Bath, Bristol, Exeter, Taunton, Plymouth, and Tavistock, converting many to the cause by her clear logic and convincing speeches. She was accompanied by Miss Lilius Ashworth (now Mrs. Ashworth Hallett), a niece of John and Jacob Bright.

Lilias Ashworth, who came into the movement in 1870, was one of the most generous and influential of the early workers. As a speaker she was always in great request, and many people have since testified to the deep impression made upon them at the meetings by her personal beauty, and witty, forcible speeches. Her interest in the work to-day is as keen as it was forty years ago, and she continues to be the "guide, philosopher and friend" of those younger workers who are fortunate enough to get the benefit of her experience and political sagacity. During the last three years she has tended the growth of two vigorous young branches of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, and of the Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Association.

During the seventies Miss Ashworth was closely associated with the Garretts. She personally organized not only the speaking tour already mentioned, but two others in 1872—one in Gloucestershire and Herefordshire, the other in the boroughs of South Wales.

On the first tour Miss Ashworth's colleagues were Miss Agnes Garrett, who rarely spoke herself, her rôle being to help and comfort those who did; and Miss Rhoda Garrett, described by a newspaper reporter of the day as "composed though young, intelligent though feminine." Rhoda Garrett, though "feminine," was nevertheless one of the most notable and earnest of the pioneers, and a convincing and eloquent speaker.

On the second occasion Miss Ashworth was accompanied by Miss Caroline Ashurst Biggs, "whose ready pen, untiring industry and methodical work made her," so writes a contemporary, "an invaluable ally, of whom one could truly say she had 'the charity that suffereth long and is kind.'"

These meetings, and a series undertaken in Lancashire by Miss Lydia Becker and Miss Isabella Stuart, are specially mentioned because they are a type of countless others which were held all over the country during those busy years, and also because they serve to illustrate the difficulties which the pioneers had to encounter in the days

when it was unusual for women to sit on public platforms, while to speak therefrom was regarded as almost indecent.

It required some courage for the workers to face audiences under such circumstances, as may be gathered from the fact that at one of the meetings a vote of thanks was passed to the speakers "for their heroism in giving such able interesting addresses." At another meeting the chairman felt it necessary to assure his audience that "the women speakers were quite respectable," meaning to convey they were not there for purposes of notoriety or to earn money. On yet another occasion the chairman, in introducing the speakers, informed the audience that "though the ladies had come to address them from a *public platform*," they were "quite homely persons."

In many cases groups of people went to the meetings with the fixed intention of sneering at and ridiculing the speakers. Lydia Becker, in particular, had much to endure in this respect, her appearance and manner being often misrepresented and travestied in "Punch."

But there were compensations. Despite the sneers and ridicule and the nervous effort involved, the meetings were a source of much interest, for the speakers never failed to carry resolutions affirming the principle of Women's Suffrage and the humorous element was rarely absent. People who had never heard of Women's Suffrage before, came in crowds to see what sort of women were these who thus made public exhibition of their zeal for the cause; "and when we appeared in our quiet, black dresses," says Mrs. Ashworth Hallett, "it was amusing to note the sudden change in the faces of the crowd who had come to look at us."

In remote country places, as well as in towns and cities, people who had never thought of the significance of the movement began to consider it. On one occasion the editor of a local newspaper, who earlier in the day had flatly refused to allow any reference to the movement to appear in his paper, actually came on to the platform at the close of the meeting to join in the vote of thanks to the speakers. He stated that up to that time he had

strongly disapproved of the agitation; but after hearing the ladies speak, he could not help thinking that those who could be so interesting and amusing on a platform must be pleasant and good comrades to live with at home.

In Scotland, the campaign was actively carried on by Mrs. Duncan McLaren, Miss Jane Taylour, Dr. Agnes McLaren, and Miss Eliza Wigham, assisted frequently by Miss Isabella Stuart, of Balgonie, in Fifeshire, and a band of earnest and devoted workers. The Scottish pioneers met with many difficulties and some amusing experiences. On one occasion, like the Apostle Paul, they were in danger of shipwreck; only a sudden change of wind saved the ship on which they were, from being driven on the rocks. On another occasion, at Kirkwall, in the Orkney Islands, the minister of the place warned the inhabitants, in a Sunday morning sermon, against "the unwomanly and unseemly proceedings" of certain women who were advertised to speak at a public meeting during the coming week. (It may be stated, in passing, that on the night of the meeting the hall was filled to overflowing.)

In Ireland, the movement was initiated and developed under the guidance of Miss Anna Isabella Robertson, whose strong and growing sense of the inequality of women's position led her to throw herself with heart and soul into the movement, and Mrs. Anna Maria Haslam.

Mrs. Haslam, whose name first appears in connection with Women's Suffrage in the petition of 1866, was a member of the Society of Friends, and so was from the first accustomed to the active co-operation of women with men on a footing of practical equality in all social and religious work.

"When," writes Mrs. Haslam, "Elihu Burritt and Frederick Douglass visited my native town of Youghal, County Cork, in the early fifties, it was quite natural for me to take part in the public meetings held by them. My husband had been a convinced Women's Suffragist since 1851, and upon my marriage with him in 1884, I found no difficulty in becoming a convert, although for several years there was no scope for any public action

in the cause. The visit of Professor and Mrs. Fawcett to Dublin in 1870 gave an impetus to the work."

When the Dublin Women's Suffrage Committee was formed, in 1876, which subsequently developed into the Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association, Mrs. Haslam was elected the Honorary Secretary, a post which, despite her 84 years, she holds to-day.

"In Belfast and the North of Ireland," continues Mrs. Haslam, "Miss Isabella M. S. Tod, whose bright and rapid intellect, ready pen and admirable gift of speech were ever at the service of her sex, worked with unflagging energy from 1872 until the day of her death in 1896."

Other speakers and workers were Miss Mary Beedy, M.A., an American graduate, whose practical common-sense and clear logic made her advocacy invaluable; Lady Anna Gore Langton, a speaker of convincing earnestness; Lady Amberley (a daughter of Lady Stanley of Alderley, one of the most remarkable women of the time), whose death from diphtheria, contracted while nursing her little daughter, removed a notable pioneer and a beautiful speaker; Mrs. Fenwick Miller, Mrs. Charles McLaren (Lady Aberconway); Miss Eliza Sturge; Miss Helena Downing, whose eloquence was marked by the humour and pathos which were hers by national inheritance; Mrs. Helen Bright Clark; Miss Flora Stevenson; Mrs. Arthur Arnold; Mrs. Ormiston Chant; Miss Florence Balgarnie; the Misses Priestman; Miss Jane Cobden; Mrs. Scatcherd; Viscountess Harberton; Mrs. Beddoe; Mrs. Alfred Osler, and many others. An occasional but notable speaker of the time was Mrs. Josephine Butler, who was and is the inspirer of the movement for purity. Throughout her long campaign against vice and immorality Mrs. Butler repeatedly and consistently expressed her profound conviction that it was essential that the Parliamentary vote should be entrusted to women. Writing, in 1891, to a gathering of her old fellow workers, she says:

"During the twenty-one years of our work there was one thing which made our battle harder than it would



Mrs. Josephine Butler.

From a photograph of a bust by Alexander Munro.



Anna Maria Haslam (Mrs. Haslam).

From a photograph by Lawrence, Dublin.

have been; we had to fight outside the Constitution. We have been knocking at the door of the Constitution all these years, and there are men who even now tell me that they would give us anything in the way of justice but the Parliamentary vote. . . . The prayer which I now offer is that the veil may be taken away, and the selfishness—the perhaps unconscious selfishness—may be removed from the hearts of men who deny women equality and keep them outside the Constitution. Think what we could do in the cause of morality, think of the pain and trouble and martyrdom that we might be saved in the future, if we had that little piece of justice.”

These are but a few of the hundreds of brave women “who,” in Mrs. Ashworth Hallett’s words, “moved by the sense of great injustice, undaunted by scorn and sneers, first went forth to speak the thing they knew, and to plead for their sex a fair field and no favour.”

PETITIONS.

During this period, petitions in favour of the enfranchisement of women were literally poured into the House of Commons.

In 1871, 622 petitions, signed by 186,976 persons, were presented to the House of Commons. In 1872 there were 829 petitions, with 350,093 signatures. In 1873, 919 petitions, with 329,206 signatures. In 1874, 1,404 petitions with 430,343 signatures. In 1875, 1,273, with 415,622 signatures. It has been estimated that between the years 1866 and 1879 alone, the number of petitions in favour of Women’s Suffrage amounted to over 9,563, and that the signatures numbered over three millions. These petitions, signed by all classes of men and women, were invaluable in arousing interest in the work, and afforded scope for quiet, intelligent agitation. But as years went by, workers became tired of collecting signatures to petitions which attracted so little attention, and this method, after a few years, was to a great extent discarded, to be revived, though in a somewhat different form, a quarter of a century later.

The following extracts, taken from speeches and a letter

of this period may be fittingly introduced here, as they throw light on the spirit of hope in which the pioneers entered on their work and the happy anticipations, shared by all Suffragists of that time, of early victory.

Mr. Commissioner Hill, speaking at the inaugural meeting of the Bristol Society, January 24th, 1868, asked "for support for a cause which would require help for a very short time." "The claim," he said, "is so clear and reasonable that it has but to be brought before Parliament to be granted."

Miss Becker, in a letter of about the same date, wrote :

"I do believe that if we are thoroughly bent on our point and play our cards well, we may see women voting at the next Election; and I am sure if they do not vote then it will be the last General Election from which they will be excluded."

Lady Anna Gore Langton, in a speech at Bath, in 1873, said: "Only ask a thing in the name of justice and it is seldom, if ever, asked of Englishmen in vain."

"We are within measurable distance of success," said Miss Becker, entering the Committee Room of the Manchester Women's Suffrage Society one day in 1874. "Mr. Disraeli has promised me that if he gets into power he will bring in a Bill for the enfranchisement of women." "Some of us," says Mrs. Isabella Mills, who relates the incident, "feared disappointment, but Miss Becker trusted and was strong in the faith. When nothing came of it she, though saying little, felt the disappointment keenly, but only girded on her armour and set afresh to work." Little did those in the forefront of the battle at this time imagine that 40 years hence, and in spite of Women's Suffrage Bills having passed their second reading on seven different occasions, women would still be engaged in bringing forward their "clear and reasonable claim." Yet so it is. Viewed in the light of history, the beautiful and almost childlike optimism of the noble souls who thought so well of their countrymen as to believe that the prejudice and sentiment of ages would be so easily overcome, may bring a smile to the face of present-day workers; but all

must admit that the pioneers had the vision, the keen sight of the prophet who sees the truth as it is, the truth which is too often hidden from the "statesman" and the "crowd." It may be that the goal of their hopes seemed to them nearer than it was; but who to-day will dare to say that the pathway they selected, narrow, difficult and hard as it has proved to be, was not the right way, and one which will ultimately lead to victory?

In 1872, in accordance with a suggestion made by Mr. Jacob Bright, a new Committee, called the Central Committee, was established in London, to which all the existing Women's Suffrage Societies had the right to send representatives, the object of the Committee being, as explained by Mr. Bright, to solidify and strengthen the work. Mrs. Pennington, Mr. Hopwood, Q.C., and Professor Amos acted as Hon. Secretaries during the first year of the new Committee's existence, and following them Miss Agnes Garrett and Miss C. A. Biggs. The Societies represented on the Committee included Bristol, Birmingham, Manchester, Edinburgh, Dublin and the North of Ireland.

In 1873, the introduction of Mr. G. O. Trevelyan's Franchise Bill awakened a reasonable hope amongst the Suffrage workers that the claim of women might be considered, as well as that of the agricultural labourers, and gave fresh impetus to the work.

It was in this year that the hearts of all Suffragists were saddened by news of the death, at Avignon, of John Stuart Mill, the friend and supporter of the movement, and the man who first carried the question of Women's parliamentary enfranchisement into the arena of practical politics.

The success which had attended the campaign throughout the seventies, the great number of meetings held, the enormous petitions signed and presented to Parliament in support of the claim of women to citizen rights, the interest created in the question throughout the country, the prospect of a new Electoral Reform Bill, and, above all, the steady perseverance and unflagging courage of the devoted band of workers, led Miss Becker to conceive the

bold idea of filling the Free Trade Hall in Manchester, a building capable of holding 5,000 persons, with women and with women only, in support of the cause. This great demonstration was held on February 8th, 1880, and exceeded the most sanguine expectations. When Mrs. Priscilla Bright McLaren, who had been invited to preside, took her seat on the platform surrounded by a distinguished array of speakers, all women, "the scene," writes one who was present,

"was a sight never to be forgotten. The whole of the vast area, galleries and platform was thronged with a dense crowd composed (with the exception of reporters and about 156 men who had paid 2/6 each for a seat in the gallery) entirely of women. Some had walked ten miles to attend the meeting. A large overflow meeting was held in a neighbouring hall, presided over by Mrs. Bright Lucas, but even with this, accommodation could not be provided for all who came, and thousands went away unable to obtain admission."

Mrs. McLaren opened the proceedings in a speech delivered in clear, grave tones, which penetrated to every part of the vast hall. "Is this a dream or a reality?" she asked. "It is no dream; and only grave realities could have brought so many women together from all parts of the Kingdom to form this magnificent meeting. It can no longer be said that women do not want the Suffrage. Need we wonder that the beneficent designs of Providence have been so imperfectly carried out when only one-half the intellect and heart of the nation have hitherto been called into action, and the powers of the other half have been almost wholly suppressed. Women, along with good men, think that politics in the true sense have to do with human interests at large."

Mrs. McLaren was followed by 15 speakers—Lady Harberton, Mrs. Scatcherd, Mrs. Ashworth Hallett, Mrs. Ellis, Miss Eliza Sturge, Mrs. Wellstood (Edinburgh), Mrs. Haslam (Dublin), Miss Becker, Mrs. Pearson, Miss Jessie Craigen, Miss Helena Downing, Miss Lucy Wilson, Mrs. Nichols, Mrs. O'Brien and Mrs. Josephine Butler.

At the overflow meetings most of these ladies spoke, with the addition of Mrs. Lucas and Miss C. A. Biggs. Their speeches were short, eloquent and to the point, no speaker being allowed more than ten minutes. The resolution in favour of Women's Suffrage was unanimously carried, and a memorial to the Government embodying the same was adopted.

This demonstration was quickly followed by eight others in the largest halls of the principal towns of the country.

2. London, St. James's Hall, May 6th, 1880, Lady Harberton presiding. In connection with this meeting a procession of working women (the first Women's Suffrage procession ever organized) marched through the streets with a banner on which was inscribed the words: "We are far too low to *vote* the tax; we are not too low to *pay*."

3. Bristol, Colston Hall, November 4th, 1880, Mrs. Beddoe presiding.

4. Birmingham, Town Hall, February 12th, 1881, Mrs. Crosskey presiding.

5. Bradford, St. George's Hall, November 22nd, 1881, Mrs. Priscilla McLaren again presiding.

6. Nottingham, Albert Hall, November 30th, 1881, Mrs. Bright Lucas presiding.

7. Sheffield, Albert Hall, February 27th, 1882, Lady Harberton presiding.

8. Glasgow, St. Andrew's Hall, November 3rd, 1882, Mrs. McLaren presiding.

Early in 1884 a great Scottish National demonstration was held in the Hall of the U.P. Synod, Edinburgh.

In every case conditions similar to those in the Manchester demonstration prevailed. The halls were packed from floor to ceiling with women of all ranks and occupations. Men were present only as spectators, and that on payment of half-a-crown. On each occasion resolutions in support of Women's Suffrage were unanimously adopted and embodied in memorials to the Government. Every worker of the day assisted in some form or other. These demonstrations proved that women possessed not only political capacity and organizing ability,

but also that they were far more in earnest about the enfranchisement of their sex than the men concerning whom the House of Commons was so deeply interested.

An important event of this year (1880) was the introduction of a Bill for Household Suffrage to male persons, which came up for discussion in the "House of Keys," (Isle of Man). An amendment was moved by Mr. Richard Sherwood to omit the word "male" for the purpose of extending the franchise to women. A compromise that the extension should be confined merely to "women owners" was accepted, as it was considered advisable to get the concession to women voters secured, as thereby the principle of Women's Suffrage was admitted. This proposal was carried unanimously, and the Bill passed into law in 1881. At the election which immediately followed, Mr. Sherwood, who had introduced the proposal, received the votes of all the women voters, and was returned at the head of the poll. The testimony of the Returning Officers was that the new women voters were quick, intelligent and businesslike, and they always knew for whom they wished to vote.

A notable event of the year 1882 having an important bearing on the Parliamentary enfranchisement of women was the passing into law of the "Married Women's Property Bill," which received the Royal Assent twenty-five years after it had first been introduced in Parliament by Sir Erskine Perry.

The honour of bringing to a successful close a struggle, by which the property of a married woman was secured to her, was mainly due to Mrs. Wolstenholme Elmy and Mrs. Jacob Bright, who for many long years gave their undivided attention to securing the support necessary for its passage into law.

GOVERNMENT REFORM BILL (1884).

In 1884 the long-expected Reform Bill came before the country.

The women who had been working in the forefront of this movement since 1867, confidently expected that when

the Government dealt with the question of reform, women would receive representation at the same time and in the same measure as the other unenfranchised classes. The Reform Bill was looked forward to as the time when their demand for justice would be satisfied; for it did not seem possible to persons of common sense and just views that the claims of women who fulfilled all the duties and obligations of householders could be ignored when the time came for a further extension of the franchise. Some sanguine persons went so far as to imagine that the Bill itself would contain a clause relating to women. This expectation was not generally shared, for it was known that the Cabinet held very dissentient views regarding the enfranchisement of women. There was no great surprise therefore, though some disappointment, when the Reform Bill, on its introduction, was found to contain no reference to women. But when, later, it was announced that the Government intended to oppose Mr. Woodall's proposal to introduce a clause to include women, a thrill of indignation and disappointment ran through the ranks of the women who had laboured so courageously and waited so patiently for a recognition of their just claims. The golden opportunity had come, and the verdict was given against them. No word, no act of theirs could turn this defeat into victory; the door of Parliament was once more "banged, bolted and barred" against them.

CHAPTER VII.

WORK IN THE FURROWS (1885—1900).

“THE UNCONQUERABLE WILL.”

“There is,” says Justin McCarthy, in his “History of Our Own Times,” “from whatever cause, a very common phenomenon in our political history. A movement which begins with the promise of sweeping all before it seems to lose all its force, and is supposed by many observers to be now only the care of a few earnest and fanatical persons. Suddenly it is taken up by a Minister of commanding influence, and the bone of contention or the crotchet of one Parliament is the great party controversy of a second, and the accomplished triumph of a third.”

The Women’s Suffrage Movement is no exception to this rule. From 1866 to 1884 the cause had steadily advanced. Then followed the period of reaction common to most reform movements. In 1885 the Women’s Suffrage agitation entered on the second or stationary stage, in which it was destined to remain, apparently neither advancing nor receding, for sixteen years; and workers for the cause had to resign themselves to a series of dull and apparently profitless years.

The opinion is sometimes advanced that the inactivity which characterised the period between 1884 and 1900 was due to lack of courage and determination on the part of those who were leading the agitation at that time. But this is only a superficial view.

The reasons for this period of apparent torpor and reaction are not far to seek, and were due to many causes.

In the first place, between 1884 and 1900 the Parliamentary horizon was as black as it well could be. Attempts were persistently made to promote legislation, but with little success. There were momentary gleams of brightness, but during these lean years on three occasions



S. A. Reddish.



Rosalind, Countess of Carlisle.

*From a photograph by H. Walter Barnett, Hyde Park Corner,
S. W.*

only, were debates and divisions on Women's Suffrage secured.

(1) In 1885, when a Bill, introduced by Mr. Leonard Courtney, was read a second time without a division, but was then blocked for the remainder of the Session.

(2) In 1892, when Sir Albert Rollit, on April 27th, moved, in a clear and vigorous speech, the second reading of a Bill, the terms of which were as follows :

“Any woman who in Great Britain is registered or entitled to be registered as an elector for any Town or County Council, or (2) in Ireland is a ratepayer entitled to vote at an election for guardians of the poor, shall be entitled to be registered as a Parliamentary elector, and when registered to vote at any Parliamentary election for the county, borough, or division wherein the qualifying property is situate.”

During the debate which followed, Mr. Arthur Balfour made the important declaration that when any further alteration of the franchise was proposed, “the House would have to face and deal with the problem of Women's Suffrage, and deal with it in a complete fashion.” In spite of a strong Opposition whip, which was sent out two days before the debate, and a letter from Mr. Gladstone to Mr. Samuel Smith, which was circulated against the Bill, the votes on a division showed 152 for, 175 against—a narrow majority of 23.

(3) In 1897, when Mr. Faithfull Begg introduced a Bill which passed its second reading on February 3rd by a majority of 71. The debate was chiefly noticeable for the extraordinary levity with which the subject was treated by Mr. Radcliffe Cooke and Mr. Labouchere, who moved and seconded the rejection of the Bill.

The following extracts from a letter written the week after the debate, by Mrs. Ashworth Hallett, who was present in the Ladies' Gallery, show the position to which the Suffrage movement had attained in spite of every obstacle, and the expectations of the supporters and workers in regard to an early victory.

"We knew," says Mrs. Hallett, "that we had a majority in this Parliament in favour of giving women votes, but we knew also that there was a desperate minority to be encountered. Mr. Radcliffe Cooke, the member for Hereford, and Mr. Labouchere gave notice at once to move the rejection of the Bill. If women had had to make a selection of the most suitable man to take this part they could not have found in the whole House of Commons one so entirely fitted to lead the enemy as Mr. Labouchere himself.

"When Mr. Faithfull Begg rose to move the second reading the House was fairly full of the friends of the Bill. It was his first speech in the House, and it proved to be one of great excellence. There was no attempt at effect or display, but he went on from point to point, marshalling his facts in excellent order. The Ladies' Gallery meanwhile was crowded with eager occupants. Lady Frances Balfour, the Countess of Carlisle, and Mrs. Courtney were all there, representing as they did the various women's organizations . . . The speeches of the mover and seconder of the rejection of the Bill showed that they had no intelligent arguments to offer, and when they subsided the occupants of the Ladies' Gallery came to the conclusion that the speeches of their opponents were calculated to do the cause more good than even the speeches of their friends. All the arguments heard in years gone by, that 'women must not mingle in the rough and tumble of political contests,' that 'they are too delicate and refined,' that 'they don't understand politics,' that 'it is not their sphere,' that 'they don't want the vote,' had vanished. This talk is no longer possible from the mouth of a Member of Parliament. The fact cannot be denied that thousands of women have been enlisted to work in great political organizations, and when working men turn on women canvassers and say as they do say, 'What business have you to come and ask for my vote when you are not fit to vote yourself?' the situation is not to be endured. This is the secret of the Women's Suffrage triumph. Women have become necessary to the success of party organizations, and to deny them the power of quietly going to a polling booth to record a vote is no longer rationally possible. . . . While Mr. Jebb, the Member for Cambridge University, was speaking, I heard Mr. Bryce say in anxious tones to Sir William Harcourt, 'How large do you think the

majority will be?' Sound carries curiously up to the cage where the ladies sit, and when these words reached me I knew we were going to win. After a speech from Sir William Harcourt, who entreated the House to pause before they committed themselves to a change so momentous for good or evil, and some powerful and hopeful words from Mr. Courtney, the House divided, and a majority of 71 was given for the Bill.

"It is expected that the Bill will go into Committee on June 23rd, and if *nothing unforeseen* happens it is hoped that one clear afternoon will dispose of this stage, when there will only remain the third reading. It is an important fact that we have still a reserve of one hundred members besides those who have already voted, pledged to support the Bill.

"If this Bill should indeed become law this year it will be a more notable and historic memorial of the Diamond Jubilee of the Queen than any that money can raise."

As is generally the case in connection with Women's Suffrage Bills, the "something unforeseen" did happen. All further progress was blocked owing to the tactics of the opponents whose flights of eloquence regarding the registration of plumbers and the disagreeable subject of "verminous persons" barred out any further debate or division on the Bill. Once again the claims of women were treated as a huge joke, and set aside by what even the "Times" of the following day described as an "undignified shuffle."

With these three exceptions, the Bills and Resolutions brought forward during this period were either "crowded out" or "blocked," or the day secured for debate was taken by the Government. If all other plans failed, an honourable member or members opposed to the enfranchisement of women would undertake to "talk" till the hour arrived when to take a division became impossible.

By the adoption of these and similar devices, opponents of Women's Suffrage in the House of Commons successfully prevented during these sixteen years any Women's Suffrage Bill, even if it had passed its second reading, from advancing a step further.

The leaders of the movement in the House of Commons at this time were: Mr. Woodall, Mr. Courtney, Viscount Wolmer, Mr. George Wyndham, and Mr. Faithfull Begg.

II. The satisfying of the men's demand by Parliament in 1884, and the refusal to recognise at the same time the claims of women who had worked, petitioned and organised, to secure representation, had a discouraging effect upon the workers in the country. Women still held together within their organisations, still nursing the "unconquerable hope," still clutching "the inviolable shade," but they were as yet without reward of their labours; they had asked for bread, they had received a stone.

The extension of the franchise to three millions of men served to increase the difficulties of waging an always uphill fight. Women had now to begin over again the weary task of educating the public; they had to persuade the new electorate to grant the measure of justice which had been denied by the old electorate.

III. The formation during this period of women's party political associations, such as the Primrose League and the Women's Liberal Federation; the admission of women to fields of public usefulness connected with local government; the opening up of many avenues of employment hitherto closed to women; the lack of Women's Suffrage Bills in Parliament, and the changing procedure of the House of Commons by which the opportunities of private members were steadily curtailed; all served to scatter interest and absorbed the energies of many workers who, in former years, had devoted their attention exclusively to the promotion of Women's Suffrage. The death of Miss Lydia Becker under tragic circumstances in 1900 tended still further to paralyse the energies of the workers, to diminish funds, and to increase the anxiety of those on whom rested the responsibility of carrying on the agitation.

It is hardly surprising that under these conditions the bright hopefulness and courage which were such marked features of the movement during its earlier stages should

disappear for a time. But even during these apparently profitless years there were forces at work which no human being had called into existence, and which no human being could check; and quiet progress was being made.

The brave and gentle spirits who for a quarter of a century had guided the movement through good report and through evil report, during periods of progress and periods of discouragement, with patience, tact and political sagacity were not likely to be easily cast down. The defeats and disappointments which would have crushed or embittered less consecrated spirits, only served to strengthen the hearts of the pioneers and nerved them to fresh effort.

Taking as their motto

“All is not lost; the unconquerable will is ours,”

they stuck to their posts on deck, and skilfully guided the wind-tossed barque with its precious freight through the stormy seas of disappointment and defeat.

The success which had attended the debate and division on Sir Albert Rollit's Bill in 1892 infused new life and spirit into the hearts of many workers, and inspired new methods of work. To revive interest in the movement, a scheme was formulated by the London Women's Suffrage Society for an appeal from women of all classes and parties to the members of the House of Commons. With this object in view a Conference was held in 1893, at which a Special Appeal Committee was appointed, consisting of the following members: Mrs. Fawcett, The Lady Frances Balfour, Mrs. Frank Morrison, Miss Helen Blackburn, Mrs. Bradley Reid, Miss Balfour, Mrs. Eva McLaren, Mrs. Leonard Courtney, Mrs. Massingberd, The Lady Knightley, Miss Mordan, Mrs. Wynford Phillips, The Lady Henry Somerset, Mrs. Thomas Taylor (of Chipchase), Miss Vernon (Scotland), the Countess of Aberdeen, Mrs. Priscilla Bright McLaren, Miss M. Cunningham, Mrs. Muir Dowie, Mrs. Lindsay Forbes, Miss Lees, Miss E. Scott Kirkland, Miss Methven, Miss Flora Stevenson, Miss Louisa Stevenson, Mrs. Lang Todd, and Miss Wigham.

The appeal was thus worded :

“ To the Members of the House of Commons.
“ Gentlemen,—

“ Many of the women who sign this appeal differ in opinion on other political questions, but all are of one mind that the continued denial of the franchise to women, while it is at the same time being gradually extended among men, is at once unjust and inexpedient.

“ In our homes it fosters the impression that women's opinion on questions of public interest is of no value to the nation, while the fact of women having no votes lessens the representative character of the House of Commons.

“ In the factory and workshop it places power to restrict women's work in the hands of men who are working alongside of women whom they too often treat as rivals rather than as fellow-workers.

“ In Parliament it prevents men from realising how one-sided are many of the laws affecting women.

“ We therefore earnestly beg you to support any well-considered measure for the extension of the Parliamentary franchise to women.”

Throughout the country, great interest was taken in this scheme. In the work of collecting signatures, 3,500 women took part. In 1894, when it had been proposed that the appeal should be presented, the signatures had reached the number of 248,000, including the names of women eminent in literature and art, heads of women's colleges, teachers, medical women, women Poor Law Guardians, and members of School Boards, women following scientific or professional careers and engaged in the work of philanthropy, social reform and politics.

Miss Becker, in her lifetime, had often expressed the opinion that if once women could plead their own cause at the bar of the House, the enfranchisement of women would speedily follow. The time seemed ripe for such a step, and application was made to the Speaker for the necessary permission. The application was refused on the ground that it would be contrary to precedent. Mr. Speaker Peel, however, gave permission for the “Appeal” to be displayed in the Library of the House of Commons

so that it might be seen and examined by members at the time when Lord Wolmer's amendment to the Registration Bill, "That it be an instruction to the Committee that they have power to deal with the registration of women," was under discussion. As it was found that the Bill would not reach Committee stage that year, the display of the Appeal was postponed to a more suitable occasion.

The opportunity seemed to arise in 1896, when Mr. Faithfull Begg's Women's Suffrage Bill stood first on the orders of the day for May 20th.

Application was made to Mr. Speaker Gully to renew the permission given in 1904 by Mr. Speaker Peel for the Appeal to be shown in the Library of the House of Commons. The request was refused. Application was then made to the Board of Works for permission to place the Appeal in Westminster Hall, and granted. On the day appointed, the Hall presented an unusual sight. Below the statues of the Kings of England were ranged tables, 50 feet in length, on which were placed volumes containing the signatures, which had now risen to over a quarter of a million, systematically arranged according to Parliamentary constituencies. It was thought that such a record would prove to Members of Parliament how keenly women in all walks of life desire admission into the ranks of citizenship. But the volumes containing signatures of "voteless women" failed to arrest the attention of Members of Parliament, nor did the Press vouchsafe more than a few words to this further demand on the part of women for justice.

This "Appeal" is one of the greatest petitions ever presented to Parliament in support of any reform, but as it was an "Appeal," and therefore technically not a petition, no mention is made of it in the record of petitions presented in support of Women's Suffrage.

The closing years of the nineteenth century gave little scope for prominent Suffrage work. Wars and rumours of wars occupied the mind of the public, and the attention of the Government was fixed on questions of imperial importance to the exclusion of domestic reforms.

“Almost,” as Miss Blackburn truly says, “it might seem to the despondent that all would have to be begun over again; but not quite; what had been done could not be undone, and the labours in the days of hope had left their mark.”

Through the awakening of women and mainly through the energies of women and men identified with the Suffrage movement, the trend of events since 1866 had steadily made for the freedom and advancement of women. Better and higher education had been secured. Colleges and High Schools had been established. University advantages had been granted, avenues of employment and public usefulness had been opened out, including admission into the medical and other professions and the right to sit on local governing bodies. The right of married women to control their own earnings and property had been secured; many legal hardships and disabilities had been removed; and the extension of all local franchises to some women had been carried. These are but a few out of many advances which were quietly made between the years of 1866 and 1900, the importance of which cannot be overestimated.

Measured by the standard which some people apply to a movement, that there is no progress unless it takes effect in definite legislation, the record during the sixteen years reviewed in this chapter, may seem painful and unsatisfactory; but history and experience teach and thinking people know that the season of silent growth is as important to the success of a great reform as the more showy hours of triumph. And so it was in this case. The fires kindled in the memorable campaign which had its rise in 1867 were not dead, they only slumbered, to burst out with renewed heat and brilliancy with the dawn of a new century.

CHAPTER VIII.

NEW FORCES.

THE CALL OF THE NOBLE.

The advent of the twentieth century and the cessation of war brought fresh life and vigour into the movement, and new forces into the field.

In 1901-2 public attention was drawn to petitions signed by 67,000 women textile workers in Lancashire and Cheshire which were taken to the House of Commons by deputations of women employed in the cotton trade. For many years previously, enthusiastic meetings and demonstrations had been held in most of the great towns in the North; and in many of these when a vote was taken as to whether the question of Women's Suffrage was to become a Trade Union question, it was carried by huge majorities and with few dissentients.

It was the appearance on the scene of action of this new and important force, the organising of which was carried out by Miss Esther Roper, Miss Gore Booth, and Miss Reddish, herself at one time a textile worker, which was chiefly responsible for the wonderful revival of interest in the question of the enfranchisement of women which marked the early years of 1900. There can be no doubt that this active and enthusiastic demand on the part of a great army of women who earn their bread by "the sweat of their brow," and not merely their own bread, but in many cases the bread of relatives dependent on them, made a deep impression on Parliament and caused many who had hitherto treated the agitation as an "impracticable fad," and "the fantastic crochet" of a few rich and well-to-do women, to enquire seriously into the why and wherefore of the movement.

Further, as Miss Eva Gore-Booth points out in an able article on this new development—

“It must never be forgotten that when the Labour Representation Movement began about this time to make itself felt in Lancashire, it was by the votes of women that it stood or fell. Before the Cotton Unions could subscribe £900 a year to the Labour Representation Committee, and before a candidate could be run and his salary paid as Labour Member for Clitheroe, a ballot had to be taken of the women, who far outnumber the men in the Cotton Unions. The women did not grudge their money for Labour Representation, and at the time the selected candidate, Mr. Shackleton, himself pointed out how large a share of the burden fell on the shoulders of these unrepresented workers.”*

As time went on, and little or no attention was paid to the political claims of the women textile workers of Lancashire, either by their comrades in the Union or by Parliament, they became impressed more and more deeply by the fact that there was no help for them in their industrial struggle until they forced their way into the ranks of responsible citizens whose words and needs politicians cannot afford to pass by or neglect.

The following extracts taken from the manifesto of “The Lancashire and Cheshire Women Textile and other Workers’ Representation Committee,” issued in July, 1904, serve to show how deeply the Lancashire women realised the need for strong and effective action and the methods they adopted to secure it:

“During the last few years,” so runs the Manifesto, “the need of political power for the defence of the workers has been felt by every section of the labour world. Among the men the growing sense of the importance of this question has resulted in the formation of the Labour Representation Committee with the object of gaining direct Parliamentary representation for the already enfranchised men. Meanwhile the position of the unenfranchised working women, who are by their voteless condition shut out from all political influence, is daily becoming more precarious. They cannot hope to hold their own in industrial matters, where their

* See “The case for Women’s Suffrage,” edited by Brougham Villiers, p. 54.

interests may clash with those of their enfranchised fellow-workers or employers.

“In view of the complicated state of modern politics, and the mass of conflicting interests, the conclusion has been forced on those of the textile workers who have been working unceasingly in past years to secure votes for women, that what is urgently needed is that they should send their own nominee to the House of Commons, pledged to work in season and out of season to secure the enfranchisement of the women workers of the country.

“A Committee has been formed of women in the cotton trade from various Lancashire and Cheshire towns, whose duties are: (1) to select a suitable and zealous candidate; and (2) to collect and be responsible for the raising of £500, the amount necessary for one candidate’s election expenses.”

Two years later, the new policy was actually enforced. At the time of the General Election (1906) a women’s candidate, Mr. Thorley Smith, unsupported by parties or organisations, was put into the field at Wigan, and secured 2,203 votes, being second at the poll on a three-cornered fight.

The example and spirited action of the textile workers and the awakening of women generally to the effect of legislation on everyday life, brought the thrifty housewives of the Women’s Co-operative Guild, who up to this time had taken but little interest in the political enfranchisement of women, openly into the field in support of Women’s Suffrage under the leadership of their indefatigable Honorary Secretary, Miss Llewellyn Davies.

Petitions presented during these years from 753 women graduates of Universities, from 71 Trade and Labour Councils, and 62 Trades Unions representing over 100,000 working men, supplied still further proof of the way in which the question of Women’s Suffrage had permeated every class and section of society.

In March, 1904, a Women’s Suffrage Resolution moved in the House of Commons by Sir Charles McLaren, was carried, to the surprise of friends and opponents, by a majority of 114.

This unexpected success and the prospect of the dissolution of Parliament in the near future, caused Women Suffrage workers to redouble their efforts to educate Parliamentary candidates and their constituents to the growing demand on the part of women for the elementary rights of citizenship.

In May, 1905, Sir John Bamford Slack moved the second reading of a Women's Suffrage Bill, for which he had secured a place in the ballot earlier in the session. Owing to the time usurped by Mr. Labouchere in expounding his views on the "Lighting of Vehicles" Bill, the Women's Suffrage Bill failed to reach a division.

Further impetus was given at this time to the cause by the new and forward policy adopted by the Women's Liberal Federation, on the motion of Rosalind, Countess of Carlisle, whose fearless and statesmanlike advocacy of Women's Suffrage has done so much to bring the question within the range of practical politics. The resolution was to the effect—

"That the official organisers of the Women's Liberal Federation be sent to help those candidates only who support Women's Suffrage in the House of Commons."

This resolution, which has been acted upon ever since it came into force, has been the means of leading hundreds of Parliamentary candidates (sometimes even against their inclinations) into the Women's Suffrage fold; and is undoubtedly responsible for the great number of Liberal members of Parliament who now stand pledged to support the question in the House of Commons.

The unsensational but steady and consistent pressure which the Federation has ever exerted in favour of the removal of sex disabilities in connection with the Parliamentary Suffrage, and election to local bodies, has already borne good fruit; and its effect upon the Liberal party and the Government of the day becomes more apparent every year.

Up to this time (1904) the movement for the enfranchisement of women, now extending over a period of forty years,

had been carried on with dignity, courage, and political sagacity. Patient continuance in well-doing in spite of much provocation and disappointment; appeals to reason and high moral considerations; the steady application of constitutional pressure on members of Parliament and electors; the education of public opinion, and steadfast adherence to peaceful methods had formed the bedrock of the agitation.

The year 1905 witnessed the appearance on the scene of action of a new army of workers with a new policy. The new school founded, in 1903, by Mrs. Pankhurst with the name of the "Social and Political Union," considered that constitutional methods had failed, that the day for peaceful agitation had passed, and "that the time had arrived" (here are quoted the words of one of the leaders of the movement) "for the institution of an anti-Government campaign, conducted by all such methods as are available to those who do not possess the constitutional weapon of the vote."

This policy which included breaches of the peace and acts of violence has been strictly adhered to by the new and militant section of Suffrage workers.

This is not the place in which to discuss the policy of this new school, concerning which public opinion is somewhat sharply divided. The next generation will be a better judge than the present of the place to be assigned to the "militant" workers in the Women's Suffrage agitation, and will see with clearer eyes the demerits or merits of their methods.

Two facts, however, may be noted before passing on.

(1) History teaches that on the fringe of most great reform movements there is generally to be found a band of impetuous, brave and revolutionary spirits who, in the disappointment of long-deferred hope, and under the influence of counsels of despair, are ready to employ tactics of anger and violence which must be as repugnant to the main body of those who adopt them as they are to those who are convinced that a great cause, the basis of which is justice and not force, does not require such tactics for its

advocacy, and whose policy therefore is one of strict adherence to constitutional and peaceful methods of agitation.

(2) It must be remembered also that the denial of justice always leads to unrest, and often to rebellion; and the long delay which has occurred in placing some form of Women's Suffrage on the Statute Book of the nation, and the disregard by Governments and Parliaments of the just claims of women to citizen rights, have made sick the hearts of those self-restrained workers who realise that great reforms worth having come slowly; and have led impatient spirits to the verge of despair. These facts explain to some extent, though they cannot excuse or justify the acts of disorder and physical violence, the humiliations and recriminations which have been such a painful phase of the Women's Suffrage agitation during the last few years; acts which have caused division in the ranks of the Suffrage party, made the work of law-abiding and peaceful workers more difficult, and filled with sorrow the hearts of a vast number of well-wishers and friends.

CHAPTER IX.

RENEWED EFFORTS.

CONFLICT AND CONCILIATION.

The General Election of 1906 returned to power a Liberal Government with an enormous majority and 420 avowed supporters (of all parties) of Women's Suffrage. Once again the time and conditions seemed favourable for pressing the claims of women on the Government. On May 19th a deputation, 400 strong and representing over 100,000 women Suffragists of every political party, profession, and rank in life, waited on the Prime Minister (Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman) (the first time in the history of the movement such a deputation had been received by the head of the Government), and there made out, to quote his own words, "an irrefutable case." Representatives from the Women's Suffrage Societies, from the Women's National Federation, the Women's Co-operative Guild, the Scottish Women's Temperance Society, the Lancashire and Cheshire Union of Women Liberals, the Lancashire and Cheshire Union of Women Textile Workers, the Women Graduates Union, and from many other bodies, were present to plead the same cause from their own special standpoint. After the deputation had been introduced by Sir Charles McLaren, Miss Emily Davies, representing the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, opened the proceedings. She was followed by Mrs. Eva McLaren, Miss Margaret Ashton, Mrs. Hunter, Mrs. Dickinson, Miss Eva Gore-Booth, Mrs. Pankhurst, and by Miss Mary Bateson who presented a petition, signed by 1,930 women graduates of universities. In the eight short speeches which followed there was neither wavering nor wandering.

The Prime Minister, who, by his reply on this occasion and by the absence of every form of coercion upon his followers during his tenure of office, proved himself personally a friend, explained that owing to a divided Cabinet it was not in his power to give any pledge of immediate Government support in connection with the question of Women's Suffrage. He could only, he said, counsel the women to have a little more patience until some plan could be arranged.

Mrs. Wolstenholme Elmy gave expression to the regret and disappointment felt by all present that Government support was for the present withheld, and the deputation withdrew. Meanwhile, and for the next two years, the fortunes of the ballot for private members' Bills fell to the Suffragists.

On April 25th, 1906, Mr. Keir Hardie (Labour Member for Merthyr Tydvil) moved: "That in the opinion of this House it is desirable that sex should cease to be a bar to the exercise of the Parliamentary franchise." Once again the old tactics of preventing progress were resorted to by opponents of the measure; and the resolution was "talked out," a disturbance in the Ladies' Gallery being the excuse for the action taken.

A feature of this year was also the declaration signed at the instance of Miss Clementina Black, by 257,000 professional and other women for Women's Suffrage.

In 1907 Mr. W. H. Dickinson (Liberal Member for North St. Pancras), who secured a place in the ballot, introduced a simple Bill containing two clauses to the effect:

- (1) That for purpose of Parliamentary voting, whenever words occur which import the masculine gender, the same shall be held to include women.
- (2) That marriage shall be no disqualification, any law or custom to the contrary notwithstanding.

The second reading was taken on March 8th. In moving it, Mr. Dickinson made a deep impression on a full House. Everything seemed to point to a division and a large majority. After a full afternoon's debate, the Speaker

refused the closure for a question involving (so it was stated) so serious a change in the British constitution, and once more a Women's Suffrage Bill was "talked out."

In 1908 Mr. Yorke Stanger, K.C. (Liberal Member for North Kensington), drew a favourable place, and at once gave notice of his intention to introduce a Bill to extend the Parliamentary franchise to women on the same lines as that of the previous year.

The second reading, which was moved by Mr. Stanger on February 28th in a well-reasoned and moderate speech, was carried by the overwhelming majority of 179: Ayes, 271; Noes, 92. The Bill was then referred to a Committee of the whole House, and its ultimate fate depended on the action of the Government.

On May 20th a deputation of Liberal Members of Parliament waited on Mr. Asquith (who, owing to the death of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, was now Prime Minister) to ask him to grant facilities for the passage of Mr. Stanger's Bill through all its further stages.

Mr. Asquith, in replying, said that facilities could not be given for Mr. Stanger's Bill, but that, barring *unforeseen accidents*, he regarded it as a "duty, indeed a binding obligation of the Government before the present Parliament came to an end, to bring in an Electoral Reform Bill, and it would then be open to Women Suffragists to urge the enfranchisement of women by means of an amendment. Such an amendment would not be opposed by the Government, provided (1) it was on democratic lines, and (2) that it had the strong and undivided support of the women of the country as well as the present electorate."

In 1909, the second reading of the "Representation of the People" Bill, introduced by the Hon. Geoffrey Howard was carried by a majority of 35 votes on March 19th; while outside the House every nerve was strained to accentuate the "proof" which the Prime Minister had demanded of the growth of the movement and the demand of women for citizens' rights.

All seemed to be going well when an "unforeseen accident" occurred in the form of a Parliamentary crisis

and a somewhat unexpected dissolution in the last month of the year. With the dissolution vanished the hope of the women that their claim for enfranchisement would be satisfied before another General Election.

In reply to a question asked by the Women's Liberal Federation in regard to the future prospects of Women's Suffrage should the Liberal Government be again returned to power, Mr. Asquith, in a speech at the Albert Hall on December 10th, 1909, spoke as follows :

“ Nearly two years ago I declared on behalf of the present Government, that, in the event of bringing in a Reform Bill we should make the question of Suffrage for women an open one for the House of Commons to decide. My declaration survives the General Election, and this cause, so far as the Government is concerned, shall be no worse off in the new Parliament than it would have been in the old.”

In January, 1910, came the sweeping excitement of the General Election. Once again the women, with characteristic courage, put forth their strength and carried the message of “ Votes for Women ” through the length and breadth of the land; once again a large majority of all parties was returned to Parliament publicly pledged to support their cause.

When the new Parliament assembled in February, many members were prepared to introduce a Women's Suffrage Bill, but none of them had the fortune to secure a place in the ballot. Moreover, the whole Parliamentary situation was so uncertain that another General Election seemed imminent. It was at this juncture that a new Committee for the promotion of Women's Suffrage was formed. This body, familiarly known as the “ Conciliation ” Committee, was drawn from every party in the House of Commons, with the Right Hon. The Earl of Lytton as Chairman and Mr. H. N. Brailsford, a brilliant journalist, as Hon. Secretary.

With a view to securing a peaceful settlement of the Women's Suffrage question, the Committee drafted a Bill which they hoped would be satisfactory to all parties in

the House and would receive their united support through all stages.

The text of the said Bill, often spoken of as the "Conciliation Bill," which was cited as "The Representation of the People Act, 1910," was as follows :

"To extend the Parliamentary franchise to Women
Occupiers.

"Be it enacted, etc.

"(1) Every woman possessed of a household qualification or of a ten-pound qualification, within the meaning of the Representation of the People Act (1884) shall be entitled to be registered as a voter, and when registered to vote for the county or borough in which the qualifying premises are situate.

"(2) For the purposes of this Act, a woman shall not be disqualified by marriage for being registered as a voter, provided that a husband and wife shall not both be qualified in respect of the same property."

It will be seen at once that this Bill was different in form to all other Women's Suffrage Bills (the object of which has always been to break down sex disqualification and to give the vote to women on the same terms as to men) in that it omitted the Lodger, Ownership and University qualifications, and limited the extension of the franchise to women householders or £10 occupiers, estimated at about a million and a quarter. The promoters of the Bill concluded an explanatory circular with these words :

"We do not claim for our Bill that it is an ideal solution; it is a working compromise. Its single merit is, that in a way which no party can consider objectionable or unfair, it breaks down the barrier which at present excludes all women from citizen rights. It is against this insulting exclusion that women are protesting at present. . . . Failing Government action, we believe that it represents for many years to come the only practicable line of advance."

As a "working compromise," the Bill was accepted by all Suffrage Societies and many other bodies in whose programme Women's Suffrage was included. These bodies, while adhering strictly to their own demand that the Parliamentary vote should be given to women on the same terms as it is, or may be, given to men, were all prepared

(and herein they showed their good sense and moderation) to accept any measure which would once and for ever establish the principle that no person shall be debarred from the possession of a vote merely on the ground of sex.

On June 14th, 1910, the Bill was introduced into the House of Commons (under the ten minutes rule) by Mr. D. J. Shackleton (Labour Member for Clitheroe), and passed its first reading without a division, Mr. F. E. Smith, who spoke in opposition, being wiser than to challenge one.

Application was then made to the Prime Minister to grant facilities for the Bill to be carried through its remaining stages without delay.

Owing to the death of King Edward in May, there was at this time a lull in party strife, and the militant wing of Suffragists had given an undertaking to observe a truce while the Bill was before the House. The time therefore seemed opportune for a recognition of the claims of women.

On June 21st, the Prime Minister received deputations from the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies and the Women's Liberal Federation (the first deputations of women Suffragists he had received since he became Prime Minister), which supplied additional and striking evidence of the growing demand in the country for Women's Suffrage, and earnestly urged that facilities should be given for the passage through the House of Commons of Mr. Shackleton's Bill.

Mr. Asquith, in his reply, while stating that his own personal views had undergone no change, frankly admitted that "the question of Women's Suffrage was exciting an ever-increasing amount of interest, and even passion, in the country," and reiterated his opinion that the House of Commons ought to have the opportunity of expressing an opinion upon it. He thanked the deputations for the care, skill and moderation with which they had presented their case, undertook to convey faithfully to his colleagues the representations which had been made, and promised to announce the decision of the Cabinet without delay. Two days later (June 23rd), in the House of Commons, Mr. Asquith announced his intention of giving time before the

House rose for a full debate and division on the second reading of Mr. Shackleton's Bill, and added: "The Government recognise that the House ought to have opportunities, if it is their deliberate desire, of effectively dealing with the whole question."

A few days later, a memorial asking that facilities might be given for the Bill, signed by 196 Members of Parliament, was presented to the Prime Minister, who, on June 30th, announced that the second reading would be taken on July 11th, two full days being given for the purpose of debate and division.

Between June 14th and July 11th an unprecedented agitation was kept up throughout the country, and great sums of money were subscribed in support of the Bill.

On July 11th and 12th the "Representation of the People (Women)" Bill was debated in Parliament.

Mr. D. J. Shackleton moved, and Sir John Rolleston seconded, "That the Bill be read a second time." The speakers in support of the motion were: The Right Hon. R. B. Haldane (Secretary of State for War), now Lord Haldane, the Right Hon. Walter Runciman (at the time President of the Board of Education), the Right Hon. A. J. Balfour (Leader of the Opposition), the Right Hon. Alfred Lyttelton, Lord Hugh Cecil, Sir Alfred Mond, Sir Albert Spicer, and Messrs. Chancellor, Goulding, Keir Hardie, Kettle, Leach, W. S. B. McLaren, Ponsonby, William Redmond, and Philip Snowden. The opponents were: The Right Hon. H. H. Asquith (Prime Minister), the Right Hon. D. Lloyd George (Chancellor of the Exchequer), the Right Hon. Winston Churchill (at that time Home Secretary), the Right Hons. Walter Long and Austen Chamberlain, Messrs. Harold Baker, Hilaire Belloc, Leonard Brassey, S. H. Butcher, J. Annan Bryce, Arnold Ward, Haviland-Burke, Henry Harwood, Lyell, Mills, Sir A. Nugent, and Earl Ronaldshay.

Never in the whole course of the Parliamentary history of Women's Suffrage was the question treated with such marked respect, or with a greater sense of responsibility.

Amongst the occupants of the crowded Ladies' Gallery

was Madame Belloc, whose untiring labours on behalf of the women's cause between 1847 and 1860 have been already recorded in Chapter II. of this book.

The division taken on the night of July 12th, showed an overwhelming majority in support of the Bill, 299 voting in favour, and 189 against, majority, 110. On a motion to "refer the Bill to a Committee of the whole House" the division showed a majority of 145 in favour of the motion. Further progress during the Session was thus rendered impossible unless the Government would give facilities for the Bill to be carried through its remaining stages. This they declined to do. But in spite of this refusal, the position of Women's Suffrage was now in a totally different position from any it had held before. Ever since 1867 there had always been found the traditional ten righteous men ready to support and champion the cause of women in the House and in the country, but never until 1910 had a Prime Minister and a Cabinet given two days of Government time for a debate on the question. It was felt that this action on the part of the Government at once brought the movement out of the shades "of a dim and speculative future" into the full daylight of practical politics. The question before the country was no longer "Shall women have a vote?" but "When and how is their enfranchisement to be accomplished?"

This fact and the announcement of an autumn session inspired the Suffragists and the Conciliation Committee to continue their work of persuasion and pressure.

It is impossible adequately to describe the extraordinary earnestness and self-sacrifice which lay behind the campaign which was carried on between the introduction of the Bill and the middle of November. During this time, according to records which are far from complete, no fewer than 4,220 meetings were held throughout the country in support of the Bill. In one week the Albert Hall in London was twice filled by different Suffrage Societies. The huge open air demonstrations held in Hyde Park and Trafalgar Square in London, followed by similar gatherings in many of the chief towns and cities

of Great Britain, were in themselves sufficient evidence of the urgency and extent of the demand that the enfranchisement of women, in some form or other, should be speedily accomplished.

A memorable event of this month was the passing by both Houses of the Commonwealth of Australia of the following Resolution, which was cabled to Mr. Asquith :

“That this Senate is of opinion that the extension of the Suffrage to the women of Australia for States and Commonwealth Parliaments 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 proportionate 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 discriminating as men. Because the reform has brought nothing but good, though disaster was freely prophesied, we respectfully urge that all nations enjoying representative government would be well advised in granting votes to women.”

Early in November came the announcement that Parliament was to be immediately dissolved. Another General Election was imminent, and women were still outside the Constitution. The disappointment in Suffragist ranks was keen and bitter. Since 1867 a constitutional campaign increasing in vigour and extent as years went by, had been kept up throughout the Kingdom in support of the enfranchisement of women. For forty years an ever-increasing body of women, supported by a band of generous and far-seeing men, had set forth with patience and perseverance the claims of women to citizens’ rights, not cast down by frequent disappointments, not discouraged by constant rebuffs. They had reasoned, argued, petitioned and worked. They had lost no opportunity of pressing their claims upon the attention of Parliament and the country.

During the opening years of the twentieth century, the

movement had increased and extended with unparalleled rapidity. Women had done everything which human ingenuity could devise and human endurance carry out, to convince Parliament and the country of the desire on the part of a great multitude of women and men that this long-delayed measure of justice should be speedily granted.

A tremendous agitation had been kept up throughout the country: great mass meetings, indoor and open air demonstrations, in addition to innumerable smaller meetings of every kind and description, were held. The Suffrage question was a factor at every by-election. Women Suffrage candidates were put into the field. Unique and striking processions, including all classes of society, marched again and again through the streets of our principal towns and cities, headed by bands, and with banners flying. Huge funds were collected; new supporters had flocked into the ranks; thousands of new friends, men as well as women, had come forward to help in the work.

During this same period, new Societies, too numerous to mention even by name, having Women's Suffrage for their sole object, were formed. Amongst such were "The Women's Freedom League," of which Mrs. Despard is the honoured President, the "Conservative and Unionist Franchise Association" (Lady Selborne, President), which is doing such good work amongst the members of its own political party, "The Church League" (The Right Rev. The Lord Bishop of Lincoln, President), "The Free Church League" (The Rev. John Clifford, D.D., President), "The Catholic Women's Suffrage Society," "The New Constitutional Society," "The National Industrial and Professional Women's Suffrage Society," "The Artists', Actresses' and Writers' Leagues," "The Society of Women Graduates," "The Younger Suffragists," "The London Graduates' Union for Women's Suffrage," "The Gymnastic Teachers' League," and "The People's Suffrage Federation," which demands adult Suffrage for men and women alike.

Special mention must be made of the Men's Leagues for Women's Suffrage, the members of which generously give

help and support to the women in their struggle for the electoral rights and privileges which they themselves already possess. And here may be fittingly introduced a word of grateful recognition and appreciation of the active and sympathetic service rendered to the cause in early as well as in later times, by the men who have generously worked with and for women, sharing their good and their evil fortunes, because they have realised that the movement is based on principles of justice and righteousness, and that the reform will be good for the women and good for the State.

These Societies by no means represent the full strength of the Women's Suffrage movement in the country, for there are numberless organised bodies of women, such as "The Women's Liberal Federation," "The Co-operative Women's Guild," "The National British Women's Temperance Association," to mention a few out of many, who make Women's Suffrage a plank in their programme, and demand in no uncertain tones the enfranchisement of women.

From City and Town Councils also, which have learnt by practical experience the value and benefit of women's advice and co-operation in public work, petitions in support of their claims poured in.

Brief reference must be made, in passing, to the Anti-Suffrage League, formed in 1907, whose women members get deeper and deeper into politics year by year in their determination to keep out of politics. The Anti-Suffrage movement is merely a phase of the general agitation for the enfranchisement of women. It proves its strength, and can no more stop the progress of the reform than it can stop the earth moving round the sun.

"There are," says the President of the International Women's Suffrage Alliance and truly, "no examples among men in their long struggle to secure Suffrage rights, of such devotion, self-denial and compelling earnestness as has been shown by the British women. I believe," continues Mrs. Chapman Catt, "more money has been contributed, more workers enlisted, more meetings held, more demonstrations made in Great

Britain alone, on behalf of Women's Suffrage than in the entire world's movement for man suffrage. Certainly the man suffrage movement never brought forth such originality of campaign methods, such superb organisation and such masterly alertness. Yet it is said that women do not want the vote."

As the Parliament of 1910 drew to its close, Mr. Asquith, in reply to a question asked in the House of Commons by Mr. Keir Hardie, stated "that the Government would, if they were still in power, give facilities in the next Parliament for effectively proceeding with a Women's Suffrage Bill, if so framed as to permit of free amendment."

This statement of the Prime Minister advanced the whole status of the Women's Suffrage question as a definite issue before the country at the General Election, and implied, that if the electors confirmed the Government in power, the new Parliament would be considered to have received a definite mandate in respect to the enfranchisement of women.

The year 1910 ended, as it began, in the turmoil of a General Election. Again the women worked, if possible, harder than ever before, spending hours out of doors, generally in rain and snow, always in cold weather, appealing to voters to support, in one way or another, the cause of Women's Suffrage.

One new method of election work initiated by the National Union of Women's Suffrage was the collection of signatures to a Voters' Petition, to which over three hundred thousand signatures were collected in a short time, by a small staff of workers.

The Election of December, 1910, left the balance of parties, and the personnel of the House of Commons much the same as before.

At once, upon the assembling of the new Parliament, in February, 1911, the "Conciliation" Committee was reformed, and another Women's Suffrage Bill with a new title and with certain modifications designed to meet objections which had been raised to the 1910 Bill, was drafted.

The text of the new Bill was as follows :

“A Bill to confer the Parliamentary Franchise on Women.

“Every woman possessed of a household qualification within the meaning of the Representation of the People Act (1884) shall be entitled to be registered as a voter and when registered to vote for the county or borough in which the qualifying premises are situate.

“(2) For the purposes of this Act a woman shall not be disqualified by marriage for being registered as a voter provided that a husband and a wife shall not both be registered as voters in the same Parliamentary borough or county division.”

This Bill differed in two points from the 1910 Bill.

(1) The title had been altered to admit of free amendment, and (2) the £10 occupation qualification had been omitted.

These alterations met the objections raised by Mr. Lloyd George, Mr. Winston Churchill and other members during the 1910 debate, and left no technical difficulties in the way of the second reading.

Once again the fortunes of the ballot favoured the introduction of a Women's Suffrage measure; and the amended Bill was brought in by Sir George Kemp (Liberal Member for North-West Manchester), who moved on May 5th in a clear and moderate speech, the second reading. This was seconded by Mr. E. A. Goulding (Unionist Member for Worcester).

Mr. M. Levy (Loughborough) proposed, and Mr. H. G. Mackinder seconded its rejection. On a division being taken, there were for the amendment, 88; against, 255—majority for the second reading 167.

The Bill was then read a second time without a division; and, on the motion of Sir George Kemp, was referred to a Committee of the whole House.

On May 24th the Prime Minister received a deputation of Liberal Members, who asked for facilities for the further stages of the Bill.

An announcement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on behalf of the Government in the House of Commons on May 29th to the effect that no facilities could be granted for the Women's Suffrage Bill during the Session, was received with keen disappointment by the supporters of Women's Suffrage in the country. The refusal of facilities was, however, coupled with a promise that a week would be granted in the next Session of Parliament. The apprehensions which arose as to the exact meaning of the statement were entirely removed on June 1st by Sir Edward Grey, who announced that "if the House of Commons in that week showed itself to have a combined, determined majority, substantial and united, and anxious to proceed with the Bill," the Government would not prevent the further stages from being reached; and, further, that the Government intended that the promoters and supporters of the Bill should have a fair chance and should not be left to be "the mere helpless butt for obstruction, without any powers of defence, making themselves and the Bill ridiculous."

The statement of Sir Edward Grey was confirmed in a letter from the Prime Minister to Lord Lytton, published on July 17th, in which he reaffirmed the determination of the Government "to give effect, not only in the letter but in the spirit, to their promise in regard to facilities made in December, 1910," adding that "the Government would oppose no obstacle to a proper use of the closure." These declarations remove all possible misconceptions as to the intentions of the Government, and indicate that, barring unforeseen accidents, the Women's Suffrage ship is at last within reach of land.

The voyage has been long and perilous, and navigation has been difficult. The courage, patience and sagacity of the crew of the ship have been taxed to the uttermost. Again and again has the vessel with its precious cargo been driven by contrary winds into whirlpools of disappointment and defeat; many times she has narrowly escaped shipwreck on the rocks of prejudice and sentiment, but she has weathered the storm; and to-day and for the moment,

she rides at anchor in the bay waiting for a Government pilot to come on board to take her into port. Meanwhile, the crew in charge of the ship stand to their posts alert and steadfast, eager for service, ready for any emergency which may arise, even to the setting forth, if need be, on another voyage.

Many who manned the decks when the ship "put forth to sea" and in the early days steered her through deep and dangerous waters, have passed away:—few indeed of the first crew are here to see their ship come home; but "their works do follow them"; for they have left to their successors an unbroken faith in their sacred cause and an unwavering determination to carry it to victory. Come what may, they will stand by the good ship launched more than forty years ago, until it is safely in port and the parliamentary enfranchisement of women has become the law of the land.

CHAPTER X.

LOOKING FORWARD.

THE ELECTORAL REFORM BILL, 1912.

This chapter has yet to be written. Suffice it now to say that while the pages of this book were being prepared for the press the Prime Minister announced, on November 7th, 1911, that it was the intention of the Government to bring in an Electoral Reform Bill in 1912; the Bill to be introduced in such a form as to leave the House of Commons free to vote on an amendment to include women, which amendment, if carried, would become an integral part of the Bill, and be regarded as such by the Government. The value of this declaration, coupled as it is with the pledge given by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Sir Edward Grey, that they are prepared to champion the Women's Suffrage cause and carry it to victory, cannot be overestimated.

The struggle for women's citizenship has now entered on its third and final stage. Barring "unforeseen accidents," and if the friends in Parliament stand firm to their pledges, and the movement in the country is conducted *with wisdom and political sagacity as well as courage and determination*, the enfranchisement of women in some form or other will be an accomplished fact in 1912.

SUMMARY OF PARLIAMENTARY EVENTS.

1832. Reform Bill passed by which women were legally disfranchised for the first time in the history of the English Constitution.
1832. Petition in support of the enfranchisement of women signed by Mary Smith, of Stanmore, Yorkshire, presented to the House of Commons by G. Hunt.
1850. Lord Brougham's Bill passed, which declares that in all Acts of Parliament the word 'man' shall include 'woman' "unless the contrary is expressly provided."
1851. Petition from a public meeting of the "Sheffield Female Political Association" presented to the House of Lords by the Earl of Carlisle.
1866. Petition signed by 1,499 women praying for the enfranchisement of women, presented to the House of Commons by John Stuart Mill.
1867. '*Representation of the People*' Bill, Amendment to include '*women*' moved by John Stuart Mill. Amendment defeated by 123 votes.
1869. Municipal Suffrage restored to women.
1870. First *Women's Suffrage Bill* passed 2nd Reading by 33 votes.
 " " " " " rejected on going into Committee by 126.
1871. Debate on Bill.
1872. Debate on Bill.
1873. Debate on Bill.
1874. Bill withdrawn.
1875. Debate on Bill.
1876. Debate on Bill.
1877. Debate on Bill.
1878. Debate on Bill.
1879. Debate on Resolution.
1880. No Bill introduced.
1881. Resolution introduced. No debate.
1882. " " "
1883. Debate on Resolution.

1884. *Electoral Reform Bill.* Amendment to include women rejected by 136 votes
1885. Women's Suffrage Bill. Day taken for Government business.
1886. *Bill passed Second Reading.* Further stages blocked.
1887. Day taken for Government Business.
1888. " " "
1889. Day taken by Easter recess.
1890. No day obtained.
1891. Bill shelved.
1892. Debate on Bill.
1893. No day obtained.
1894. No Bill introduced.
1895. No day obtained.
1896. Day taken for Government business.
1897. *Bill passed Second Reading* by 71 votes. Further progress blocked.
1898. Bill crowded out.
1899. Resolution set down. Day taken for Government business.
1900. Bill crowded out.
1901. Resolution set down twice. Days taken for Government business.
1904. Resolution set down. Carried by 114 votes.
1905. Bill "talked out."
1906. Resolution "talked out."
1907. Bill "talked out."
1908. *Bill passed Second Reading* by 179 votes. Further progress blocked.
1909. Bill passed Second Reading by 35 votes.
1910. Bill passed Second Reading by 110 votes. Further progress blocked.
1911. Bill passed Second Reading by 167 votes. Further progress blocked. Facilities promised for 1912.





