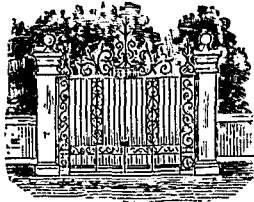


Outside the Gates.

THE CIVIC RIGHTS OF WOMEN.
CONFERENCE AT THE HOLBORN TOWN HALL.
Afternoon Session.
(Concluded from p. 340)



At the afternoon session of the Conference on the Civic Rights of Women the chair was taken by the Rev. S. Alfred Steintal, who opened the meeting by reading a message from that veteran worker in the Suffrage cause, Mrs. Priscilla Bright McLaren, of Edinburgh, who sent to the meeting loving greetings from one who would fain be with them, whose interest in the cause before them had never flagged, who believed that, when the suffrage was granted to women, purity would follow in its train, and that it would give them the lever with which to effect many reforms. She reminded the meeting that neither political party wishes to give women the vote, and concluded:—"Carry your meetings through the provinces; let nothing discourage you, and God will bless you."

THE CHAIRMAN'S SPEECH.

The Chairman reminded the meeting of the deep need which women have industrially of the vote, and repeated what Mrs. Eva McLaren had justly pointed out in the morning, that the Suffrage question appealed to no party sympathies. It was the questions which divided parties in which Members of the Houses of Parliament were deeply interested.

The possession of the Suffrage, however, was of vital importance to women. Questions of war or peace, of national education, of fiscal policy, affected women no less than men—sometimes more. Women had no means of efficiently expressing their opinions on these questions, and, until they obtained the Parliamentary vote, they never would have. It was a strange thing to insist strongly on the special duties and sphere of women, thus acknowledging by implication special gifts for their performance, and then to deny them the right to use these gifts for the national benefit. As long as half the nation had no voice the whole nation had not the strength it might have. The unwisdom of this denial was clear to the minds of those who believe in righteousness. Those who oppress suffer most by oppression, and men have suffered because they have not followed the law of Nature that man and woman should work together for the common good.

The Chairman said that in view of a General Election men were very anxious to secure votes, and the work of women as canvassers. He urged women to work for no man who would not pledge himself to work on behalf of Women's Suffrage, and pointed out the difference between a promise merely to vote for a Bill if introduced, and a promise to work for a full and fair discussion in the House of Commons. Men had so many interests at stake that it was necessary to secure from them a definite promise to ballot for a Bill and to work amongst their friends for it.

The first speaker was

Mrs. CARMICHAEL STOPES,

who delivered an able and eloquent speech. She said that when a wise physician was called in to attend a

patient he was not content with treating the part affected, but tried to discover the fundamental evil. The fundamental cause of all the troubles affecting women was that the British Constitution was not true to its own ideals. The foundation principles of the Magna Charta, which were justice and freedom to all, had been denied to a great part of the nation. Every reformation since had been to the political disadvantage of women, culminating in 1832 with the introduction of the word *male* before *persons* in connection with representation in the House of Commons.

It was an accepted principle that those who had to obey laws should have a voice in making them. It was because they were debarred from this that women were asking for the vote, and in this case against the British Constitution woman is in the position of plaintiff, and man is the defendant, judge, jury, and officers of the law all in one.

Mrs. Stopes concluded by moving the resolution, which was published in our issue of last week, as subsequently amended with the approval of the proposer and seconder.

MR. WALTER MCLAREN,

who seconded the resolution, said he had been asked to speak on the legal status of women, a somewhat difficult matter, as it was little exaggeration to say that the legal status of women in this country was non-existent; more, a reactionary Parliament had destroyed privileges women had once possessed and rendered their whole position insecure.

Under the Interpretation Act, said the speaker, the word masculine includes the feminine gender also. This holds good whenever anything of an unpleasant nature is in question, but, when the advantage is on the side of women, as a rule the interpretation is whittled down in the Courts of Law; thus Lady Sandhurst was deprived of her seat on the London County Council. By the Education Act of last year, women were deprived of their right hitherto undisputed to act as the direct representatives of the electorate on educational bodies, and there was no saying how soon the Government would jockey them out of the positions they at present hold on Boards of Guardians and Parish Councils.

MR. JOHN THOMASSON

asked what women were to do. Was there a leader they could trust? Not one. They must trust themselves and make their own power felt. Electioneering time was coming, and candidates for election would be anxious to secure their services as canvassers. Let them make Women's Suffrage the supreme test. If they voluntarily took the degrading and humiliating position of working for the return to Parliament of those who would vote against the franchise being accorded to them, then they had no one but themselves to thank for the position they occupied.

Mrs. GREEN,

representing 16,000 working women, said that the wealth producers should have a voice in the election of Parliamentary representatives. It was a burning disgrace to the nation that men should say women were unfit to exercise this right. Were they unfit physically, intellectually, morally? They were held unfit to vote, but not unfit to pay taxes. Taxation without representation was tyranny.

MISS GORE BOOTH

showed that without the possession of political power the position of the worker goes from bad to worse.

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