

# Royal British Nurses' Association.

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## THE PARLIAMENTARY FRANCHISE.

We would remind our members of the responsibility that lies with each one to see that her name is placed on the Parliamentary Register before the close of next December. There are many who make the Club their permanent headquarters, and, if they have not registered their vote in some other district, we shall be glad to carry out any formalities which will enable them to exercise their right to vote in our own. There are many reasons why they should not neglect to take the trouble of communicating to us their wishes in this connection.

To begin with, as women of high professional attainment, possessed of knowledge of incalculable value to the Empire and the State, it is surely only right that they should be citizens of the Empire with all those rights of citizenship which can be acquired through taking the steps necessary to exercise the Parliamentary Franchise. The battle which gave them these rights and privileges was fought and won by the heroism, the pertinacity, the generosity and the spirit of citizenship of the great band of pioneer women who, in their clear vision, saw their mission to lie in the direction of bringing about that era-making achievement—the enfranchisement of their sex; well did they realise that women would never attain to any position of real dignity in modern life unless Government acknowledged their powers of judgment, their influence on the health and well-being of the coming race, and a patriotism in them equal to that of the men, although it may work itself out in quite different spheres of national activity.

Every age has its own particular consciousness, its own particular outlook on life, and what may be quite proper, quite harmonious to one period may be wrong, and indeed evil, in another. In Victorian days women were confined to those spheres of life more closely connected with the home and too often indeed sentimentality or prejudice prevented them from making full use of gifts which they might possess, gifts which, in a later time, might have made them great pioneers in art, literature, medicine, nursing, pedagogy and the like. There have been many mute, inglorious Florence Nightingales probably who have felt the limitations and the barriers of the family citadel, but who had not the determination, the force, the economic freedom to enable them to capture the hour and the opportunity for making their mark on professional progress and history. But now neither the manse parlour, the Bible class, the still room, nor any other homely vocation is, of necessity, "woman's sphere"; the wide, wide world has become her province, and long before Parliament granted her full rights of citizenship she had won the title-deeds to these herself in many activities where, a little more than fifty years ago, it would have been highly unladylike for her to seek to enter in. This being so, the work of women has become an important influence in cosmology, evolution, education, hygiene and so on, and, if her energies and her influence are to be of value, it is but right that she should also have her share in administration and organisation as it applies to government.

But, apart from that, who knows what great issues may be at stake when the Parliamentary elections take place next year? There may be points of most vital importance upon which candidates for Parliament must stand or fall; and they will stand or fall irrespective of what may be their views, irrespective of what may be those of a vast number of voteless women, unless the newly enfranchised members of the population secure their titles to vote. Therefore does it become a serious responsibility on the part of all to secure such political rights as are offered to them rather than, like the foolish virgins, to remain in a state of unpreparedness and have to face the elections, when perhaps matters of untold importance are involved, without the power to give their support to one side or another. Such a position must result in a certain loss of self-respect, besides indicating weakness of character and a corresponding lack of a sense of responsibility. Everyone who can secure the right to a vote owes it to her country, her fellow men and women, to coming generations and to her profession that she should get her name placed on the Register, and having done so, that she should take an interest and attain a knowledge of matters affecting national life that seem to her to be of vital importance or that are concerned with activities of which she has wide expert knowledge and experience.

True, it may chance that, owing to circumstances, it may not be necessary, or perhaps it may not be possible, to exercise one's vote when the great election day arrives. It may even be, we hope in but a few cases, that indifference or ignorance may be the reason why its privileges and responsibilities are not taken advantage of, but even if one "doesn't care for politics" and "could never be bothered to vote," one can do good even by securing the right to do so. Think what it may mean, for instance, in our own case, if some matter vitally affecting the sick, vitally affecting the health of the people, or perhaps vitally affecting the advancement of the profession or its economic conditions has to be decided in Parliament; or, again, supposing some evil or injustice existed in connection with our work which only Parliament could put right. Think of the influence we could bring to bear upon Members of Parliament were we able to state that a large number of potential voters had their registered address at 194, Queen's Gate, or even that throughout the Association and scattered throughout the Kingdom there were those who had and meant to use their Parliamentary vote to promote this reform or to remove that injustice.

Merely in the matter of having questions asked in the House, with one purpose or another, merely in the matter of educating Members of Parliament to the advisability of "lending an ear," it would have untold weight in favour of the Association's political activities if every member who can secure a vote in this district, through her relationship with the Club, would do so; it is equally the responsibility of every member of the nursing profession, and of the Association as such, to see that she makes certain of her right to a vote where and how her circumstances demand.

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