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EDITED BY MRS. BEDFORD FENWICK REGISTERED NURSE.

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EDITORIAL.

HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT AND ITS WOMEN ELECTORS.

Parliament has risen. To pastures new have departed our twenty little potentates revolving round the sun of privilege, together with their six hundred satellites. During the past session what have our dictators done for women? Alas! nothing, but add insult to injury. No woman holds honourable office in this Government, and until she does the status of women in this country remains below the salt.

THE BRITISH NATIONALITY AND ALIENS BILL.

We are moved to these reflections after reading the debate in the House of Lords on the Bill by which Lord Alness proposed to restore to a British woman the right to retain her nationality on marriage to an alien. The Bill met with much support, but it was opposed by Lord Munster, on behalf of the Government, on the ground that at successive Imperial Conferences it had not been found possible to secure agreement to this change. The Government felt, he said, that in this matter it was most important to have uniform legislation throughout the Empire.

On moving the second reading of the Bill Lord Alness said he was speaking on behalf of some 40 Women's Societies in the United Kingdom and of 120 Women's Societies in the Dominions. The Bill also had the support of the International Council of Women, representing 31 nations. To-day an alien woman who married a British man *ipso facto* became a British subject. A British woman who married an alien lost her British nationality if, by reason of marriage, she acquired the nationality of her husband.

The principal purpose of the Bill was to restore to a British married woman the right to retain her nationality on marriage with an alien, and the corresponding right of an alien woman on marriage to a British subject. "Restore" was the right word, because up to comparatively recently the marriage of an alien woman to a British subject, or of a British woman to an alien, left the nationality of both entirely unaffected. It was not until 1844 that an alien woman, on marrying a British subject, became herself a British subject, and it was not until 1870 that a British woman, for the first time in British history, lost her British nationality on marrying an alien and herself became an alien. It was difficult to discover why those changes were made.

The Bill sought to equalise the position of the sexes in the eyes of the law. To-day a woman was classed

in that matter with minors and lunatics and became a mere chattel in the household. Such a doctrine must be repugnant to all enlightened and unprejudiced minds. Painful cases of the results of the existing law had come under his notice, cases of intolerable indignity, hardship, and tragedy inflicted on British married women who had married aliens.

The chief line of opposition would be based on a plea for uniformity of nationality within the British Empire. In other words, it was what we lawyers would term a dilatory plea and not a plea on the merits.

If he was not misinformed uniformity of nationality throughout the Empire no longer existed. With regard to the consent of the Dominions it was anomalous and worse that this reform, approved time and again and applauded by successive British Governments, should be held up until the last and most reactionary Dominion had come into line.

Several Noble Lords spoke in support of the Bill, but the Earl of Munster, the Government's spokesman, advanced the argument that the question raised by Lord Alness had come before successive Imperial Conferences (from which women were presumably excluded) and so far it had not been possible to secure agreement on proposals to amend the law (thrust on women as late as 1870) so as to give women a position closely approximating to that of men. In a large Empire with hundreds of millions of people owing allegiance to a common Crown it was essential and absolutely vital that any legislation on such a subject should be of a general character and agreed to by all the members of the Empire, rather than of a unilateral nature. The Government could not see their way to support the Bill or give facilities for its passage.

The Lord Chancellor, Lord Maugham, said that it was a mistake to think that the matter was one of a simple and easy character. It was one of great difficulty and required very careful consideration.

Lord Alness withdrew his motion for the second reading.

Are women going to submit to this cruel indignity without protest?

Nothing, of course, will be done in this vital matter by this misnamed National Government. It remains therefore, for women to form a militant organisation to emancipate themselves from the control of Black, Brown, Yellow and Red men (apparently there are few White men even in Britain) who help to enforce the principle of women's degradation in far-flung Dominions.

A Nurses' group should be forthcoming in support of our British Birthright of nationality.

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