

MANCHESTER NATIONAL SOCIETY FOR
WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE.

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE,
1885-86.

Presented at the Annual General Meeting, November 3rd, 1886.

IN presenting their Annual Report your Committee have the satisfaction of recording a victory for the principle of women's suffrage by the passing of the second reading of the Bill in the House of Commons in the month of February last. Although the opponents, by availing themselves of the forms of the House, were able to obstruct the further progress of the measure, the fact remains that almost the first act of the first Parliament elected on the basis of the extended suffrage was to pass the second reading of the Women's Franchise Bill.

Immediately on the assembling of Parliament Mr. Woodall introduced the Bill in the same form as last year. The second reading was fixed for January 27th.

[49 VICT.] *Parliamentary Franchise (Extension to Women).*

A B I L L
FOR

Extending the Parliamentary Franchise to Women. A.D. 1886.

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 :

Short title. 1. This Act may be cited as the Representation of the People (Extension to Women) Act, 1886.

Women to have same voting rights as men. 2. For all purposes of and incidental to the voting for members to serve in Parliament women shall have the same rights as men, and all enactments relating to or concerned in such elections shall be construed accordingly.

Provided that nothing in this Act contained shall enable women under coverture to be registered or to vote at such elections.

The other gentlemen whose names were on the Bill were Sir R. N. Fowler, Mr. Houldsworth, Mr. Illingworth, Mr. Stansfeld, and Mr. Yorke.

On January the 26th, the day before the Bill stood for second reading, Mr. Woodall made an appeal to the then Chancellor of the Exchequer (Sir M. H. Beach) to allow the debate on the Address to be suspended in order to allow the Bill to be discussed. In response to this appeal, the Chancellor of the Exchequer said he admitted the importance of the question, though he might not entirely agree with the hon. member. If the Bill did not come on to-morrow, he did not see how the question was likely to be fairly discussed during the present session. He did not, therefore, wish to press the debate on the Address to-morrow.

This announcement gave rise to considerable discussion, in the course of which it appeared that the feeling of the House was against the suspension of the debate on the Address in order to allow of the discussion of a private member's Bill. Mr. Woodall, under the circumstances, stated that he should be anxious to consider the convenience of the House in regard to his measure, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer said that after the remarks of the hon. member he had no hesitation in saying that the Government would proceed with the debate on the Address next day. Later in the evening the Government were defeated on an amendment to the Address moved by Mr. Jesse Collings, and in consequence of this the House adjourned over the Wednesday until Thursday, the 28th.

During the adjournment for the installation of the new ministry, Mr. Woodall accepted an office under Government which necessarily precluded him from moving the Bill. Under these circumstances Mr. Courtney consented to take temporary charge of the measure.

When the House re-assembled for business on February 19th, the Bill stood as third order on the paper. The debate on the Address concluded before midnight, and after the next order had been disposed of, Mr. Beresford Hope moved the adjournment of the House. Mr. Courtney opposed the motion, and the House divided, when there appeared for the adjournment, 137; against, 142. Majority, five in favour of proceeding with the Bill. Mr. Courtney then moved the second reading of the Bill. Mr. Puleston seconded the motion. The Bill was supported by Mr. Everett, Mr. Conybeare, Professor Stuart, Sir J. Gorst, Mr. T. M. Healy, and Mr. Illingworth. It was opposed by Mr. Cooke (Newington) and Sir Henry James, who moved the adjournment of the debate. On this Mr. Puleston rose and said that the division on the motion for the adjournment might be accepted as practically a division on the Bill. When the numbers were declared there appeared for adjournment 102, against 159, giving practically a majority of 57 in favour of the Bill. Sir Henry James then said that after the opinion of the House had been so clearly expressed by increasing majorities, he should offer no further opposition to the second reading of the Bill. The Speaker put the question that this Bill be read a second time, and his declaration that the Ayes had it was accepted without dissent. The Bill was then read a second time.

Mr. Courtney having been elected Chairman of Committees, Dr. Cameron, at the request of Parliamentary friends, undertook the charge of the motion for going into Committee, and was assisted in this duty by Mr. C. B. M'Laren and others. But the Bill was continuously blocked throughout the session, and by this means the opponents were enabled to prevent the House from proceeding further with

it. In June the Ministry were defeated on the Government of Ireland Bill, and in consequence the newly-elected Parliament was dissolved on the twenty-sixth of June.

The results of the second general election under the new franchise show an increased number of supporters of women's suffrage over those in the Parliament of 1885. The number of members now in the House of Commons who have voted or otherwise declared themselves in favour of women's franchise is 343. As the total number of members is 670, the friends appear in an actual majority of 12 in the whole House. The known or presumed opponents number about 136, therefore among the 477 members whose opinions are known there is a majority in favour of women's suffrage of nearly three to one. There remain 193 whose opinions have not been declared. It appears not unreasonable to assume that the balance of opinion among the members whose views are unknown will be on the same side as among those who have declared their sentiments.

The 341 friends consist of 167 Conservatives, 101 Gladstonian Liberals, 30 Unionist Liberals, and 43 Nationalists. There are 316 Conservatives in the House, of whom 167 are friends. Out of the 190 Gladstonians 101 are friends. Of the 78 Unionists 30 are friends, and 43 out of the 85 Nationalists.

The verdict of the general election caused the resignation of the Government. Mr. Woodall was again free to take charge of a private member's Bill, and at the request of a deputation representing various committees of the National Society for Women's Suffrage he consented to re-introduce the Parliamentary Franchise (Extension to Women) Bill, and he has since obtained the names of the same gentlemen to back it as before, with the exception of Mr. Yorke, who is no longer in the House.

When Parliament re-assembled in July it was announced that the whole time of the House would be given to the transaction of necessary financial business; there was therefore no possibility that the Bill could have been brought on for discussion.

Four hundred and fifty-four petitions were presented in the two sessions of 1886 to the House of Commons in favour of the franchise for women, containing 16,905 signatures; of these, 64, with 1,024 signatures, have been obtained by friends and correspondents of your Committee.

Of the 454 petitions, 129 were from public bodies signed officially. These include petitions from the Mayor, aldermen, and burgesses, under their corporate seal, of the following municipal boroughs in England and Wales: Accrington, Batley, Bedford, Bewdley, Brecon, Burslem, Cardigan, Chester, Chesterfield, Chipping Norton, Colchester, Crewe, Dewsbury, Dunstable, Glastonbury, Glossop, Halifax, Hartlepool, Harrogate, Jarrow, Kidderminster, Kingston-upon-Hull, Leeds, Newark, Northampton, Rotherham, St. Helens, Scarborough, South Molton, Southport, Sunderland, Tenby, Warrington, Weymouth and Melcombe Regis, Worcester, Wrexham.

The Convention of Royal and Parliamentary Burghs of Scotland, and the following Scotch municipal councils have also sent petitions in favour of the Bill: Anstruther Wester, Brechin, Dumfries, Dunbar, Dunfermline, Dysart, Edinburgh, Elgin, Forres, Galashiels, Greenock, Hawick, Kilmarnock, Kinghorn, Kirkcaldy, Kirkeudbright, Lochmaben, Montrose, Paisley, Port Glasgow, Tain, Whithorn, Wick.

Fifty-six petitions have been presented to the House of Lords, but there is no official record of the number of signatures.

Members of debating societies in the following places have applied for and received packets of pamphlets, &c.: Sunderland (2), Liverpool (6), Sale, Merthyr Tydfil, Penmaenmawr, Taymouth, Hull, Glasgow (2), Cardiff, Uttoxeter, Ashton-under-Lyne, Wolverhampton, London (2), Oxford, Darlington, Manchester (2), Newcastle-on-Tyne, Leeds (2), and Bideford.

During the past year your Committee's Assistant Secretary, Miss Backhouse, has visited the following places: Grimsby, Wakefield, Huddersfield, Derby, Southport, Accrington,

