

3900  
278482

Price 1d.

1922 Series—No. 5.

# NATIONAL UNION OF SOCIETIES FOR EQUAL CITIZENSHIP.

EVELYN HOUSE, 62, OXFORD STREET, W.1.

## WHAT THE VOTE HAS DONE.

By MRS. HENRY FAWCETT, J.P., LL.D.

Before women were enfranchised it was possible, after years of hard work and persistent effort, to get through Parliament changes in the law favourable to the position of women. But this process was not rapid; and it absorbed the labour of a large number of able women. During the first eighteen years of the present century four such measures were carried, or one in every four and a half years, whereas in the four years since women have had the vote the rate has been speeded up to rather more than two a year.

I wish, however, to emphasise not merely the number and value of the Acts that have been passed since women had the vote, but the completely different and improved atmosphere which has been created as regards the sphere of women in national life and its responsibilities. Those of us who had worked in the Lobbies and Committee Rooms of the House of Commons for bettering the legal position of women were conscious of this improvement from the very moment when the Representation of the People Act, 1918, received the Royal Assent. We were no longer there on sufferance, but by right.

Below will be found a list of the chief changes in the law, favourable to women, which have been made in the United Kingdom since the passing of the Representation of the People Act, in February, 1918.

1918 **The Parliamentary (Qualification of Women) Act** renders it possible for a constituency to choose a woman as its representative in the House of Commons. This Act went through almost unopposed. Viscountess Astor was elected for (Sutton) Plymouth in November, 1919, as a Conservative, and Mrs. Wintringham, a Liberal, was elected for Louth in September, 1921. Many women candidates are contesting seats in the General Election which must take place before the autumn of 1923. In the two Parliaments elected in Northern and Southern Ireland in 1921, women were returned in not inconsiderable numbers. Their success has been facilitated by the adoption of the system of Proportional Representation, and the creation of large constituencies, each returning several members, electors having the possession of the single transferable vote.

1918 **The Registration of Midwives Amending Act** removes some of the defects of the previous Act passed in 1902, which was placed on the Statute Book only after twelve years' hard work, and included several obvious defects, because it was feared that their removal would jeopardise its passing. In 1918, the Amending Act was adopted as a Government measure and passed almost unopposed.

1918 **The Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act.**—In November, 1918, immediately before the General Election, Mr. Lloyd George and Mr.

Bonar Law promised, if returned to power, to introduce legislation "to remove all existing inequalities in the law between men and women." They were returned to power by an immense majority, but the King's Speech at the opening of Parliament gave no indication of any intention to fulfil this particular pledge. In 1919 the Labour Party introduced and carried through all its stages in the Commons, notwithstanding Government opposition, a measure called the Women's Emancipation Bill, and this roused the Government. The Bill of the Labour Party was torpedoed in the House of Lords and the Government passed through all its stages, in both Houses, the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act. The Government measure was not so complete as that of the Labour Party, as it made no reference at all to the Franchise, but it gave an important instalment in the direction of fulfilling the pledge quoted above. It opened the legal profession, in both its branches, to women; it enabled women to sit on Juries and to act as Magistrates, and it made clear to the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge that they were free to open their membership, Degrees and all other privileges to women. Oxford availed itself of these powers without delay, but Cambridge, in November, 1920, and again in October, 1921, refused to do so. It was shown on an analysis of the voting that the majority of resident members of the Senate (those responsible, therefore, for the actual working of the University) were favourable to the admission of women to membership. The University Commission has also reported favourably on this. So that there is a strong probability that the present anomalous position of women students at Cambridge will soon be terminated by Parliamentary action, or otherwise. The women's vote is, of course, a great asset in this struggle.

Under the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act over 1,000 women have already been appointed as Magistrates. When the Juvenile Courts (Metropolis) Act was passed (1921), it was enacted that in London the Magistrates presiding in these Courts must secure the presence of two lay justices, one of whom must be a woman.

**1919 Nurses Registration Act.**—Trained nurses, without the vote, had been working for registration for 32 years, but without success; one year after the enfranchisement of women the principle of registration was accepted by the Government and the Act embodying it was passed into law.

**1919-1922 League of Nations.**—The Charter of the League of Nations contains a clause rendering women equally eligible with men for all appointments in connection with the League, including the Secretariat. This clause has not remained a dead letter. Dame Rachel Crowdy has been put in charge of the section dealing with Public Health and the Traffic in Women and Children. Miss Sophie Sanger is Acting-Director of the Department of Labour Legislation, and many other women have been given responsible positions in the International Labour Bureau.

Mrs. Wicksell, of Sweden, and Miss Forchhammer, of Denmark, were appointed alternate representatives of their respective countries at the Assembly of the League of Nations in Geneva in November, 1920. Great Britain has been behind other countries in this respect,

but at the time of writing I hear that Mrs. Coombe Tennant, J.P., has been appointed in an advisory capacity as a member of the British delegation to the meeting of the Assembly to be held in Geneva in September.

Mrs. Wicksell has been appointed member of the Mandates Commission, and Dr. Paulina Luisi and Dr. Estrid Hein have been appointed as Government Delegates on the Advisory Committee on Traffic in Women and Children. Four women, including Miss Baker, of the International Bureau for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children, have been appointed among the Assessors representing international organisations on this Committee. Two women, Madame Curie and Mdle. Kristine Bonnevie, have been nominated to the Committee on Intellectual Co-operation, which consists of 12 members.

Dr. Josephine Baker, of the United States Department for Child Hygiene, has been nominated to the Health Committee of the League of Nations.

**1920 Married Women's Property Act** (Scotland) gives a married woman the same rights over her property as a single woman, and brings the Scottish legislation into line with the English on this subject.

**1920 Maintenance Orders (Facilities for Enforcement) Act** makes it possible for sums payable under Maintenance Orders to be recovered from men who have gone to any other part of the Empire. Unfortunately, reciprocal legislation, without which the British Act is a dead letter, has only been passed in Western Australia and in New Zealand.

**1921 Married Women (Maintenance) Act.**—This Act provides that under a Separation Order a sum up to 10s. for each child shall be allowed to a wife in addition to a maximum sum of 40s. for herself.

**1922 Summary Jurisdiction (Separation and Maintenance) Bill.**—This Bill, based on the Separation and Maintenance Orders Bill of the N.U.S.E.C., has been introduced by the Government, which has promised that it shall become law this Session. The Bill provides that a married woman need no longer leave her husband before applying for a Separation Order on the grounds of cruelty or neglect, and facilitates the enforcement in this country of the payment of Maintenance Orders.

**1922 The Infanticide Act** provides that a woman should not be accused of murder if, having killed her infant child, it can be shown that she was still suffering from the effects of confinement.

**1922 Criminal Law Amendment Act.**—As a result of the long struggle for the protection of the young girl, the passing of the Criminal Law Amendment Act in July, 1922, must be regarded as a triumph. Criminal Law Amendment Bills of various kinds have been introduced year after year. In 1921 the Bishop of London introduced a Criminal Law Amendment Bill which had behind it the backing of all important women's organisations and which would have passed into law but for the determined obstruction of a persistent group of opponents. In 1922, as a result of great pressure mainly from women's organisations, the Government introduced its own Bill, and even this did not go

through without difficulty. The most important Clauses of the Act are those which—

(A) Raise the age of consent for indecent assault from 13 to 16.

(B) Take away the plea of reasonable cause to believe that a girl is under the age of 16 except in the case of young men of 23 and under on the occasion of a first offence.

(C) Extend the time limit during which proceedings can be taken, in a case of criminal assault, from six to nine months after the offence.

**1918 The Affiliation Orders (Increase of Maximum Payment) Act** amended the Bastardy Laws Act of 1872, which fixed five shillings a week as the maximum which the father (whatever his wealth) could be made to pay towards the maintenance of an illegitimate child. The Act of 1918 increased this sum to 10s. a week.

**1922 Legitimation Bill.**—The Government has introduced a small measure to provide for the legitimation of the children of unmarried parents after the marriage of the parents. This it has undertaken to pass into law in the Autumn Session.

**1920-1922 The Position of Women in, and their Right of Entry into, the Civil Service** is still very far from being completely satisfactory. Major Hills, M.P., succeeded in May, 1920, in passing without opposition a resolution in the House of Commons favourable to the adoption of equal conditions for women as Civil Servants, and in August, 1921, a notable Parliamentary victory was won, when the Government would certainly have been defeated if they had not made important concessions to the claims of women to be admitted to the Home Civil Service under the same regulations which govern the admission of men. The question of the remuneration of women was postponed for three years. Since then, in response to steady pressure, an Inter-Departmental Committee has been set up to consider the question of Women Establishment Officers and single seniority lists, and a Woman Establishment Officer has just been appointed in the Post Office. The first Competitive Examination admitting women to the Administrative Grade has been announced by the Civil Service Commissioners.

**The Future.**—Much, however, remains to be done. The Parliamentary franchise has still to be extended to women under 30 and to women in unfurnished lodgings on the same terms as men; an amending Act to the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act is clearly called for, in order that the Government's performance may correspond to its expressed intentions; the Guardianship and Maintenance of Infants Bill has still to become law; and legislation is certainly urgently needed to alter the status of the married woman, whose personality is, to a large extent, still regarded as merged in that of her husband. The Government is a long way from the fulfilment of its election promise to remove all existing inequalities in the law as between men and women; until this promise has been fulfilled, the enfranchised woman cannot afford to take her ease.

*August, 1922.*