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GENEVA —
THE KEY TO EQUALITY

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Geneva — The Key to Equality

I.

THE home of Calvin and the birthplace of Rousseau, Geneva had long been associated with civilising ideas and liberal movements when its selection by the Peace Treaties as the seat of the League of Nations identified it for all time with humanity's remorseful effort to find an alternative to war. Such a city seems well-fitted to be the scene also of the endeavour, now world-wide, to build a future of free and true comradeship between men and women on the strong foundations of equal status and opportunity. Yet, in answer to the question: "What progress has feminism made at Geneva?" it is only possible to reply that, although for a time the past looked hopeful, the present is stagnant and dark, and that the future must see a great reawakening of international feminism if we do not want the woman's movement to founder at the very spot which we have learnt to regard as a main centre of human emancipation.

Ten years ago, the diplomats beginning to assemble in Paris represented nations which four grimly necessitous years had taught to revise their traditional attitude towards women. Three-quarters of the population of Europe had come to depend upon women for the production of their food, the maintenance of their industries and even for their gigantic contributions to the munitions of warfare. Gratitude to these workers and a recognition of their right to political status had become the fashion. Women were popular; yet, even though the war could not have been won without their help, nor peace be maintained without their co-operation, there was still no idea in the convention-ridden minds of the Allied statesmen of specifically recognising the rights of women in international agreements, and the first draft of the League Covenant mentioned them not at all.

THE WOMEN'S INTERVENTION.

It was at this stage that a number of Allied women, at the invitation of the International Council of Women and the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, met in

Paris to see that their interests were not overlooked in the Treaties. A deputation, led by Dame Millicent Fawcett, waited on President Wilson, and the consequence of their action was two paragraphs, which the representatives of many interests seem subsequently to have repented, but which not all the piety nor wit of diplomats and delegates can erase either from the documents themselves or from the memories of the women who read them.

The first paragraph, inserted into Article 7 of the Covenant, declared that "All positions under or in connection with the League, including the Secretariat, shall be open equally to men and women." The second, written into Part XIII. of the Treaty, which contained the Charter of Labour drawn up for the guidance of the International Labour Organisation, was the now famous Principle Number 7, "that men and women should receive equal remuneration for work of equal value."

What results can we point to as indications that these paragraphs were inserted in good faith and were intended to be seriously observed?

THE FIRST WOMEN AT GENEVA.

In the earlier years, the representation of women at Geneva was perhaps as good as any feminist not suffering from undue optimism could have expected. Though no women were deputed to sit on either the Council or the Permanent Court of International Justice, quite a number held positions of varying responsibility in the Assembly and on the Secretariat. The Scandinavian countries from the first included women in their Assembly delegations, though never as full delegates. Rumania followed suit in 1921 and Great Britain and Australia in 1922. In the Secretariat a celebrated social worker, Dame Rachel Crowdy, was made head—though not Director—of the Social Section as soon as this was separated from the Health Section. Another woman, Miss Florence Wilson, held the post of Chief Librarian.

At the first Assembly in 1920, it was decided that women should also be represented on the various permanent and temporary Commissions at work within the League, and as a result eight Commissions included women members. On one of the most important, the Permanent Mandates Commission, Fru Bugge Wicksell won great respect from all the world for her valuable work. The Permanent Health Commission included Dr. Alice Hamilton, while Miss Emma Cushman and Miss Karen Jeppe were members of the Commission on Deported Women and Children in Asia Minor. The Com-

mission on the Opium Traffic had Mrs. Hamilton Wright as a member, and no less than seven women belonged to the Advisory Commission on the Traffic in Women and Children. The Commission on Intellectual Co-operation, constituted in May 1922, included Madame Curie and Dr. Kristine Bonnevie, while Frau Emmy Freundlich was later the only woman to sit on the Economic Commission, and Madame Dreyfus-Barney was appointed to serve on a small Commission set up by the Council to study the Education of Young People.

In the International Labour Office women were not so conspicuous, but from 1920 to 1924 Miss Sophy Sanger held a very responsible post as Chief of a Section in the Research Division, while good secondary positions were filled by Mrs. Weaver and Dr. Martha Mundt. But it was not so much for its employment of women in the Office as for its promised adherence to the principle of Equal Pay that the feminists of all countries looked hopefully to the International Labour Organisation.

REACTION AND RETROGRESSION.

How bitterly the past eight years have disappointed them may be estimated by the depressed condition of industrial women, as compared with men, all over the world, and by the number of countries in which women are still without political recognition. The women who go to the Assembly as substitute-delegates and technical-advisers have never succeeded in losing their hyphens; no woman has been appointed as a full delegate, and only once—the year in which the Labour Party delegation included Mrs. Swanwick, who astonished her foreign colleagues by preferring the topic of disarmament to that of humanitarian activities—has this country sent an active feminist to Geneva. Fru Bugge Wicksell, who sat on the First (Legal) Commission of the Assembly as well as on the Mandates Commission, died not long ago, and another woman with her knowledge of international law will not be easy to find.

In the Secretariat, Dame Rachel Crowdy's term of service ends in July, 1930; her seven-year contract as Chief of Section, completed last summer, was renewed only for two years, though the contracts of two Directors and of one of the other two Chiefs of Sections have all been extended for further seven-year periods. The length of Secretariat contracts varies in inverse ratio to their importance, the lowest positions being on a basis of twenty-eight years, the intermediate on that of twenty-one, and the highest on that of seven. Dame Rachel was originally engaged for twenty-one years; by her promotion she

forfeited, as did her senior male colleagues, the security of a long contract, but in their case renewal has mitigated the disadvantage which still remains hers. She has never, incidentally, been raised to the position of Director, though the work and responsibility of her department are equal to those of the Directors; in consequence, her maximum salary has been 33,000 Swiss francs, whereas that of a Director is 53,000. Some time ago, too, Miss Florence Wilson lost her position in the Library; her American nationality counted against her, though it appears to be unobjectionable in the case of the American men who are still working with the Secretariat.

Even greater disillusionment has followed in the wake of the International Labour Organisation, which has tended from the first to treat women as a class apart, and to maintain the tradition that regards them as "a controlled annex to industry." Where conditions are badly in need of improvement, but male competition is insignificant—as in nursing and domestic service—no legislation has so far been suggested. Many important trades, on the other hand, are virtually closed to women in those countries which ratified the Washington Convention forbidding the employment of "women and young persons" during the night. As for the Seventh Principle of Equal Pay, in the words of Mr. G. K. Chesterton on Christianity, "it has not been weighed in the balance and found wanting; it has been found difficult and has not been tried." In public as well as in private discussions, the whole subject is treated even by high officials of the Office with cynical distaste.

It is not therefore surprising that feminists have begun to turn their attention to Geneva as a future field for international action.

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II.

THE lack of determined effort by women at Geneva in the past has not been due to their failure to attend Assemblies or to study the situation. Every year, the representatives of various international women's societies meet at the Maison Internationale in the Rue du Vieux Collège, while a Council for the Representation of Women in the League of Nations has been at work for the past few years in this country. No doubt it is due to the quiet and unobtrusive labours of these organisations that the position of women in the League has not become even worse than it is, yet they have somehow failed to convey an impression of persistent and resolute action. The polite attitude of uncritical appreciation

which the League of Nations Union expects from its women members appears to have influenced those who belong also to societies with feminist or partly feminist aims, and to have led them, in spite of themselves, to regard their claims as of secondary importance, and to be content with auxiliary rôles and insignificant concessions.

INDICATIONS OF FUTURE FEMINIST ACTION.

So far, there have only been two indications that women intend to set to work in the large field that Geneva offers, in a more direct and vigorous fashion than that of the past. The first occurred in the summer of 1928, when five British feminist societies sent Mrs. Abbott, the Chairman of the Open-Door Council, as their delegate to the International Labour Conference, at which the Minimum-Wage-Fixing Machinery Convention came up for discussion. In spite of the almost insuperable difficulties created by a body which was supposed to have accepted nearly ten years previously the principle of Equal Pay, Mrs. Abbott succeeded in getting the question raised at the Conference by Mr. Chaman Lall, the Indian Workers' delegate, and by Madame Eugenia Wasniewska, the Polish technical adviser. The result of the discussion was the inclusion of the Equal Pay principle in the Recommendation, but not in the Convention, a position which renders the various interpretations of the Convention so confusing that the Permanent Court of International Justice is probably the only body competent to give a ruling on the matter.

The second indication of feminist effort was to be seen in the following September during the meeting of the Ninth Assembly, when Miss Doris Stevens, of the American National Woman's Party, was indirectly responsible for a very useful resolution passed by the First Committee (Legal Questions) in connection with the forthcoming Hague Conference on problems of nationality, including that of the nationality of married women. This resolution, proposed by M. Orestes Ferrara of Cuba, seconded by M. Diogenes Escalanta of Venezuela, supported by Mr. Lo-Honai of China, and finally incorporated by the Committee in its Report to the Assembly, ran as follows:

"The Assembly, having regard for the fact that the question of nationality which is on the agenda of the Codification Conference is of particular interest to women, and since Article 7 of the Covenant already provides for equal opportunity between men and women to positions and services of the League, expresses the wish that the Governments and Members of the League of Nations called to the future Conference on the Codification of International Law consider the desirability of

taking into account these conditions when framing their delegations."

These indications appear to show that international feminist work in the immediate future is likely to be directed towards one or both of two main possibilities: first, a comparatively limited and straightforward campaign on behalf of the right of married women to retain their nationality, and secondly, a much more comprehensive endeavour to obtain some kind of simple international agreement which would override the complicated machinery of conferences, conventions, resolutions and recommendations in which feminist interests are so often apt to become hopelessly entangled. Such an agreement would probably take a form similar to that of the Equal Rights Treaty which Miss Stevens and her colleagues endeavoured to present to the Pact Signatories in Paris in 1928.

NEW MACHINERY OF INTERNATIONAL FEMINISM.

The notion of tackling feminist problems by some kind of international machinery was first discussed between the leaders of the Six Point Group and the American National Woman's Party at the Paris meeting of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance in 1926. Carried back to the United States by Miss Stevens, it developed in the creative, legalist mind of Miss Alice Paul into the idea of a comprehensive Treaty of Equal Rights for Men and Women, whose first and major article should run as follows:

"The Contracting States agree that, upon the ratification of this Treaty, men and women shall have equal rights throughout the territory subject to their respective jurisdictions."

This Treaty, the consequences of whose acceptance would be as tremendous as that of the League Covenant itself, and whose effect upon the day-to-day lives of ordinary men and women would be far greater and more intimate, was first launched by Miss Stevens and her colleagues upon the astonished delegates to the Pan-American Conference at Havana in the Spring of 1928. Once prevailed upon to listen at all, these delegations heard the Woman's Party representatives with interest and sympathy, and the result of their intervention was the establishment of an International Commission, with Miss Stevens as Chairman, to study the position of women throughout the Americas.

An idea so startling, so simple, and yet so all-embracing as an Equal Rights Treaty or Convention was not likely to appeal so readily to the rigid mind of the Old

World as to the more elastic and imaginative intelligence of the New. It was hardly to be anticipated that the direct, sudden effort to gain the ear of the Kellogg Pact signatories would achieve anything more than the surprised publicity which was by no means so generally hostile as might have been expected. There are, however, at least three ways by means of which such an international agreement or Convention might be brought within the desired realm of discussion at Geneva.

METHODS OF CAMPAIGN.

In the first place, an International Conference on the subject could be summoned by any one country, which would issue invitations to others. Such a Conference usually results in the passing of a Convention which is submitted to the Secretary-General of the League by one of the governments concerned. Both the Opium Convention and the Convention on the Traffic in Women and Children were the result of such Conferences, the one summoned by the United States to Shanghai in 1909, and the other meeting by agreement at Geneva in 1921.

Secondly, any subject may be placed by a Member of the League on the Assembly agenda for discussion, usually in the following year, but in cases of urgency in the year in which it is proposed.

In the third place, the discussion may be initiated by a representative on one of the six Commissions, and a resolution recommending consideration of the subject incorporated in that Commission's Annual Report to the Assembly. For feminist purposes the second or third type of machinery would probably prove the least cumbersome and the most effective.

The endeavour to set such machinery in motion would of course have to be accompanied by quiet but persistent propaganda, carried on by individuals capable of remaining unshaken by hostile criticism or obstructionist patronage. Such propaganda would necessarily be based on a sound knowledge of current events. This is less difficult to obtain at Geneva than elsewhere, for the majority of Assembly, Council and Commission meetings are public, and any visitor to Geneva may obtain a ticket of admission to at least a few sessions.

A truly feminist international campaign would be a unique event in history, and might result in raising for all time the status of womanhood throughout the world. Whether any group of women will have the courage and the enterprise to initiate such a campaign, the future alone can show.