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1891

ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

CENTRAL COMMITTEE

OF THE

NATIONAL SOCIETY FOR WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE.

Your Committee have this year the satisfaction of recording a debate and division on the second reading of a Women's Suffrage Bill, for the first time in the life of the present Parliament. The result has indicated a marked advance in the growing force of the movement.

The steps which led up to this debate may be briefly stated. In anticipation of the important Conference of the National Union of Conservative Associations, which was held in Birmingham last November, your Committee in the autumn took counsel with some of the influential Conservative supporters of Women's Suffrage with a view to the inclusion of Women's Suffrage in the questions for deliberation at the Conference: as a result of these negotiations Viscount Feilding (now Lord Denbigh) introduced the following Resolution, which was seconded by Mr. Rankin, M.P. :—

" That this Conference is of opinion that when the question of representation of the people is re-opened in Parliament, serious consideration should be given to the claims of women to be admitted to the franchise when entitled by ownership or occupation."

An invitation was conveyed by the Chairman to Mrs. Fawcett from the Conference of Delegates asking her to address a few words to them on the question. The Resolution when put to the meeting was carried by a very large majority amid much enthusiasm. In the afternoon of the same day a ladies' confer-

ence in connection with the National Union of Conservative Societies was held, presided over by Lady Windsor, and attended among others by the Marchioness of Salisbury and Lady Gwendolen Cecil. Mrs. Fawcett and Mr. Dixon Hartland, M.P., addressed this meeting on the importance of extending the Parliamentary Franchise to women.

In December a deputation from your Committee waited on Sir A. Borthwick to lay before him an earnest request that he would undertake to introduce a Bill into Parliament this session for extending the Franchise to those women who already possess the various local franchises. After carefully considering the request of your Committee, Sir Algernon Borthwick most kindly promised to take charge of the Bill and do all in his power to get it passed.

On the opening of Parliament a considerable number of M.P.'s balloted for a day for the second reading of the Bill. Sir Albert Rollit was fortunate in securing the earliest place, and according to the custom of Parliament, the Bill was then passed to his charge. April 27th was secured for the second reading, being the first Wednesday after the Easter recess.

Notice of opposition was immediately given by Mr. Samuel Smith, also by Mr. De Lisle, Mr. Radcliffe Cooke, and Mr. John Kelly.

The text of the Bill was prepared, after much careful consideration and consultation with experienced parliamentary draughtsmen, in a form which your Committee could heartily support, and immediately after it was printed,* they began

* Text of the Women's Franchise Bill [55 Vict.] Parliamentary Franchise (Extension to Women).

A Bill to extend the Parliamentary Franchise to Women. 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:—1. This Act may be cited as the Parliamentary Franchise (Women) Act, 1892. 2. Every woman who—(1) In Great Britain is registered or entitled to be registered as an elector for any town council or county council; or (2) In Ireland is a ratepayer entitled to vote at an election for guardians of the poor; shall be entitled to be registered as a parliamentary elector, and when registered to vote at any parliamentary election for the county, borough, or division wherein the qualifying property is situate.

(Prepared and brought in by Sir Albert Rollit, Sir A. Borthwick, Viscount

active preparation in its support. In addition to the whip sent out by the Parliamentary Leaders, a joint whip, signed by the officers of your Committee and the Committees of the Central National, Manchester, Bristol, Birmingham, Nottingham, Leeds, Edinburgh, Dublin, and Belfast Societies, was sent to all Members of Parliament not known to be opponents. A letter, written by Mrs. Fawcett in reply to Mr. Samuel Smith's pamphlet, was sent to the newspapers immediately on the rising of Parliament for the Easter recess. This letter appeared in full in the *Morning Post*, *Morning Advertiser*, *Manchester Examiner*, *Leicester Post*, and several other papers, while many more gave extracts or comments.

Meantime the opponents were exerting themselves to a quite unprecedented extent against the Bill. First an attempt was made to prolong the Easter recess over the 27th. This, however, met with no encouragement from the Leader of the House of Commons. An adverse whip* was then issued, signed by twenty members drawn equally from each side of the House. Finally, the week before the day fixed for second reading, Mr. Gladstone addressed a letter to Mr. Samuel Smith, which was widely circulated in pamphlet form, and which urged Parliament to decline giving a second reading to the Bill.

This action on the part of the Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition doubtless determined the action of many wavering Liberals against the Bill, while the speech of the Leader of the House in its support may have determined some waverers on the Conservative side to vote in its favour. All shades of party are represented amongst both the ayes and the noes.

Wolmer, Mr. W. M'Laren, Mr. Penrose Fitzgerald, Mr. T. D. Sullivan, Mr. T. W. Russell, Mr. Burt and Mr. Ernest Spencer.) Notice of opposition, that the Bill be read this day six months, has been given by Mr. Samuel Smith, by Mr. John Kelly, and by Mr. Radcliffe Cooke.

* The whip issued against the Bill was as follows:—Women's Suffrage Bill. The second reading of this Bill will be moved on April 27th. You are earnestly requested to be present in the House of Commons, not later than 4.30, for the purpose of opposing the motion. H. H. Asquith, W. B. Barttelot, M. Hicks-Beach, J. L. Carew, J. Chamberlain, H. Chaplin, R. Churchill, Geo. N. Curzon, T. G. Esmonde, H. H. Fowler, Geo. Hamilton, W. G. V. Harcourt, Henry James, H. Labouchere, J. R. Mowbray, A. J. Mundella, J. W. Pease, J. A. Picton, Edward J. Reed, M. W. Ridley.

The second reading of the Bill was moved by Sir Albert Rollit in a speech of unusual force and value. Its rejection was moved by Mr. Samuel Smith, and the debate was continued by Mr. Woodall, Mr. Wyndham, Mr. Courtney, and Mr. Balfour, who spoke in its support; whilst Col. Barttelot, Professor Bryce, Mr. Asquith and Sir Henry James spoke in opposition. The debate was marked by an unusually high standard of excellence both in the power and the tone of the speeches, so that the question may be said to have been raised by the debate of 1892 to a higher level than it had ever before reached. The extremely important speech of the Right Hon. A. J. Balfour has given the question a distinct place amongst the practical measures of the near future.

The division showed 152 for, 175 against—majority against, 23; there were 25 pairs. A full report of the speeches and the division list has been issued by your Committee and circulated to their subscribers. Of the members who voted there were (including tellers and pairs):—

	For.	Against.
English,	133	164
Welsh,	8	6
Scotch,	20	23
Irish,	18	9
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	179	202

The evening before the debate a conversazione of those interested in the Woman's Suffrage Bill was held at the Galleries of the Royal Institute of Painters in Water Colours, Piccadilly, and brought together a numerous and influential company. The following ladies formed the Committee of Reception:—The Lady Frances Balfour, Mrs. Leonard Courtney, Miss Courtenay, Mrs. Culme Seymour, Miss Davenport-Hill, Mrs. Fawcett, Lady Matheson, Mrs. Penrose Fitzgerald, The Lady Rayleigh, Mrs. Henry Sidgwick, Mrs. Temple, Mrs. Westlake, The Lady Maude Wolmer.

Short addresses were given during the evening by Mrs. Fawcett and Miss Tod.

Successful drawing-room meetings have been held this spring, by the kind invitation of Captain and Mrs. James, in Lexham Gardens; of Miss Bell, in Bayswater, the Rev. J. C. Ridgway presiding; of Misses Gurney in Kensington, Mr. Lafone, M.P., presiding; and of Mrs. Shillington, in Wandsworth. In February Miss Reid kindly arranged a meeting in Hammersmith, Prebendary Snowden in the Chair.

Mrs. Fawcett, in November, addressed a meeting at Coventry, by invitation of the Coventry Primrose League, Mr. C. H. Richards presiding; and in February at Southend-on-Sea, by invitation of the Conservative Association of that town, Major Rasch, M.P., presiding. Mrs. Fawcett has also addressed meetings at Birmingham and Southport, in connection with the Women's Suffrage Societies of the respective districts. She has spoken on the political work of women at Liverpool, Manchester, Cambridge, and Thrapstone, and has addressed debating societies in Lewisham, Norwood, and Bloomsbury, and at Toynbee Hall. She also addressed a meeting at Bradford-on-Avon, Wilts, presided over by the Hon. Canon Meade, which meeting was also addressed by Mrs. Beddoe and Mrs. Hallett.

Miss Mordan has addressed debating societies at Wandsworth, Woodbury Down, and a Primrose League meeting at Ingham.

The thanks of your Committee are due to Miss Petrie, B.A., Mrs. Benjamin Clarke and Mrs. Stopes for speaking at Debates.

Periodical meetings of friends actively helping the work have been held at the Society's office during the winter, which your Committee believe have been useful in suggesting and extending work, especially in regard to private discussion parties and circulation of literature.

The requests for literature which have been received at your office during the past year have been much more numerous than in any preceding year, which in itself is an indication of growing interest in the subject.

Your Committee have to record with sorrow the death of Miss A. J. Clough, which removes from their General Com-

mittee an ever ready sympathizer in all their efforts. The death of Mrs. Charles Holland has taken one of their earliest and most generous supporters—the list of donations in this report includes her name as a donor of £100. Yet another valued member has passed away in Miss Amelia B. Edwards. They also regret to record the death of Miss Lucy Wilson, one of the early band of workers in the cause of women's progress. Miss E. L. Browne, Mrs. Hall Anderson, Mrs. Sims, all workers of early days, have also passed away.

Your Committee received the following letter in acknowledgment of a resolution of condolence sent to their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Wales on the occasion of the lamented death of the Duke of Clarence and Avondale:—

Sandringham, Norfolk.

“ Sir Francis Knollys is desired to convey to the Members of the Central Committee of the National Society for Women's Suffrage the sincere thanks of the Prince and Princess of Wales for the warm sympathy they have expressed on the occasion of the Royal Highnesses' bereavement.”

A letter was also received from the Duchess of Teck in reply to a resolution of a similar character addressed to herself and the Princess May.

Turning now to future action—a General Election is at hand and all political parties are inviting the active participation of women in the contest, as canvassers or speakers. It is earnestly hoped that all women who are thus asked to undertake political work will question the candidate they are invited to support as to his views on Women's Suffrage. The old prejudice, that women have nothing to do with politics, has been completely broken down in the face of the political work which women are encouraged to do. This is in itself a great gain for the cause of their political enfranchisement. If women are fitted to canvass and to influence the votes of others by political argument, they cannot be unfit to vote themselves. All candidates should be pressed to define the ground on which they stand upon the question of Women's Suffrage; and members and friends of this society are requested to report to this office the opinion of the candidates whom they have questioned on the subject of the

admission of the women householders and ratepayers to the Parliamentary Franchise.

In conclusion, your Committee make an earnest appeal to all friends of Women's Suffrage to come forward and help them with funds. Money is always a necessity for the successful carrying on of the work, but the increased activity called for by the approach of the General Election makes the question of finance even more important than in an ordinary year. A special fund has been opened for donations for electioneering work. Some of the old friends of the Society have once more come forward, and it is hoped that a considerable sum will be entrusted to the Committee to enable them to carry on active work during the next four months.

The following sums have already been promised:—

E. A. G.	-	-	£100
A Friend	-	-	25
Mrs. Sterling	-	-	10
Mrs. Fawcett	-	-	10

NATIONAL SOCIETY FOR WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE,
CENTRAL COMMITTEE, 10, GREAT COLLEGE STREET, WESTMINSTER.

Receipts and Payments from July 1st 1891, to May 30th, 1892.

RECEIPTS.		PAYMENTS.	
	£ s. d.		£ s. d.
By Balance	-	By Rent	40 0 0
" Donations	-	" Office Expenses	15 16 7
" Subscriptions	-	" Salaries	136 13 4
" Sale of Publications	-	" Meetings and Advertisements	64 12 8
		" Stationery	17 12 5
		" Printing and Publications	63 17 3
		" Postage	68 13 3
		" Secretary's Travelling Expenses	6 18 5
		" Newspapers and Parliamentary Papers	15 14 2
		" Fee for Legal Opinion	11 11 0
			<hr/>
		Balance in Bank on General Fund	441 9 1
		" " on Three years Fund	29 8 8
			<hr/>
		Cash in hand	115 8 8
			4 5 8
			<hr/>
			£561 3 5

Examined, compared with the books and vouchers, and found correct,
M. HARRIS SMITH, Auditor.

10th May, 1892.

(Public Accountant)
13, Victoria Street, Westminster, S.W., and
Royal Bank Buildings, 123, Bishopsgate Street Within, E.C.

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE EXTRACTS.—No. I.
The Late MISS LYDIA E. BECKER.

The General distribution of political power necessitates the giving of a share to women, because every extension of the franchise to classes hitherto excluded lowers and weakens the status of the classes which remain out of the pale. Agricultural labourers in counties, and women householders everywhere, are now excluded from influence over the Government. They possess none of those "little bits" of political power which those who would govern the country need to sweep into a heap by means of persuasion and offers of just measures and legislative protection. The larger the body of unrepresented persons in the country, the stronger is that body. If the unrepresented body consists of two distinct classes having interests not always in common, and sometimes apparently antagonistic, as in the classes of employers and employed, it is evident that if one class is admitted to the safeguards of representation, the one left out is in a worse position than before. It has obtained another master in place of a fellow-sufferer, and its interests will have less chance than ever of being considered, as they will have to withstand the rivalry of those belonging to the class just admitted to a share of those magical and all-potent "bits" of power.

It is because each "bit" is so small that it is safe to assign a bit even to the uneducated and indifferent elector. No man or woman, however stupid or silly, could do much mischief with the infinitesimal share of power comprised in his or her particular "bit." It is perhaps for this reason that so many intelligent women and men are slow to appreciate the value of a vote. Because the mere possession and occasional exercise of a vote seems a small thing in itself, is actually an infinitesimal factor in the sum of most people's experience, they imagine it is an equally unimportant matter to the interests of a class. One drop is an infinitesimal item in a shower, yet it would not be safe to say that the shower is unimportant because each drop composing it is a very small thing. It matters little or nothing personally to any individual woman whether she has a vote or not. It is of vital consequence to the interests of women as a class that they should have representative government.

Extract from "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," 1874.