

**FAWCETT
MILLCENT
GARRETT**

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

Millicent Fawcett
Women's Suffrage

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Women's Suffrage / A Short History of a Great Movement:*

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Dame Millicent Garrett Fawcett Women's Suffrage / A Short History of a Great Movement

CHAPTER I THE BEGINNINGS

We suffragists have no cause to be ashamed of the founders of our movement —

"In everything we're sprung
Of earth's first blood, have titles manifold."

Mary Wollstonecraft¹ started the demand of women for political liberty in England, Condorcet in France,² and the heroic group of anti-slavery agitators in the United States. It is true that Horace Walpole called Mary Wollstonecraft "a

¹ *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, published in 1792.

² See *Le vote des Femmes*, pp. 16-22, par Ferdinand Buisson, Député de la Seine et Président de la Commission du Suffrage Universelle. Condorcet had a predecessor in Mademoiselle Jars de Gournay, the friend of Montaigne. See Miss E. Sichel's *Michel de Montaigne*, p. 137.

hyena in petticoats." But this proves nothing except his profound ignorance of her character and aims. Have we not in our own time heard the ladies who first joined the Primrose League described by an excited politician as "filthy witches"? The epithet of course was as totally removed from any relation to the facts as that which Horace Walpole applied to Mary Wollstonecraft. William Godwin's touching memoir of his wife, Mr. Kegan Paul's *William Godwin: his Friends and Contemporaries*, and Mrs. Pennell's Biography show Mary Wollstonecraft as a woman of exceptionally pure and exalted character. Her sharp wits had been sharpened by every sort of personal misfortune; they enabled her to pierce through all shams and pretences, but they never caused her to lower her high sense of duty; they never embittered her or caused her to waver in her allegiance to the pieties of domestic life. Her husband wrote of her soon after her death, "She was a worshipper of domestic life." If there is anything in appearance, her face in the picture in the National Portrait Gallery speaks for her. Southey wrote of her, that of all the lions of the day whom he had seen "her face was the best, infinitely the best."

The torch which was lighted by Mary Wollstonecraft was never afterwards extinguished; there are glimpses of its light in the poems of her son-in-law Shelley. The frequent references to the principle of equality between men and women in the "Revolt of Islam" will occur to every reader.

In 1810 Sydney Smith, in the *Edinburgh Review*, wrote one of

the most brilliant and witty articles which even he ever penned in defence of an extension of the means of a sound education to women.

In 1813 Mrs. Elizabeth Fry began to visit prisoners in Newgate, and shocked those who, citing the parrot cry "woman's place is home," thought a good woman had no duties outside its walls. She had children of her own, but this did not shut her heart to the wretched waifs for whom she founded a school in prison. A little after this England began to be stirred by the agitation which resulted in the passing of the Reform Bill of 1832. It is one of life's little ironies that James Mill, the founder of the Philosophical Radicals, and the father of John Stuart Mill, who laid the foundation of the modern suffrage movement, was among those who, in the early nineteenth century, justified the exclusion of women from all political rights. In an Essay on "Government" published in 1823 as an appendix to the fifth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, he dismissed in a sentence all claim of women to share in the benefits and protection of representative government, stating that their interests were sufficiently protected by the enfranchisement of their husbands and fathers. It is true that this did not pass unchallenged; a book in reply was published (1825) by William Thomson. This book had a preface by Mrs. Wheeler, at whose instigation it was written.³

³ Helen Blackburn's *Record of Women's Suffrage*, also *Women in English Life*, by Miss Georgina Hill. Mrs. Wheeler's daughter Rosina, married Mr. Lytton Bulwer,

The Reform Movement was agitating the whole country at this period, and political excitement led to political riots, burning of buildings, and general orgies of massacre and destruction. The Government of the day had their share in the blunders and stupidities which led to these crimes, and in none were these qualities more conspicuous than in the riot at Manchester, which came to be known as the Peterloo Massacre in August 1819, in which six people were killed and about thirty seriously injured.

What connects it with the subject of these pages has already been hinted at. Women as well as men had been ridden down by the cavalry; they were present at the meeting not merely as spectators, but as taking an active part in the Reform Movement. A picture of the Peterloo Massacre, now in the Manchester Reform Club, is dedicated to "Henry Hunt, Esq., the chairman of the meeting and *to the Female Reformers of Manchester* and the adjacent towns who were exposed to and suffered from the wanton and furious attack made on them by that brutal armed force, the Manchester and Cheshire Yeomanry Cavalry." The picture represents women in every part of the fray, and certainly taking their share in its horrors. In the many descriptions of the event, no word of reprobation has come to my notice of the women who were taking part in the meeting; they were neither "hyenas" nor "witches," but patriotic women helping their husbands and brothers to obtain political liberty; in a word, they

afterwards the first Lord Lytton. The present Earl of Lytton is thus the great-grandson of the lady who prompted the reply to James Mill's article referred to in the text.

were working for men and not for themselves, and this made an immense difference in the judgment meted out to them. However, it is quite clear that even as long ago as 1819 the notion that women have nothing to do with politics was in practice rejected by the political common-sense of Englishmen. No one doubted that women were, and ought to be, deeply interested in what concerned the political well-being of their country.

Some political antiquarians in this country have expressed their conviction that in early times when the institution of feudalism was the strongest political force in England, women exercised electoral rights in those cases where they were entitled as landowners or as freewomen of certain towns to do so.⁴ This view has been combated by other authorities, and has not been accepted in the law courts, where special emphasis has been laid on the fact that no authentic case of a woman having actually cast a vote, as of right, in a Parliamentary election can be produced. The claim that in ancient times women did exercise the franchise, whether capable of being established or not, certainly does not deserve to be dismissed as in itself absurd and incredible. I believe it has been called by some anti-suffragists "an impudent imposture," in the most approved style of the "what-I-know-not-is-not-knowledge" pedant. Whatever it

⁴ This view has also been supported in France, see *Le vote des Femmes*, by Ferdinand Buisson, for evidence of women having in ancient times voted and sat in the Parlements of France. Taine also mentions the Countess of Perigord sitting in the États of her province prior to the Revolution (*Les Origines de la France Contemporaine*, par H. Taine, vol. i. p. 104).

may be, it is not this. In a book published in 1911,⁵ there is a passage which goes far to prove that even as late as 1807 the right of women possessing the necessary legal qualification to vote in Parliamentary elections was recognised as being in existence. One of the Spencer Stanhopes was a candidate during the general election of 1807, and Mrs. Spencer Stanhope writes to her son, John, that her husband's party was so certain of success that they had announced that their women folk need not vote. "Your father was at Wakefield canvassing yesterday... They determined not to admit the ladies to vote, which is extraordinary and very hard, considering how few privileges we poor females have. Should it come to a very close struggle, I daresay they will then call upon the ladies, and in that case every self-respecting woman should most certainly refuse her assistance."

The contention is that the Reform Act of 1832, by substituting the words "male person" in lieu of the word "man" in the earlier Acts, first placed upon the women of this country the burden of a statutory disability. This process, it is argued, was repeated in the Municipal Corporation Act of 1835, and is the reason why the admission of women to the municipal franchise in 1870 is spoken of in many of our suffrage publications as the "*Restoration*" of the municipal suffrage to women. The point appears more of antiquarian than of practical interest. If substantiated, it only illustrates anew the fact that under feudalism, and as long as feudalism survived, property rather than human beings had a

⁵ *Annals of a Yorkshire House*, vol. ii. p. 319.

special claim to representation, but it assumed a larger degree of importance from what followed in 1850 and 1868.

In 1850 Lord Brougham's Act was passed, which enacted that in all Acts of Parliament "words importing the masculine gender shall be deemed to include females unless the contrary is expressly provided." In the Reform Bill of 1867 the words "male person" were abandoned, and the word "man" was substituted, and many lawyers and others believed that under Lord Brougham's Act of 1850 women were thereby enfranchised. Under this belief, the reasons for which were set forth by Mr. Chisholm Anstey, barrister and ex-M.P., in two legal pamphlets published, one just before and one just after the passing of the Reform Bill of 1867, a large number of women rate-payers claimed before the revising barristers in 1868 to be placed upon the Parliamentary register. Under the able leadership of Miss Lydia Becker 5346 women householders of Manchester made this claim, 1341 in Salford, 857 in Broughton and Pendleton, 1 lady in S.E. Lancashire, a county constituency, 239 in Edinburgh, and a few in other parts of Scotland. The revising barristers in most of these cases declined to place the women's names on the register; and in order to get a legal decision, four cases were selected and argued before the Court of Common Pleas on November 7, 1868. The judges were the Lord Chief Justice Bovill, with the Justices Willes, Keating, and Byles. Sir John (afterwards Lord) Coleridge, and Dr. Pankhurst were counsel for the appellants. The case (technically known as

Chorlton v. Lings) was given against the women, on the express ground that although the word "man" in an Act of Parliament must be held to include women, "*this did not apply to the privileges granted by the State.*" This judgment, therefore, established as law that "the same words in the same Act of Parliament shall for the purpose of voting apply to men only, but for the purpose of taxation shall include women."⁶

Some women's names had been accepted by revising barristers, and were already upon the register. A question was raised whether they could remain there. The barrister in charge of this case, Mr. A. Russell, Q.C., argued that when once the names were upon the register, if they had not been objected to they must remain; one of the judges thereupon remarked that if this were so there would be no power to remove the name of *a dog or a horse* from the register if once it had been inscribed upon it. This was eloquent of the political status of women, identifying it by implication with that of the domestic animals. *The Times*, in anticipation of the Chorlton v. Lings case coming on for hearing, had an article on November 3, 1868, in which it said: "If one supposes it ever was the intention of the legislature to give women a vote, and if they do get it, it will be by a sort of accident, in itself objectionable, though, in its practical consequences, perhaps harmless enough. On the other hand, if they are refused, *the nation will, no doubt, be formally and in the light of day committing itself through its judicial tribunal, to*

⁶ Report of the Manchester National Society for Women's Suffrage, 1869.

the dangerous doctrine that representation need not go along with taxation." With the decision in *Chorlton v. Lings*, the last chance of women getting the suffrage by "a sort of accident" vanishes, and very few of us can now regret it, for the long struggle to obtain suffrage has been a great education for women, not only politically, but also in courage, perseverance, endurance, and comradeship with each other.

If the nineteenth century was a time of education for women, it was no less a time of education for men. We have not yet arrived at an equal moral standard for men and women, but we have travelled a long way on the road leading to it. A George I. openly surrounding himself with mistresses, and shutting up his wife for life in a fortress for levity of behaviour; a George IV. who measured with similar inequality his own and his wife's connubial transgressions, would not be tolerated in the England of the twentieth century. The awakening of women to a sense of their wrongs before the law was a leading feature of the women's movement in the early nineteenth century. The Hon. Mrs. Norton, the beautiful and gifted daughter of Tom Sheridan, a reigning toast, a society beauty, and with literary accomplishments sufficient to secure her an independent income from her pen, was subjected to every sort of humiliation and anguish as a wife and mother which the mean and cruel nature of her husband could devise. Mr. Norton brought an action against Lord Melbourne for the seduction of his wife, and the jury decided without leaving the box that Lord Melbourne was wholly

innocent. This did not prevent the petty malice of her husband from depriving Mrs. Norton entirely of her three infant children, one of whom died from an accident which ought never to have happened if the child had been duly cared for. To read her life⁷ is comparable to being present at a vivisection. Mrs. Norton had one weapon. She could make herself heard; she wrote a pamphlet in 1836 called "*The Natural Claim of a Mother to the Custody of her Children as affected by the Common Law Right of the Father.*" One result which followed from Mrs. Norton's sufferings, coupled with her power of giving public expression to them, was the passing of Serjeant Talfourd's Act in 1839, called the Infants' Custody Act, giving a mother the right of access to her children until they are seven years old. This is the first inroad on the monopoly on the part of the father of absolute control over his children created by the English law. The division of legal rights over their children between fathers and mothers has been described by a lawyer as extremely simple – the fathers have all and the mothers none. Serjeant Talfourd's Act did not do much to redress this gross injustice; but it did something, and marks the beginning of a new epoch.

Little by little things began to change. Mrs. Somerville and Miss Caroline Herschell were elected members of the Royal Astronomical Society in 1835. Mrs. Browning wrote "Aurora Leigh," and thereby touched the whole woman's question with an artist's hand. Thackeray, in *Esmond*, pointed the finger of scorn

⁷ *The Life of Mrs. Norton*, by Miss Jane Gray Perkins (John Murray).

at the "politicians and coffee-house wiseacres," who are full of oratorical indignation against the tyrannies of the Emperor or the French King, and wonders how they, who are tyrants too in their way, govern their own little dominions at home, where each man reigns absolute. "When the annals of each little reign are shown to the Supreme Master, under whom we hold sovereignty, histories will be laid bare of household tyrants as cruel as Amurath, and as savage as Nero, and as reckless and dissolute as Charles." This was a new note in literature. Mrs. Jameson and the Brontë sisters contributed much in the same key. Anne Knight, a Quaker lady of Quiet House, Chelmsford, issued about 1847 a small leaflet boldly claiming a share for women in political freedom. There can be little doubt that the presence of a pure and virtuous young woman upon the throne had its influence in leading people to question seriously whether there was any real advantage to the nation at large in shutting out from direct political power all women who were not queens. In 1848⁸ Mr. Disraeli, in the House of Commons, had said, "In a country governed by a woman – where you allow women to form part of the other estate of the realm – peeresses in their own right, for example – where you allow women not only to hold land but to be ladies of the manor and hold legal courts – where a woman by law may be a churchwarden and overseer of the poor – I do not see, where she has so much to do with the State and Church, on what reasons,

⁸ The date of this speech is given in Miss Blackburn's *Record of Woman's Suffrage* as 1866, the only mistake I have found in her careful and faithful history.

if you come to right, she has not a right to vote."

Other influences were operating to open political activity to women. Their help and co-operation were warmly welcomed by the Anti-Corn Law League. Cobden, at one of the great meetings of the League held in Covent Garden Theatre in 1845, said that he wished women could vote. A few years later than this the Sheffield Female Political Association passed a resolution in favour of women's suffrage, and presented a petition in this sense to the House of Lords. The refusal to allow women who had been duly appointed as delegates in the United States to take their places in the Anti-Slavery Congress held in London in 1840 roused a great deal of controversy, especially as William Lloyd Garrison, the leader of the Anti-Slavery Movement in America,⁹ declared that if the ladies were excluded he would share their exclusion with them; he did this, and sat with them in a side gallery, taking no part in the discussion. The opponents of the women took refuge, as they have so often done before and since, in an affirmation that they were the special repositories of the Divine Will on the subject, and declared that it was contrary to the ordinances of the Almighty that women should take part in the Congress. The treatment they had received in London naturally caused great indignation on the part of the American ladies, among whom were Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott. When they returned to their own country they immediately began to work for the political enfranchisement of women, and

⁹ See the interesting picture in the staircase of the National Portrait Gallery, London.

the first Women's Rights Convention was held in the United States at Seneca Falls in 1848. This was the beginning of definite work for women's suffrage in the United States.

In England in the 'fifties came the Crimean War, with the deep stirring of national feeling which accompanied it, and the passion of gratitude and admiration which was poured forth on Miss Florence Nightingale for her work on behalf of our wounded soldiers. It was universally felt that there was work for women, even in war – the work of cleansing, setting in order, breaking down red tape, and soothing the vast sum of human suffering which every war is bound to cause. Miss Nightingale's work in war was work that never had been done until women came forward to do it, and her message to her countrywomen was educate yourselves, prepare, make ready; never imagine that your task can be done by instinct, without training and preparation. Painstaking study, she insisted, was just as necessary as a preparation for women's work as for men's work; and she bestowed the whole of the monetary gift offered her by the gratitude of the nation to form training-schools for nurses at St. Thomas's and King's College Hospitals.

When a fire is once kindled many things will serve as fuel which to a superficial glance would seem to have no connection with it. The sufferings and torture of women during the Indian Mutiny heroically borne helped people to see that Empire is built on the lives of women as well as on the lives of men.

"On the bones of the English
The English flag is stayed,"

means that women as well as men have laid down their lives for their country.

In 1857 the movement among women for political recognition was stimulated in quite a different way. In that year the Divorce Act was passed, and, as is well known, set up by law a different moral standard for men and women. Under this Act, which is still in force (1911), a man can obtain the dissolution of his marriage if he can prove one act of infidelity on the part of his wife; but a woman cannot get her marriage dissolved unless she can prove that her husband has been guilty both of infidelity and cruelty. Mr. Gladstone vehemently opposed this Bill. It is said that "in a ten hours' debate on a single clause he made no less than twenty-nine speeches, some of them of considerable length."¹⁰ All these things prepared the way for the movement which took definite shape in the next decade.

¹⁰ Morley's *Life of Gladstone*, vol. i. p. 571.

CHAPTER II

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE QUESTION IN PARLIAMENT – FIRST STAGE

"All who live in a country should take an interest in that country, love that country, and the vote gives that sense of interest, fosters that love." – Rt. Hon. W. E. Gladstone.

The women's suffrage question in 1860 was on the point of entering a new phase – the phase of practical politics. Parliamentary Reform was again before the country; the principles of representation were constantly discussed in newspapers, and in every social circle where intelligent men and women met.

James Mill's article on "Government," referred to in Chapter I., has been described as being "out of sight the most important in the series of events which culminated in the passing of the Reform Act of 1832."¹¹ The works of his son, John Stuart Mill, had a similar influence on the series of events which led up to the passing of the Reform Act of 1867. But whereas James Mill had specifically excluded women from his argument, John Mill as specifically and with great force and vigour included them.

In his *Political Economy*, and in his collected essays, and, of

¹¹ *James Mill: a Biography*, by Alexander Bain, LL.D., p. 215.

course, in his *Liberty*, it was easy to perceive that he strongly condemned the condition of subordination to which the mass of women had been from time immemorial condemned. But in his *Representative Government*, published in 1861, he put forward in a few eloquent pages of powerful argument the case for the extension of the suffrage to women, showing that all the arguments by which the principles of representative government were supported were equally applicable to woman.¹²

The volumes of his correspondence, published in 1908, show how constantly his mind dwelt on the grave injustice to women involved by their exclusion from political rights, and also how deeply he was convinced that the whole of society loses by treating them as if they had no responsibility for the right conduct of national affairs. It was an enormous advantage to the whole women's movement, not only in England, but all over the world, that it had for its leader and champion a man in the front rank of political philosophers and thinkers. He formed a school at the universities, and in all centres of intellectual activity, and from that school a large number of the chief leaders and supporters of the women's movement have been derived.

As early as 1851 an essay on the "Enfranchisement of Women" had appeared in the *Westminster Review*. It had been written by Mrs. J. S. Mill, and took the form of a review of the proceedings of a Convention of Women held in Worcester, Massachusetts, in the previous year to promote the cause of the

¹² *Representative Government*, by J. S. Mill, pp. 175-180.

political enfranchisement of women.

The essay is a complete and masterly statement of the case for the emancipation of women. The terminology is a little out of date, but the state of mind which she exposes is perennial. We can all, for instance, recognise the applicability of the following sentences to the present time: —

"For with what truth or rationality could the suffrage be termed universal while half the human species remain excluded from it? To declare that a voice in the government is the right of all, and demand it only for a part – the part, namely, to which the claimant belongs – is to renounce even the appearance of principle. The Chartist, who denies the suffrage to women, is a Chartist only because he is not a lord; he is one of those levellers who would level only down to themselves."¹³

This essay, with its clear, pointed, and epigrammatic style, produced a great effect on the more cultivated section of public opinion. If Mrs. Mill had lived longer she would probably have inaugurated the practical organisation of a women's enfranchisement movement, but she died in the autumn of 1858. What her death meant to her husband he has left on record in glowing and touching words, and in his loneliness he endeavoured "because she would have wished it," to make the best of what life was left to him, "to work on for her purposes with such diminished strength as could be derived from thoughts

¹³ *Dissertations and Discussions*, by J. S. Mill, vol. ii. p. 417.

of her and communion with her memory."¹⁴

Shortly before the general election of 1865 Mr. Mill was invited by a considerable body of electors of the Borough of Westminster to offer himself as a candidate. In reply he made the plainest possible statement of his political views, including his conviction that women were entitled to representation in Parliament. It was the first time that women's suffrage had ever been brought before English electors, and the fact that after having announced himself as strongly in favour of it Mr. Mill was elected, gave a place to women's suffrage in practical politics.

The situation in Parliament, as regards Parliamentary Reform, at the time of Mr. Mill's election was very like what it is now in respect of women's suffrage. Parliament had been playing with the subject for a great many years. Reform Bills had been introduced, voted for, and abandoned again and again. The real reformers were growing impatient. I, myself, heard John Bright say about this time or a little later that he began to think the best way of carrying a Reform Bill was to tell working men that "a good rifle could be bought for £2." Candidates who stood for election pledged themselves to Parliamentary Reform, but year after year went by and nothing was done. Each party brought forward Reform Bills, but neither party really wished to enfranchise the working classes. Before 1867 the total electorate only numbered a little over one million voters. The Reform Bill of 1867 more than doubled this number. It is not in human nature

¹⁴ *Autobiography*, p. 241.

for members of Parliament really to like a very large increase in the number of their constituents. Besides the extra trouble and expense involved, there was in 1865 another deterrent – terror. Those who held power feared the working classes. Working men were supposed to be the enemies of property, and working men were in an enormous numerical majority over all other classes combined. "You must not have the vote because there are so many of you" was a much more effective argument when used against working men than it is when used against women; because the working classes are fifteen or sixteen times more numerous than all other classes combined, whereas women are only slightly in excess of men.¹⁵ On one excuse or another the Reform Bills constantly brought before Parliament were dropped or burked in one of the thousand ways open to the experienced Parliamentarian for getting rid of measures which he has to appear to support, but to which he is in reality opposed. The time had come, however, after 1865, when it became apparent that the game was up, and that a Reform Bill would have to be passed. It was to this Parliament that Mill was elected, and in which in 1867, as an amendment to the Reform Bill, he raised the question of the enfranchisement of women. His motion was to omit the word "man" and insert the word "person" in the enfranchising clause. Of this he says himself that it was by far

¹⁵ The census of 1911 shows that the excess of women over men is in the proportion of 1068 women to 1000 men, and that this proportion has changed but little during the last hundred and ten years.

the most important public service that he was able to perform as a member of Parliament. Seventy-three members voted with him and 196 against him; with the addition of pairs and tellers the total number supporting women's suffrage was over 80. This amount of support surpassed all expectations. Before the debate and division it was uncertain whether women's suffrage would command more than a few stray votes in the House. Mr. Mill's masterly speech, grave and high-toned, made a deep impression. Perhaps the thing that pleased him most was the fact that John Bright voted with him. He was known to be an opponent of women's suffrage, but he was fairly won over by the force of Mill's speech. Those who watched him sitting in the corner seat of the front row on the left-hand side of the Speaker, just below Mr. Mill, saw his whole expression and demeanour change as the speech proceeded. His defiant, mocking expression changed to one that was serious and thoughtful; no one but Mill ever had the moral and mental strength to wrestle with him again successfully. It was the first and last time he ever gave a vote for women's suffrage.

It is an oft-told tale how in the previous year a little committee of workers had been formed to promote a Parliamentary petition from women in favour of women's suffrage. It met in the house of Miss Garrett, (now Mrs. Garrett Anderson, M.D.), and included Mrs. Bodichon, Miss Emily Davies, Mrs. Peter Taylor, Miss Rosamond Davenport Hill, and other well-known women. They consulted Mr. Mill about the petition, and he

promised to present it if they could collect as many as a hundred names. After a fortnight's work they secured 1499, including many of the most distinguished women of the day, such as Mrs. Somerville, Frances Power Cobbe, Florence Nightingale, Harriet Martineau, Miss Swanwick, Mrs. Josephine Butler, Lady Anna Gore Langton, Mrs. William Grey. In June 1866 Miss Garrett and Miss Emily Davies took the petition down to the House, entering by way of Westminster Hall. They were a little embarrassed by the size of the roll in their charge, and deposited it with the old apple-woman, who hid it under her stall. The ladies did not know how to find Mr. Mill, when at that moment Mr. Fawcett passed through Westminster Hall and at once offered to go in search of him. Mr. Mill was much amused on his arrival when he found the petition was hidden away under the apple-woman's stall; but he was greatly delighted by the large number of names which had been obtained, and exclaimed, "Ah, this I can brandish with great effect."¹⁶

It was in 1867 that the Reform Bill was carried, and Mr. Mill's Women's Suffrage Amendment defeated on May 20th. The testing of the actual legal effect of the passing of the Bill upon the political status of women (already described in Chapter I.) took place in 1868. These events caused a great deal of thought and discussion with regard to women's position in relation to the State and public duties in general; and it is as certain as anything which is insusceptible of absolute proof can be, that to

¹⁶ *Record of Women's Suffrage*, by Helen Blackburn, pp. 53, 54, 55.

the interest excited by the claim of women to the Parliamentary vote was due the granting to them of the Municipal Franchise in 1869; and also that in 1870, when the first great Education Act was passed, they were not only given the right to vote for members of School Boards, but also the right to be elected upon them. At the first School Board election, which took place in London in November 1870, Miss Elizabeth Garrett, M.D., and Miss Emily Davies were returned as members. Miss Garrett was at the head of the poll in her constituency – Marylebone. She polled more than 47,000 votes, the largest number, it was said at the time, which had ever been bestowed upon any candidate in any election in England. In Manchester Miss Becker was elected a member of the first School Board, and was continuously re-elected for twenty years, until her death in 1890. In Edinburgh Miss Flora Stevenson was elected to the first School Board, and was continuously re-elected for thirty-three years until her death in 1905. From the date of her election she was appointed by her colleagues to act as convener of some of their most important committees, and in 1900 was unanimously elected the chairman of the board; she retained this most honourable and responsible post until the end of her life.

The connection between the election of the ladies just mentioned – and other instances might be added – with the suffrage movement is strongly indicated by the fact that they were, without exception, the leading personal representatives of the suffrage movement in the various places in which

they respectively lived. Miss Garrett and Miss Davies, as just described, helped to organise the suffrage petition, which they handed to Mr. Mill in 1866; Miss Becker was the head and front of the suffrage movement in Manchester, and Miss Flora Stevenson in Edinburgh. These ladies had taken an active part in starting the women's suffrage societies in their own towns. Five important societies came into existence almost simultaneously in London, Manchester, Edinburgh, Bristol, and Birmingham, and as they almost immediately devised a plan for combining individual responsibility with united action, they formed the nucleus of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, which has become the largest organisation of the kind in the United Kingdom, and in October 1911 numbered 305 societies, a number which is constantly and rapidly increasing.

With the suffrage work carried on by the societies, other work for improving the legal status of women, resisting encroachments upon their constitutional liberties, and improving their means of education went on with vigour, sobriety, and enthusiasm; these qualities were combined in a remarkable degree, and were beyond all praise. It has been remarked that the successful conduct of every great change needs the combination of the spirit of order with the spirit of audacity. It was the good fortune of the women's movement in England to secure both these. The suffrage societies from the first saw the necessity of keeping to suffrage work only; but the same individuals in a different capacity were labouring with heroic persistence and untiring zeal

to lift up the conditions of women's lives in other ways; thus to Mrs. Jacob Bright, Mrs. Wolstenholme Elmy, Mrs. Duncan M'Laren, and Mrs. Pochin, we owe the first Married Women's Property Act, and also the Guardianship of Children Act; to Mrs. Bodichon and Miss Davies, Henry Sidgwick and Russell Gurney, the opening of university education to women; to Miss Garrett (now Mrs. Anderson), Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, and Miss Jex Blake, the opening of the medical profession; to Mrs. Josephine Butler, and Mr. and Mrs. Sheldon Amos, Sir James Stanfeld, and Mr. James Stuart, the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts (passed in 1866 and 1868); to Mrs. William Grey, Miss Sherriff and Miss Gurney, the creation of good secondary schools for girls. I am well aware that in this bald recital I have omitted the names of many noble, conscientious, and self-sacrificing workers for the great causes to which they had devoted themselves; I cannot even attempt to make my list exhaustive; I have but selected from a very large number, all ardent suffragists, a few names that stand out preeminently in my memory among the glorious company whose efforts laid the foundations on which we at the present day are still building the superstructure of equal opportunity and equal justice for women and men.

As an illustration of how the tone has changed in regard to the personal and proprietary rights of women I can give a little story which fell within my own experience. In the 'seventies I was staying with my father at a time when he had convened in

his house a meeting of Liberal electors of East Suffolk. We were working then for a Married Women's Property Bill. The first Act passed in 1870 gave a married woman the right to possess her *earnings*, but not any other property. I had petition forms with me, and thought the "Liberal" meeting would afford me a good opportunity of getting signatures to it. So I took it round and explained its aim to the quite average specimens of the Liberal British farmer. "Am I to understand you, ma'am, that if this Bill passes, and my wife have a matter of a hundred pound left to her, I should have to *ask* her for it?" said one of them. The idea appeared monstrous that a man could not take his wife's £100 without even going through the form of asking her for it.

But we were making way steadily. It is true that Mr. Mill was not re-elected in 1868, but Mr. Jacob Bright succeeded him as the leader in the House of Commons of the women's suffrage movement. The second reading of his, the first Women's Suffrage Bill, was carried on May 4, 1870, by 124 to 91. Further progress was, however, prevented, mainly in consequence of the opposition of the Government, and on the motion to go into committee on May 12, the Bill was defeated by 220 to 94.

From the beginning women's suffrage had never been a party question. In the first division, that on Mr. Mill's Amendment to the Reform Bill, the 73 members who voted for women's suffrage included about 1 °Conservatives, and one of them, the Rt. Hon. Russell Gurney, Q.C., Recorder of London, was one of the tellers in the division. The great bulk of the supporters

of the principle of women's suffrage were then and still are Liberals and Radicals, but from the outset we have always had an influential group of Conservative supporters. And it is indicative of the general growth of the movement that among the large majority secured for the second reading of Sir George Kemp's Bill in May 5, 1911, 79 were Conservatives, a number in excess of the total of those who supported Mr. Mill's amendment in 1867. Sir Stafford Northcote (afterwards Lord Iddesleigh) was among the friends of women's suffrage, and so was Sir Algernon Borthwick (afterwards Lord Glenesk), the proprietor and editor of *The Morning Post*. Support from the Conservative side of the house was greatly encouraged in 1873 by a letter written by Mr. Disraeli in reply to a memorial signed by over 11,000 women. The memorial had been forwarded by Mr. William Gore Langton, M.P., and was thus acknowledged: —

"Dear Gore Langton, — I was much honoured by receiving from your hands the memorial signed by 11,000 women of England — among them some illustrious names — thanking me for my services in attempting to abolish the anomaly that the Parliamentary franchise attached to a household or property qualification, when possessed by a woman, should not be exercised, though in all matters of local government when similarly qualified she exercises this right. As I believe this anomaly to be injurious to the best interests of the country, I trust to see it removed by the wisdom of Parliament. — Yours sincerely,

"B. Disraeli."

This was written in 1873 in immediate prospect of the dissolution of Parliament, which took place in February 1874, and placed Mr. Disraeli in power for the first time.

These were days of active propaganda for all the suffrage societies. A hundred meetings were held on the first six months of 1873, a large number for that time, though it would be considered nothing now. All the experienced political men who supported women's suffrage told us that when the 1874 Parliament came to an end a change of Government was highly probable, a new Liberal Government would be in power, and would certainly deal with the question of representation – that then would be the great opportunity, the psychological moment, for the enfranchisement of women. The agricultural labourers were about to be enfranchised and the claim of women to share in the benefits of representative government was at least as good, and would certainly be listened to. With these hopes we approached the election of 1880.

CHAPTER III

THROWING THE WOMEN OVERBOARD IN 1884

"We have filled the well-fed with good things, and the hungry we have sent empty away." – From the *Politician's Magnificat*.

The year 1880 opened cheerfully for suffragists. There was a series of great demonstrations of women only, beginning with one in the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, in February. The first little bit of practical success too within the United Kingdom came this year, for suffrage was extended to women in the Isle of Man. At first it was given only to women freeholders, but after a few years' experience of its entirely successful operation all feeling of opposition to it died away, and it was extended to women householders. The representative system of the Isle of Man is one of the oldest in the world, and the House of Keys is of even greater antiquity than the House of Commons.

The general election took place in March and April 1880, and the Liberals were returned to power with a large majority. Mr. Gladstone became Prime Minister, and it was well known that the extension of Household Suffrage in the counties would be an important feature in the programme of the new Government. Mr.

Goschen declined to join Mr. Gladstone's Government, because he was opposed to the extension of the Parliamentary franchise to the agricultural labourers. It is strange how the whirligig of time brings about its revenges. Mr. Goschen held out to the last against the enfranchisement of the agricultural labourers, but after the election of 1906 he publicly congratulated a meeting of Unionist Free Traders on "the magnificent stand the agricultural labourers had made for Free Trade!" If his counsels had prevailed in 1880, not one of these men would have had a vote and could have made a stand for Free Trade or anything else. But in politics memories are short, and no one reminded Lord Goschen, as he had then become, of his stand against the labourers' vote a few years earlier.

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