

THE MOVEMENT AGAINST WOMAN SUFFRAGE in ENGLAND

THE great meeting held recently in London to launch the Women's National Antisuffrage League was made additionally noteworthy by the participation of Mrs. Humphry Ward, Lady Jersey, Lady George Hamilton, Helen Mathers, and the dowager Lady Desart. Some of the most prominent publicists in Great Britain have pledged their aid to the campaign which will soon begin against the agitation in favor of votes for women. Mr. Austen Chamberlain is among these, as are Lord Rothschild, Lord Amphill, and Michael Hicks-Beach. The matter, said Mrs. Humphry Ward, is urgent. "Unless those who hold that the success of the woman-suffrage movement would bring disaster upon England are prepared to take effective and immediate action, judgment may go by default and our country drift toward a momentous revolution both social and political, before it has realized the dangers involved." "The Prime Minister has stated in substance," observes the *London Times*, commenting upon all this, "that if women make it clear that they want the vote, he will give it to them." Now, this British daily professes itself firmly convinced that the great majority of the women of England do not want the franchise. "But unless they exert themselves to show that they do not want it, they will give the minority occasion to misrepresent their views." Hence the movement against woman suffrage in England, a movement which our contemporaries think will become powerful and triumphant. The suffragists are to be fought with their own weapons. Organization will be met by organization, argument by argument, agitation by counter-agitation. We read:

"When Mrs. Ward affirms that the proposed change would be a disaster for England, and first and foremost for women themselves, we are satisfied that she is expressing the view of the great bulk of Englishwomen. Not many of them, and not many of their male relations, could state their reasons for holding this belief with the lucidity and the cogency which mark her speech, but their common sense teaches them that the decision of great political questions is best left to men, as it always has been left by every nation that has played any conspicuous part in the world. The leaders of the movement are as earnest and as deeply imbued with public spirit as the leaders of the suffragists, but they differ from them absolutely, both as to the wisdom of granting the parliamentary vote to women and as to the alleged wish of women to obtain it. The women who agree with them have to prove that they are as much in earnest as Mrs. Fawcett and her supporters, and that they can exhibit equal tenacity in pressing their wishes upon the legislature and the electorate. Lady Haversham stated at the meeting that in a single fortnight 37,000 signatures of women had been obtained to a petition against woman suffrage. That is an encouraging sign.

"The real reason why women ought not to have the political franchise is the very simple reason that they are not men, and that, according to a well-known *dictum*, even an act of Parliament can not make them men. Men govern the world, and, so far as it is possible to foresee, they must always govern it. That necessity arises from the fact of sex. The state depends for its existence, as Mrs. Ward says, on the physical power of its citizens to defend it by force of arms, and next upon the 'trained and specialized knowledge' which men alone are able to acquire."

From some quarters has come the suggestion that a referendum be taken in England on the subject of votes for women. To this proposition Miss Christabel Pankhurst, leader of the militant suffragists, objects. The plan to enfranchise men, she says, was never thus submitted to popular vote. Moreover, "unnecessary delay would be involved in dealing with a claim admittedly just." Finally, to introduce the referendum in this case, argues Miss Pankhurst, would be to "establish a precedent which might have unfortunate results on the future course of legislation." The *London Mail* can not help the inference that the suffragists are in dread of public sentiment when they shrink from the referendum.