

The Present Status of Woman Suffrage

ENTIRELY worthy of the attention which it has received from the press is the review of the progress attained by the woman-suffrage movement which is presented in an article contributed by IDA HUSTED HARPER to the September number of *The North American Review*. The article is timely and useful in view of the determination with which the advocates of woman suffrage have recently pressed their claim upon the British Parliament. When one considers the advanced position taken on this question by some of the British colonies, there seems to be ground for the hope that the concurrence of the mother-country will not be long delayed. We are reminded in this article that the women of New Zealand have possessed the municipal suffrage since 1886, and that in 1893 the Parliament of that colony conferred upon them the full franchise on exactly the same terms as those required of men. It is noteworthy that since, at a number of general elections in the colonies, a larger percentage of women than of men have voted. This seems to put an end to the objection that women would not use the franchise if they had it. The same thing has been observed in Tasmania, where women have had the suffrage since 1903; last year they outnumbered the men at every polling station. In the six states comprising the Australian Commonwealth women have had the municipal suffrage for twenty-five or thirty years. South Australia gave them the full state franchise in 1895, West Australia in 1899, New South Wales in 1902, and Queensland in 1905. In Victoria the franchise is still withheld from women, but one of the first acts of the government of the Australian Commonwealth was the bestowal upon them of the full Federal suffrage, and of the right to sit in the federal Parliament.

Every part of the British Empire has some form of woman suffrage. In the Isle of Man since 1881 widows and spinsters have voted for all officials, including members of the House of Keys, or Insular Parliament. In the recent organization of an autonomous government for the Transvaal woman suffrage was strongly urged by General BOTHA, the present Premier, but the British Colonial Secretary would not allow it, because of the great advantage it would give to the Boers, Englishwomen in the former South-African republic being comparatively few. In Natal, however, the municipal franchise is conceded to women. In all of the nine provinces of Canada widows and spinsters have had for years either school or municipal suffrage, or both, and in the Northwest Territories women have both on the same terms as men. The writer in *The North American Review* is undoubtedly right in saying that if Great Britain should give the full franchise to women, its Canadian dependencies would not refuse to make the same concessions. In the United Kingdom it must be admitted that events have not justified the expectations raised in 1869, when the municipal ballot was granted to women by act of Parliament. When, subsequently, the district and county vote was added, it was taken for granted that the Parliamentary franchise would soon follow. As a matter of fact, however, the efforts of forty years to secure complete equality for women at the ballot-box have

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proved unavailing in Great Britain.

Yet at the last general election in 1906, 420 candidates—a majority—were returned who were pledged to vote for woman suffrage. Under the circumstances, when the woman-suffrage bill came up on March 8, 1907, the only means of defeating it was through the old tactics of talking it to death. The Speaker refused to entertain a motion for closure, and the bill was thus prevented from coming to a vote. There is no doubt that the Prime Minister, Sir H. J. CAMPBELL-BANNERMAN, favors the measure, but the majority of his colleagues in the cabinet are opposed to it. Nevertheless, the opinion is gaining ground that in the United Kingdom the parliamentary franchise will be granted to women within a few years.

If we turn to the European Continent, we observe that the woman-suffrage movement has made relatively but little progress in the two republics of France and Switzerland, where we might have expected it to be well advanced. Neither are the prospects of the enfranchisement of women encouraging in Belgium, but in the Netherlands it is probable that the question of conceding the suffrage to women will be submitted to the voters in 1909. In Norway this year the parliamentary franchise was granted to all women who pay taxes on an income of \$84 in the country, or of \$113 in cities. A wife can vote on her husband's income, and even domestic servants may earn enough to entitle them to vote. As about 350,000 women are enfranchised by the new law, there is no doubt that they will soon acquire enough influence in Parliament to repeal the property qualification. In Sweden, since 1862, widows and single women have possessed the municipal franchise on the same terms as have men, and in 1904 this right was extended to married women who paid taxes on their own property. Recently a bill was passed by the Swedish Parliament making women eligible to all municipal offices, and removing all tax qualifications for the municipal suffrage. The action taken by Norway will undoubtedly bring about the complete enfranchisement of Swedish women in the near future. It is well known that in Finland last year the franchise was granted to women on exactly the same terms that are imposed on men, and they were also made eligible to all offices, including seats in Parliament. At the first general election after the bill enfranchising women was signed by the Czar no fewer than nineteen of them were elected to the national legislature.

If, now, we glance at the German Empire, we find that in Prussia, and many of the other constituent states, women used to be prohibited from attending political meetings. Last year, however, in consequence of repeated protests, the Reichstag repealed the prohibition, stipulating, however, that women must sit apart from the men. There is no immediate prospect, nevertheless, of women gaining the parliamentary franchise in Germany, though the demand for it is growing stronger every year. The obstacles in the way of women securing the suffrage in the Austrian or Cisleithan kingdom seem insuperable, owing to the fact that concerted action in its numerous provinces is almost impossible. In the Kingdom of

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Hungary, also, not one of the important political parties has espoused the cause of woman suffrage, though FRANCIS KOSSUTH has declared that his followers were morally bound to support it. In Italy there is an energetic woman-suffrage association, which has enlisted the cooperation of several distinguished statesmen, but the bestowal of the parliamentary franchise on women in that kingdom seems still distant.

The writer in *The North American Review* points out that even in Japan there is an extensive agitation for more rights among the women of the upper classes. In India, too, the cultured Parsee women are insisting upon exercising the local suffrage possessed by men. In Persia, also, the educated women are demanding the right to vote for members of the newly established representative assembly.

It is true, as IDA HUSTED HARPER says, that the attainment of woman suffrage is more difficult in the United States than in almost any other country, for the reason that elsewhere it is necessary only to win over a majority of the members of the National Parliament. The same end may be achieved in the United States only in two ways, namely, by a Constitutional amendment, which must receive the assent of the legislatures or State conventions of three-fourths of the States, or by the States individually, which are entrusted by the Federal Constitution with the power of determining the conditions of the franchise within their respective boundaries. Yet four of our States, namely, Colorado, Idaho, Wyoming, and Utah, have granted the full franchise to women, with results that demonstrate conclusively their fitness to possess the privilege.