

CHAPTER I. ENGLAND.

I. THE WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT.

BY MILLICENT GARRETT FAWCETT.

[Mrs. Fawcett is a daughter of Mr. Newson Garrett, of Aldeburg, Suffolk, where she was born in 1847. In 1867 she married Mr. Henry Fawcett, then Member for Brighton, and now Member for Hackney and Postmaster General in the present Administration (1883). Mr. Fawcett is also Professor of Political Economy in the University of Cambridge; and Mrs. Fawcett was led, through reading to her husband, who is blind, to study the same subject. She published in 1870 her "Political Economy for Beginners," and a year or two later "Tales in Political Economy." Mrs. Fawcett has also written a novel, "Janet Doncaster," and is joint author with her husband of a volume of essays and lectures on political and social subjects. She was one of the earliest among lady speakers and lecturers in England on behalf of the political enfranchisement of women, and she has also frequently lectured on other political, literary and economic subjects in many of the principal towns of Great Britain and Ireland. Many members of Mrs. Fawcett's family have taken an active part in promoting the removal of the disabilities of women. Her eldest sister, the late Mrs. J. W. Smith, was the secretary of the first society formed in London to promote women's suffrage; another of her sisters is Mrs. Garrett-Anderson, the well-known physician; a third, Mrs. Cowell, was for several years a member of the London School Board; and her cousin, the late Miss Rhoda Garrett, an excellent speaker and lecturer on behalf of women's suffrage, was also well known in artistic circles as a designer and decorator.]

It is very difficult in tracing the history of any great social movement to point to one particular date and say,

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on this day or in this year the movement began. The claim of women for education, for political enfranchisement, for social and industrial freedom, is one that is generally regarded as essentially modern. But it owes its origin in England to a date at least as far back as 1792, when Mary Wollstonecraft published her "Vindication of the Rights of Woman." Another weighty blow was struck for women in 1810, when Sydney Smith published his well-known and witty essay urging the claim of women to a sound literary education. Shelley's name must also be recorded as among those of the earliest of our friends. As late as the first thirty years of this century, the movement must be regarded as one of the results of the upheaval of the human mind of which the French Revolution was the most portentous manifestation. The awakening of the democratic spirit, the rebellion against authority, the proclamation of the rights of man, were almost necessarily accompanied by the growth of a new ideal concerning the position of women, by the recognition, more or less defined and conscious, of the rights of women. The growth of this movement and its adaptation to the practical spirit of the nineteenth century are to a very large extent due to the life-long advocacy and guidance of the late John Stuart Mill.* Not only in his book on the Subjection of Women,

* An English lady, whom I shall have occasion to quote several times in the foot-notes to this essay, writes me as follows: The train of events which led to John Stuart Mill's conversion to the cause of Women's Suffrage is worthy of note. The vague enthusiasm for the Rights of Man which convulsed society in Europe, at the end of the eighteenth century, soon assumed in England a more practical shape. Bentham, the father of modern Radicalism, published his philosophical essays upon Government, and founded a school of followers called Philosophic Radicals, who exercised a marked influence on thought at the beginning of this century. Amongst the most distinguished of the disciples of Bentham was James Mill, father of John Stuart Mill. As

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but in the Principles of Political Economy, in his Essays and Dissertations, in the books on Liberty, Utilitarianism and Representative Government he attacked the fortress of world-old custom and prejudice, and claimed for women the fullest liberty in the practical affairs of life, and showed the mischief, folly and misery of withholding from half the human race the opportunity of development which nothing but freedom can give. Mr. Mill was always careful

a keen, hard-headed thinker, James Mill stands pre-eminent amongst the little band of reformers, and his trenchant pen did much to impress the genius and logic of Bentham upon the enthusiasts of his time. About 1824 James Mill published an article on Government in the "Encyclopædia Britannica" which excited much attention by its novel and lucid argument. After commenting upon the love of power common to our race he argues that the safeguard of the elective franchise is necessary to protect our liberties from encroachment. "But," he continues, "all those individuals whose interests are included in those of other individuals may be struck off" the electoral roll. "In this light *women* may be regarded, the interest of *almost all* of whom is involved in that of their fathers, or in that of their husbands." Upon the publication of this article, William Thompson, another disciple of Bentham, wrote to John Mill, pointing out that "almost all" women did not include "all women," and that therefore, by his own argument, *some women* at least should be enfranchised. Thompson demanded that this logical inaccuracy should be amended. James Mill refused to alter the article, whereupon Thompson and Mrs. Wheeler published in 1825, as a joint production, a substantial volume called "The Appeal of Women," in which James Mill is attacked in scathing terms, and the whole position of women is treated with a thoroughness which no writer of the present day has surpassed. There is no doubt that John Stuart Mill, young as he was at the time, must have seen the controversy in which his father was so fiercely attacked, and it is probably from a consideration of these arguments that his attention was directed to the question of Women's Suffrage. His book on the Subjection of Women, published thirty years later, follows very much the lines laid down in "The Appeal of Women;" but, instead of the vehemence and indignation of the earlier work, we find a cool, dispassionate statement of facts which disarms opposition, and has proved far more alluring to our practical politicians.—T. S.

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to disclaim having been the originator of the women's rights question ; in a speech at Greenwich in 1870 he corrected a previous speaker who had alluded to him as having been the first to advocate the enfranchisement of women. "Several of the most eminent philosophers," he said, "and many of the noblest of women for ages have done this." But there can be no dispute that Mr. Mill's influence marks an epoch in the history of the women's movement. He was a master and formed a school of thought. Just as in art, a master forms a school and influences his successors for generations, so the present leaders and champions of the women's movement have been influenced, and to a great extent formed, by Mr. Mill. Even those who are opposed to the enfranchisement of women are unconsciously influenced by the movement of which Mr. Mill was the leader. Sir James Stephen admits that in the making of laws which directly affect the relations between men and women, men have made rules for their own supposed advantage which are in fact greatly to the injury of both parties. Even Mr. Goldwin Smith admits that "if there is any wrong to half humanity, which cannot be righted in any other way, we must at once accept Female Suffrage, whatever perils it may entail ;" and leading members of Parliament aver, in opposing the bill to remove the electoral disabilities of women, that women are as fit as men to exercise the political franchise with intelligence and care. In this, as much as in the advocacy of our friends, we see the fruit of the seed sown by Mill between the years 1848 and 1869.

One great service of Mill to the women's movement in England has been, I conceive, in impressing upon it from the first, the character of practical good sense and moderation which has been its distinguishing feature. The suf-

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franchise has not been claimed for women in England as an abstract and inalienable right, but it has been claimed upon the ground of expediency; that is to say, on the ground that the good resulting from it would far outweigh any evils that might possibly attend it. This note was struck by Mr. Mill in his speech in the House of Commons in May, 1867, and the whole movement from the first has kept in harmony with the tenor of this speech. He then said: "I do not mean that the elective franchise, or any other public function, is an abstract right, and that to withhold it from any one, on sufficient grounds of expediency, is a personal wrong; it is a complete misunderstanding of the principle I maintain, to confound this with it; my argument is entirely one of expediency. But there are different orders of expediency; all expediences are not exactly on the same level; there is an important branch of expediency called justice, and justice, though it does not necessarily require that we should confer political functions on every one, does require that we should not capriciously and without cause withhold from one what we give to another." He proceeded to state that the only grounds on which the political suffrage could be justly withheld were personal unfitness or public danger, and these, he contended, did not exist in the case of the women it was proposed to enfranchise.

This basis of expediency on which the women's suffrage movement in England has rested, has led every women's suffrage society, without exception, to seek for the suffrage on behalf of those women, and those women only, who fulfill all the qualifications which the law demands of the male elector; that is for householders in boroughs, the owners of freeholds, and the renters of land and houses, above a certain value, in counties. The societies have

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held steadfastly by this principle, and have refused to be drawn either by friends or foes into complicating their position by claiming the suffrage for those women who, by marriage, or any other circumstance, are prevented from fulfilling the conditions imposed by the legislature on the possessors of the suffrage. Whether these conditions are themselves expedient, that is, conducive on the whole to the public good, is another matter which it concerns the community very seriously to consider; it is, however, the principle on which the women's suffrage societies have always acted, not to enter in any way into the general question of the conditions imposed on electors; but to say to Parliament and to the English people, "You have fixed these conditions as you believe to be for the best; you have spent years in considering what they shall be; we accept your decision, and only ask that all who fulfill these conditions shall be admitted to the privileges they confer." This character of practical moderation and rather humdrum common sense, which has stamped the movement in England, has prevented a good deal of what strikes one as rather comic about the movement in other countries. We talk about "women" and "women's suffrage;" we do not talk about Woman with a capital W. That we leave to our enemies. A recent diatribe by Mr. Goldwin Smith in the *Nineteenth Century*, upon "Woman," shows how completely he has lost his touch upon English politics and the English tone of approaching this question. If, in his article, the word "Woman" were struck out wherever it occurred, and the word "Man" were inserted, a great part of it would read like a caricature of the fulminations against the "vile wretch man" which appear to have been the laughing-stock of the American public some twenty years ago. It must not be supposed,

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however, that Mr. Smith is able to vent all his wrath in general terms; he goes on to speak of women in particular in a way that recalls Vivien's talk to Merlin, when she

"let her tongue
 Rage like a fire among the noblest names,

 till she left
 Not even Lancelot brave nor Galahad clean."

The studious moderation of the societies, the absence of tall talk, is one great secret of the progress the women's movement has made in England. The words Man, Woman, Humanity, etc., send a cold shudder through the average Briton, but talk to him of John and Elizabeth and he is ready to be interested and, up to his lights, just.

The agitation on the subject of parliamentary reform which preceded the passing of the reform bill of 1867, naturally led to the consideration of the claims of women to representation. The death of Lord Palmerston in 1865 made reform a practical political question of the first importance; the general election of the same year, when Mr. Mill was returned as member for Westminster, gave the women's suffrage movement a parliamentary leader of the first intellectual rank. These events led to the formation in London in 1866 of a society for promoting the extension of the suffrage to women. The members were Mrs. Peter Taylor, Mr. Hastings, now member for Worcestershire, the late Dean of Canterbury (Dean Alford), the late Professor Cairnes, the well-known political economist Mrs. Knox, better known by her maiden name of Isa Craig, Miss Emily Davies, the originator of Girton College; Miss J. Boucherett,* Rev. W. L. Clay, Lady Gold-

* Miss Boucherett is the author of the essay on "The Industrial Movement," at the end of this chapter.—T. S.

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smid, Mr. James Heywood, Miss Manning, and Mrs. Hensleigh Wedgewood. The honorary secretary was Mrs. J. W. Smith. It is an interesting and touching list for us who are left, for many of the names are now dear and honored memories, "precious friends hid in death's dateless night." The society was instrumental in getting signatures to a petition in favor of the extension of the suffrage to women who were possessed of the legal qualifications, and this petition, signed by 1,499 women, was presented during the session of 1866. A member of the society, Madame Bodichon (*née* Miss Barbara Leigh Smith), read a paper at the meeting of the Social Science Congress at Manchester in October, 1866, entitled, "Reasons for the Enfranchisement of Women."

The first London Committee was dissolved in 1867 and reformed by Mrs. Peter Taylor under the name of the London National Society for Women's Suffrage. Societies in correspondence with the London society, but entirely independent of it and of one another, were almost simultaneously formed at Manchester, Edinburgh, Bristol, Birmingham, Belfast and Dublin, and subsequently smaller societies were formed in more than forty towns in Great Britain and Ireland. Mr. Mill was the president of the London National Society, Mrs. Peter Taylor was its honorary secretary and treasurer, and, I may add, its presiding genius. The meetings were held at her house, and she devoted herself with all the enthusiasm of her gentle and courageous spirit to the objects of the society. Mrs. Peter Taylor was greatly assisted in her labors by Miss Caroline A. Biggs, who has ever since been an indefatigable worker for the cause of women's suffrage.* The Manchester soci-

* "A few years later," writes the lady to whom I have already referred, "a large share of the active work of the movement was undertaken by another

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ety was so fortunate as to secure from the outset the services of Miss Becker as its able and zealous secretary.* Mrs. Duncan McLaren, sister of Mr. Bright, was the president of the Edinburgh society. Lady Amberley presided over the Bath and Bristol society, where she was aided by the untiring energy and self devotion of the Miss Ashworths, members of another branch of the Bright family.

Immediately previous to the formation of these societies, a great impetus had been given to the movement by the first discussion upon it in Parliament, which was raised by Mr. Mill on May 20, 1867, in the form of an amendment to the fourth clause of Mr. Disraeli's reform bill. The amendment took the form of moving to leave out the word "man" in order to insert the word "person." Eighty-one members, counting the tellers, either voted or paired in favor of Mr. Mill's amendment, and from this date the parliamentary history of the movement begins. Among Mr. Mill's supporters were eleven Conservatives, one of whom, Mr. Russell Gurney, the late Recorder of London, was a teller; Mr. Gurney was throughout his life a tried and valued friend of every movement for the benefit of women. Mr. John Bright, who has since gone over to the enemy, was one of Mr. Mill's band of eighty-one. Others, alas! have gone over to the majority in a different sense. Death has deprived us of Lord Amberley, Sir

committee, composed mainly of delegates from provincial centres. The first meetings of this committee were held at the house of Mrs. Frederick Pennington, wife of the present member for Stockport. Under the name of the Central Committee it afterwards became united with the London National Society."—T. S.

* "Miss Becker has since then devoted her whole time and energy to the work, and has, by her untiring efforts, continued for sixteen years, become the most active leader of the organization."—T. S.

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Francis Goldsmid, Mr. Mill himself, and others whose names are less widely known.

The year 1868 was marked by what has since become quite common, the presence of ladies as speakers at public meetings on behalf of the enfranchisement of women. In April, 1868, a meeting was held in the Assembly rooms, Manchester, at which Mrs. Pochin,* the wife of the Mayor of Salford; Miss Robertson, of Dublin, and Miss Becker, spoke.†

The Mayor, Mr. Pochin, was in the chair. This meeting was followed by one in May, 1868, at Birmingham; but it was not until more than a year later, namely, July, 1869, that a meeting with lady speakers was ventured upon in London. The meeting was held at some rooms in Conduit street. Mrs. Peter Taylor was in the chair, and the speakers were, besides herself, Mr. Hare, Mr. Boyd Kinnear, Mr. Mill, the Rev. Charles Kingsley, Mr. Henry Fawcett, Mrs. Henry Fawcett, Lord Houghton, Mr. John Morley, Sir Charles W. Dilke, Mr. P. A. Taylor, Professor Masson, and Mr. Stansfeld. The presence of lady speakers is now so common at similar meetings as to call forth no remark either of commendation or the reverse, but fourteen years ago lady speakers had to endure an ordeal of ridicule from foes and remonstrance from friends such

* "Of all the advocates now living of the claims of women to the suffrage, Mrs. Pochin occupies the earliest place, having, in the year 1855, published a pamphlet entitled 'The Right of Women to Exercise the Electoral Franchise,' one of the most brilliant defences of their cause."—T. S.

† It may be mentioned as illustrative of the change which has taken place in public opinion with regard to the propriety of women speaking on the platform, that, at this first meeting in Manchester, it was believed that the utmost public opinion would endure was that the ladies should *read papers*; they therefore each read a short address, instead of making a speech in the ordinary way."—M. G. F.