

# WOMEN OF POLAND

**I**N the course of an address in Wellington the other day, Countess Maria Wodzicka, wife of the Polish Consul-General, gave some interesting sidelights on the position and influence of women in pre-war Poland.

After the last war, she said, Poland was faced with an enormous task of reconstruction. "The Polish women, to whom our Constitution of 1921 granted full political rights and opened all doors of educational work and position, took full part in this huge workshop of national reconstruction." The Poles had to build new lines of communication, to raise industry and agriculture, to build hospitals, to create their own laws and to introduce into the country a number of social reforms. In 1919 they introduced a social security scheme, together with an eight-hour working day.

The Countess went on, "I don't think I ever met in Poland any prejudice against a woman filling any type of position whatever, because she was a woman. The result was that in every branch of work she held high positions quite often, which had excellent results, because our brains and powers of organisation are certainly no less than men's. I often think that we owe much of the mess we are now in to men, and that the world would look much better if women had more hand in the building of this famous new world order.

## "It's Different in France"

"Do you know that in France to this day, a woman has no right to vote, no right to handle her business matters; she can't open an account in the bank without the permission of her official guardian (husband, father, or whatever he may be). If she is a rich girl and there does not exist a special clause in the marriage contract, she has to ask her husband for every penny of her own money, even to buy rouge or silk stockings. I learned this when I was in Paris during the war, for I was most indignant to find that when I wanted to open an account in a bank, I could not do this without a permit from my husband. Though we are excellent friends, my sense of independence was outraged, and I decided to keep my money in my pocket and not open an account.

"We have many remarkable women in music, art, and science in Poland, but the woman who made all the women of the civilised world proud of their womanhood was a daughter of my country, Marie Curie-Skłodowska.

"The achievement of which we were most proud in Poland was the building-up of our education. In 1918 we started with an appalling percentage of illiterates, specially in the part of Poland which was under Russian occupation, where 81 per cent of the children were illiterate. We had no trained teachers or Polish text-books. We made a tremendous effort to organise education for 5,000,000 children. We opened about 23,000 new schools, and had to build about 10,000 new buildings to do this. We trained about 70,000 teachers. Besides this, we had to cope with a yearly increase amounting to half a million children."

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