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THE BRITISH SUFFRAGETTE MOVEMENT.

(By Wm. Ensom.)

The visitor to England, whatever his or her opinion may be on the question of votes for women, cannot but be deeply impressed with the extent and enormous significance of the woman's suffrage movement.

From the point of view of the social reformer or the politician of any shade of colour, from Tory to Socialist, the influence of this new factor, which has come into our public life, and which is spreading so rapidly, is of the greatest importance.

Various causes have operated to obscure the question and its great significance from those outside its direct influences, and especially from those who are at a distance from the Empire's centre. The Home Rule struggle and the conflict between the Government and the House of Lords has bulked so largely as great and vital constitutional questions, that they have overshadowed this great British woman question, this matter of the rapid and startling change in the attitude of women towards the social and political life and interests of the country.

To those who have not paid any special attention to the votes for women agitation, the significance of it would not be understood, and it is quite apparent that the great bulk of our fellow-citizens outside the British Isles have no conception of the extent and strength of the organisations, nor the business energy, enthusiasm, and splendid organising ability that have been enlisted in the suffrage crusade. Very generally a totally erroneous

opinion has been and is held as to the spirit and aims of the women, but this is passing away, and largely through the ability, strength, and persistence of the women themselves, the public generally are getting to know and appreciate the very great significance of the movement and the change that it is bound to bring about in our national life.

It is not my intention here to discuss the question as to why the British Government refuse to give the vote, neither do I propose to give an opinion as to how long it will be before it is granted, or whether the present Government will give it, but I am quite convinced—as are all whom I have met who have knowledge of the strength and extent of the women's organisations—that it must come in the very near future. By their very efficient organising and propaganda in the constituencies, a pressure is being brought to bear on members of Parliament such that, whatever party is in office, it cannot possibly long resist the demand.

There is much discussion in all quarters as to the extreme methods of the militant section. It is of course being widely condemned, many holding that the lawless tactics are injuring the cause; on the other hand, many whose opinions are valuable consider that without the publicity these methods give the cause would be ignored by the public and Parliament, and that it is only since they have been practiced that the movement has made any real progress.

One very important matter which is not generally understood is that the militant group is only a comparatively small section of the movement.

There are three outstanding points with reference to the work and methods of the suffragette societies generally:—

First, the great extent and efficiency of the organisation. Second, its democratic character and the great enthusiasm of its members. Third, the wide social and political outlook and the burning interest of its members in social and political questions.

As to the first, the number of different societies is to the visitor very surprising. The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies is perhaps the largest; its methods are constitutional. Mrs Henry Fawcett, LL.D., is President, and the committee and vice-presidents include many of those foremost in social work in Britain: Councillor Margaret Ashton, M.A., B.Sc., the Countess of Aberdeen, Mrs Garrett Anderson, M.D., the Countess Brassey, Mrs George Cadbury, Lord Courtney, Sir Francis Darwin, the Bishops of Hull, Lincoln, and Chichester, Lady Henry Somerset, Lady Maud Parry, Mrs Forbes Robertson, Lady Strachley, are amongst them. The number of branches affiliated throughout England and Scotland is some four hundred and eighty.

There are ninety organisers employed by the Head Executive, besides local organisers. The increase in membership is about one thousand a month, and the income of the central office for the year 1913 was between ten and eleven thousand pounds.

The Church of England League for Women's Suffrage has several bishops on the Board of Management, and reported a membership of 3600 at the end of 1912, with sixty-five branches.