

THE INTER-ALLIED CONFERENCE IN PARIS.

On February 10th the Inter-Allied Suffrage Conference met in Paris, and it closed on April 10th, after the delegation, side by side with the representatives of the International Council, had been received by the Commission of the League of Nations, presided over by President Wilson. On April 10th, at 8 p.m., the deputation was received. On their entrance, President Wilson shook hands with each of the delegates.

Lady Aberdeen, President of the International Council of Women, thanked the members of the Commission for receiving the deputation, and said: "The International Council of Women has been ahead of you, created to carry out for women this unity of thought and action which aims at the well-being of humanity; it represents 22 federated national councils, which in their turn are federations of women's societies, working in each country for progress, and including about 20 million women. Can we not then be considered pioneers of the League of Nations?"

Mme. Suzanne Grinberg, advocate (France), pleaded the cause of Oriental women: "Since a new world is to arise from the war, it should be a better world. But an improvement in human life cannot be realised if women remain in future in the conditions which centuries of error and tradition have made for them. I am not here to plead our cause—the cause of Western women. Our civilisation is happily sufficiently advanced, although we are treated as inferiors from the civil and political point of view, for us to have, both according to law and custom the free right to the disposal of our persons.

It is not so everywhere in the world. There are countries in which written laws claim that the wife and child of a man who is unable to pay a debt may be taken as pledges by the creditor.

There are countries where paternal authority is so great that mothers can sell or hire their daughters—children of 12 or 13 years—or bind them by legal contracts for sums varying from 500 to 1000 francs, to make slaves of them or inmates of bad houses. There are laws to which millions are subject and which are all the more rigorous for having a religious character, which prescribe that the father,

master of his daughter, can marry her without her consent. In a great Asiatic country where marriage is obligatory and where the law gives a regular character to polygamy, the future wife is never consulted as to the choice of a husband.

There are countries where the law of man, the stronger, is exercised in all its horror, where the husband has the right to inflict upon his wife the severest corporal punishment; where he has the right to repudiate her, consequently to separate her for ever from her children for futile motives—where the law gives the man always the guardianship of the children in case of divorce, even when he is the guilty party.

Gentlemen, are you not indignant at such facts, of which I can only give you, alas, a faint idea, for lack of time?

After having established the first principle of human justice, that the peoples have a right to free self-determination, do you feel the higher duty affirming that every human being, man and woman, has the right to choose freely his own destiny.

It is true that we have received no mandate to plead this cause by those whom it concerns. There is something more imperious that imposes on us the obligation to speak of these miseries and horrors: it is the duty of every human being who knows these injustices and iniquities, to denounce them, in order to have them righted. In the interests of humanity, therefore, we remind you of these barbarous laws.

We think it would be a great claim to honour for the League of Nations only to admit nations who undertake to give the women of their country new and better conditions. We think, too, that it would dishonour this great League if it did not proclaim before all the right of human beings to live in their country free and respected."

Madame Avril De St. Croix spoke on the State Regulation of Vice.

"My task, gentlemen, is to present the case not of women living under an inferior civilisation, and of primitive mentality. They belong, on the contrary, to nations which have attained a high degree of civilisation, nations on whom they are an indelible blot by reason of the position in which they are placed.

By a mistaken conception of the role of the State in the dominion of public order, of morals and hygiene,

these nations have, through the State Regulation of prostitution, put out.

As President of the International Commission for the Repression of the Traffic in Women, which the International Council of Women has entrusted to me for the last 20 years, I have the sad task of explaining to you to-day this agonising problem, whose gravity and complexity we realise. Like you, we are interested in hygiene; like you, we are anxious for public order and morality, and it is just because we are interested in these questions to a high degree that we wish for the disappearance of an institution from all countries where it still exists, which, by giving men a fictitious security in vice, is most degrading to women's dignity.

Gentlemen, order is not promoted by disorder, nor morality by immorality, nor public health by practices which are a defiance of hygiene. Society is degraded by people whose degradation it permits; nay, more, whose degradation it sanctions.

In the hour when the future is being prepared, when, after the years of suffering we have gone through, aside the law the unfortunates whom misery had already put outside society the world is being rebuilt, we must find something else to save humanity from disease, disorder and immorality, than the official slavery of prostitution for the most unfortunate of women. The prison of the tolerated house must disappear, and its procuress, the shameful traffic in women.

We suffer in having to raise the veil that hides this terrible social sore. But we should have failed in our duty if we had not demanded the inclusion in the principles of the League of Nations of absolute respect for the dignity of womanhood, and consequently the disappearance of institutions or laws which are the last link in the chain which binds women to ancient slavery.

We know that it is not in your power to intervene directly in these questions which are questions of internal order. We do not ask you to do so. But we expect, from your high sentiment of justice and human dignity, your moral support for the triumph of the principles we represent here."

Mme. De Witt Schlumberger urged strongly that the principle of woman suffrage be proclaimed by the League of Nations in a spirit of peace and justice without waiting for the necessity of revolutions.