

The White Ribbon

FOR GOD AND HOME AND HUMANITY

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NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN.

Underneath is part of the opening address at the Conference of the National Council of Women of New Zealand. We propose to give further extracts later on.—Editor "W.R."

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS.

To the Members of the National Council of Women of New Zealand in Conference assembled.

It is with a spirit of great hopefulness that our Conference should meet this year. The terrible tragedy of a world war has been ended—a peace between the most powerful of the combatants has been signed, and a League of Nations to preserve peace is being established.

In the four years of conflict, systems of government, class distinctions, national and international laws, have been cast into a fiery crucible and tested, until those which were faulty have crumbled into ashes, and those which were basically right are emerging, purified of much dross.

Truer and clearer perceptions of truth and justice, of rights and of duties have been gained, and already attempts are being made for a fairer and more equitable adjustment of power and responsibility. Amid the crash of high explosives and the din of battle a more vivid sense of the value of the common people—of the rights of the individual—has been evolved. It has been realised that the peer and the peasant, the male and the female, are fashioned out of one common clay; that the accident of birth or the incidence of sex cannot be allowed to bar the right of each human being to self-development.

And, further, it has been borne in upon us that our greatest and truest



MRS EVA C. WHEELER.
(A Visitor from U.S.A.).

liberty can only be attained by our voluntary submission to divine law—the law of service—the law of "each for all."

Although the range of subjects which might be profitably discussed is most invitingly large, I propose to confine myself to those which bear more directly upon the position and work of women. It is gratifying that the opposition to the admission of women to full citizenship is break-

ing down. The desire among women for a change in their political status may be said to be world-wide. The organised women's societies in the twenty-six countries where National Councils of Women have been established are all working in this direction. All are working for the removal of the civil and political disabilities which hinder women from developing their capacities for service, whether in the home or in the State. For it must not be forgotten that the Home and the State are one. A very little consideration will show that, in its ultimate issue, all the work of the State is for the welfare and protection of the Home. It therefore follows that any community which deliberately excludes women from its government is lacking in a true perception of the functions of government.

I have said that the opposition to the right of women to full citizenship is breaking down. How could it be otherwise? Continuous appeals to reason and justice for more than half a century had convinced the more thoughtful and unprejudiced that to class women politically with criminals and lunatics was worthy only of tyrants or of fools. But the majority of the people (I am paraphrasing Carlyle) are foolish, and neither thoughtful nor unprejudiced. And, curiously enough, it did not hurt the self-love of most men to have their mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters classed with criminals and lunatics. Therefore, progress was slow, and came first in the smaller centres of population. Then came the tremendous upheaval of the war, and fossilised prejudices crashed in all directions. Women were welcomed in professional and industrial capacities that had hitherto been deemed sacred