

THE SUFFRAGE QUESTION.

WOMEN AND THE FRANCHISE.

PUBLIC MEETING IN THE TOWN HALL.

On Friday night last at 8 o'clock a public meeting, under the auspices of the Irishwomen's Suffrage Federation, was held in the Assembly Room, Town Hall, for the purpose of renewing the demand for the extension of the Parliamentary Franchise to women. The chair was taken by Mrs. Bligh, President of the local Branch of the League. The attendance of the general public was rather small, but those present followed with much interest the remarks of the principal speaker, Miss Helen Frazer, who, in a very eloquent address, pointed out the objects of the movement.

In opening the proceedings, the chairman referred to the good results accruing in other countries from women's Franchise, and went on to say that in the past, in the golden age of Ireland, women had equal rights with men; they helped to make Ireland what she then was, one of the greatest countries in the world. It would be a pity if Ireland was going to lag behind now in this great movement (applause).

Miss Frazer then addressed the meeting. Two years ago, or a little more, she said, there were only five women's suffrage societies in Ireland, and, as a result of organisation, they had now got twenty-six branches of the Irish Women's Suffrage Federation. That was only natural, as it was a movement that was making great headway all over the world. Here in Ireland women had got a good many rights of citizenship; they had got the right to vote for the local councils. At present there was one woman on the Dublin City Council there were two women on Co. Councils, and there were a great number of women members of Boards of Guardians. What they wanted was simply to have the citizen rights of women extended to Parliamentary voting in this country. In many countries all over the world, women voted on equal terms with men. In America, with which Ireland had many links, the women were winning victories every year, and at present in ten States of America, the women were voting for their Parliaments. In Ireland this fight for the enfranchisement of women had been going on in a small way since 1867, when John Stuart Mill first brought the question before the House of Commons. That was the year in which the workmen in towns got the right to vote, and John Stuart Mill moved an amendment that women be included in that Bill. The amendment got seventy-three votes, but it was defeated. In 1870 the measure passed its second reading. Seven times the House of Commons had passed the second reading of the women's suffrage measure, and they had discussed the question thirty-two times, so that the House of Commons knew perfectly well everything there was to be said for and against this great question. What she wanted the people to help them to do

now was to show clearly and unmistakably that there was a great demand for this reform. (A voice—We want Home Rule). The Irish Women's Suffrage Association was a non-party body, and they left the men, who had the votes, to fight out the question of what kind of government they were going to have.

She gathered that her friend was a Home Ruler. He was fighting for what he believed was justice for himself, and all she asked him to do was to listen to what women thought was justice for them (applause). The Society was also non-militant, and used only what was called constitutional methods in advocating this reform. It wanted the women to have Parliamentary votes, and on the same terms as men. The women in this town voted at local elections, and why should not they be allowed to vote at Parliamentary elections? Anti-suffragists said that women must not be allowed to vote, but she never met an anti-suffragist who said that women must not be allowed to pay taxes in this country. There was no difference made between men and women when it came to paying, and since the government spent women's money, why shouldn't the women have equal rights with men in deciding how that money was to be spent? Every member of the House of Commons at present got £400 a year for doing his work. That money was paid not by men alone, but by men and women, and if a woman was good enough to pay a man's salary, she was quite good enough to say whether she liked the gentleman or not as her representative in Parliament (applause). They all knew of the great fight that was made by O'Connell for Catholic emancipation, and how strongly they felt the injustice of shutting out certain classes of men, making a disability of their religion, and refusing them the right to speak because of their religion. Why did men make a disability of sex? Women were affected by what the Government did. They paid for legislation just as much as men did. They remembered the great industrial crisis in this country. There was never a strike that did not affect women as bitterly as men. A woman, if she wanted the Parliamen-

tary vote in this country, was not a "person." The Act read, "Persons who are householders shall have votes." Let any woman in the country break the law in any way, and then she became a "person" on the spot, and was punished for the crime she had committed. Surely women had an equal right with men to speak of the laws under which they lived in this country (hear, hear). The only class of people who were refused votes were criminals, lunatics, aliens, paupers and women. That was the company women were keeping in the constitution, and they did not like their company. A criminal, when he came out of prison, could vote again, but women could never vote. People said that women must not vote, because they did not know enough about politics to vote. She was not going to say that women knew as much about politics as men. They did not, because they had not been educated as men had. Before workmen got votes, no politician went to the bother of educating them on politics, or asking them to express their opinions. Did they ever know of a politician who called a meeting of the women of his constituency to explain politics to them and tell them what he was going to do for them when he went back to the House of Commons? They never did, because women had not got votes, but give them votes and they would be educated quickly enough, because the politician would see that they were educated, and would do his best to see that they were educated in the way he liked. As a matter of fact, tens of thousands of women in this country understood politics, and were taking part in politics. They never met a man who told a woman to go home and stay there, if he wanted some canvassing done. Women were sent out to tell men how to vote and why to vote, and surely women were good enough to use

sort of idea that women, if they went into this movement, might go and do something ridiculous and absurd. They were not going to do anything ridiculous. Every movement in the world had been laughed at, and the women were in very good company when they were laughed at in making this demand. Women wanted to be educated, but people in this country said that if a woman understood mathematics she would never love a baby again, or stay in the home. When girls first rode bicycles it was said that they were a disgrace to their sex, but now they could see girls all over the country riding bicycles and nobody bothered about them, and twenty years hence people would laugh just as much at the idea that it was such an astonishing thing to give women the Parliamentary vote (hear, hear). They never held an open air meeting about women suffrage without being told to go home and stay there. Anti-suffragists said that to allow woman to go into political life, was to take from her her highest sphere and her noblest function, but that was exactly the same argument as that of the man in the street, "Go home and stay there," or "Go home and wash the dishes," as if washing dishes was contemptible work. The woman who washed the dishes was just as valuable a person in the world, if she did her duty properly in the home, as any man doing his work out in the world. She heard talk of women not needing votes because they were protected and looked after. That was all very well for rich and comfortable women, but what about the poor women, the wives of workmen and their homes? The home of the slums, what were they like. They had got 73,000 men, women and children living in Dublin in one roomed houses. The housing problem was a question for legislation, and why should not the women who had to spend their lives in those miserable hovels, from morning to night, have some right to push the work forward? (hear, hear). She remembered an anti-suffragist candidate for Parliament at one of the elections, issuing a poster on which was printed: "To the suffragettes. Go home and mind the baby." They retorted with this poster: "To the anti-suffragists. The infant death-rate in this town is 125 per thousand. We are out to mind the baby" (hear, hear). Why should not women help in getting better legislation to deal with the widow, the orphan, and the destitute? Then there was the education of children. Women had distinguished themselves in the Universities, and yet there was not a single woman considered intelligent enough to help to decide any question about education for children. They wanted the vote for women as a matter of justice; not only that, but because they believed that men and women could do far better than men alone, or women alone could ever hope to do. Men and women built the perfect home. They wanted the State to be the larger home, and then by a wisdom, capacity, ability, experience and practical common sense of men and women working together, they would help to create better and finer conditions than obtained at present (applause).

The proceedings then concluded.