

IRISHWOMEN AND THE SUFFRAGE.

By Constance Markievicz.

From *Sinn Féin*, March 27, 1909.

Countess Markievicz writes to us:—

We hear a great deal just at present of a league that is being started in Dublin called the 'Irish Women's Franchise League.' This league appears to be a very vague organisation, but we see no reason why, when its members have gained a little experience, it should not become something definite and something useful to Irishwomen, and 'par consequence' useful to Ireland.

I should like to suggest to the committee of this Society before they continue their propaganda further to consider the question from an Irish point of view. Their propaganda is excellent—from any foreign woman's standpoint—but we contend that over here we are differently situated to Englishwomen and the women of other countries, and that a propaganda ready-made from over the sea, and bearing the hall mark of an English agitation, does not entirely suit our needs.

The leaflet that they circulated was, I am glad to say, printed in Ireland. But I would like to ask the Secretary whether the matter therein printed was English-made or not?

With the motto I have no complaint to make; it suits us just as well as it suits Englishwomen, or in fact Indians, Egyptians, or any other unfortunate race that is groaning under British injustice. 'Government without the consent of the governed is tyranny' is a fine phrase, and I should like to know who was its author. It is somehow very familiar to me, so in fact is most of the leaflet. Perhaps those responsible for it would oblige us by telling us if it is a reprint of a

leaflet distributed by the English Suffrage Societies, and if not, how far it is copied from one.

Again let me say, what an excellent leaflet it is, and there is just where the tragedy comes in, for with two slight alterations it might have been perfect.

My first criticism is on the phrase 'we demand the vote on the same terms as it is or may be granted to men'; for Irishwomen surely it is essential to add 'and a Parliament to be represented in.'

For myself I don't at all feel inclined to stop there. I should prefer to disregard the English precedent and make the demand for women's rights much more inclusive, and say—'We, the women of Ireland, declare that Ireland is a free nation, and we as an integral party of that nation are entitled to the rights of free citizens.' That would be a logical position for women who are in revolt against England, not only because of the enslavement of their sex, but also because of the enslavement of their nation.

With all the paragraphs headed 'Because' I agree most thoroughly till I come to one that states 'Because the possession of a vote will in itself raise the status of women.' That may hold good in England where 'law abiding' is the ideal of all, or rather the majority of the English nation; but over here it is the contrary; the national heroes of Ireland are felons and convicts; men who were just as much without a vote as we are ourselves—our martyrs and saints are those who were hung and their bodies desecrated because they would not admit the right of England to govern them.

No one can deny that it is an admission of a usurping country's right to govern you when you go out to agitate to get for yourself representation in the Parliament of that hostile country. Any woman understanding this surely must see that she owes it to her martyrs to do the little she can to keep up the glorious spirit of revolt against the oppressor for which they died. With their life's blood they glued the standard of Ireland to the Tree of Liberty... Tattered and torn it hangs there still.

Over and over again have even great and good men turned their backs on it to fight some side-issue. 'Votes for Catholics' was once the cry... a very right and just cry too. They got their 'votes' for an alien Parliament, and they got also the privilege of being English citizens in Ireland and I can only ask my readers how has that helped the nation's struggle for freedom? Nor can I see that the Catholics of Ireland are so much more numerous, richer, or more prosperous than they were before they attained to the inestimable privilege of becoming free English citizens.

At the meeting in the National Council Rooms we, the Inghinidhe nah Éireann, made these criticisms on the Women's Franchise League, and Mrs. Wyse-Power and Mr. Griffith tried their hardest to argue that Sinn Féin women could logically join in this movement. Firmly, but respectfully, we must disagree with them, and assert that it is only as fighting for the full freedom of—Ourselves as enslaved women, and Ourselves as units of an enslaved nation that we can stand safe and sure, denying the criticism of the world; taking courage and hope from the clear inward knowledge that we have seen and recognised the highest principle, and having seen it we have not turned our backs upon it, or talked of expediency, but have stood out honestly and without fear for what we knew to be right.