

# WOMEN AND THE REPRESENTATION OF PROPERTY.

## II.

### Can Women Suffrage Rest on the Property Basis ?

#### **Let us look at the facts.**

If the Woman Suffrage Bill advocated by Lady Frances Balfour, Mrs. Fawcett, and Mrs. Pethick Lawrence were to pass, a property franchise would be the rule for women. Almost all married women, except those possessed of a property qualification, would be excluded, and only those unmarried women would vote who were householders or occupiers or who paid a rent of at least 4s. a week for a separate room. But in the case of men for the most part, the franchise does not, as a fact, rest upon a property basis. Accordingly the proposed franchise for women would be a constant offence to the Liberal Party. If, for a time, it seemed to serve the ends of the Conservatives - as many believe it would - the next turn of the political tide would inevitably see it swept away; and as the principle of woman suffrage has been once admitted, it would be past recall. The only way out would be an immense enlargement of the electorate, ending in adult suffrage.

The Woman Suffrage Bills hitherto put forward could only be - and are only - accepted by Liberals, who are true to their own principles, as a

mere temporary stage, to be replaced, as soon as possible, by something more democratic. The majority of Liberals do not accept them at all - for Liberal and democratic reasons, as is proved by Mr. Asquith's\* recent pronouncement.

On the other hand, the Conservatives, if they gave women the vote on what is practically a property basis, would only find, when the next Liberal Government came in, that they had paved the way to - had even provoked - adult suffrage, involving in this country a permanent majority of women voters.

The Suffragists are thus in this dilemma: a property franchise would be a perpetual provocation to the democratic feeling of the country, while the suffrage for all men and women over twenty-one would mean the Government of this Empire by women.

Is it not better to accept the natural fact of the difference between men and women; to enlarge the legitimate influence of women in every possible way; to strengthen their hold on the field of local government, but to leave to men the political rule and maintenance of this vast and complex Empire, which men have created?

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\*Herbert Asquith, 1852 - 1928. Prime Minister from 1908 - 1916. While he was a Prime Minister Asquith introduced a number of significant reforms. He was, however, ardently opposed to women suffrage. This made him unpopular in several corners of society, and in the campaigns in connection with the 1910 General Elections he promised to grant suffrage to all women with property. Once in power, though, the promise was abandoned and instead all men over 21 were given universal suffrage. Asquith was not a good wartime leader, and in 1916 his government lost to the Conservative Party. During all his years in power he fought against women getting the vote, and we come across his name a number of times in the texts collected on this site.