

An Editor speaks

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AN EDITOR SPEAKS.

by PIERRE BÉGUIN.

"The Cause of Feminine Suffrage has registered a Success."

Abroad, people are often surprised at the fact that in our country women are still deprived of the right of voting. Switzerland occupies a prominent position in the very short list of countries in which civic equality between men and women has not yet been realised. This may appear to be somewhat paradoxical because, otherwise, Swiss democracy functions with a plenitude unknown in a great many other countries. It should be remembered that the Swiss citizens do more than just elect their representatives; the Constitution cannot be modified without their consent; they have the right to launch a Referendum against laws and decrees, and thus undo what has already been done by the Chambers; they can also launch Initiatives, in order that a new article may be inserted in the fundamental Law of the country. In this respect no other country has gone so far as has Switzerland.

No doubt it is because of the existence of the very extensive control on the part of the people that women's suffrage has not yet been introduced here. Everywhere else it is the Parliaments which have introduced this reform. In no case have the men, as a whole, been consulted on the matter. I think one might ask oneself, with very good reason, whether women in other countries would have achieved the right to vote if the decision had rested with the masculine electoral body. Here, the resistance is to be found among the people; it is not parliamentary. It is on the part of the man in the street, of the average citizen. It is not any act on the part of the politician or member of the Government.

This resistance is to be found more particularly among the farming classes, where traditional ideas predominate, as well as among certain working class circles. The warmest advocates of women's suffrage are to be found among the intellectuals and in the Government circles. This is an aspect of the question which is neglected far too often, and which can be proved by an analysis of the recent votes on this matter.

Nevertheless, the cause of feminine suffrage is now progressing. At the beginning of this year the Federal Council proposed a new Constitutional Article instituting equality for men and women. This is the first time that our Government has taken up such a positive attitude in this matter. Moreover, resistance is decreasing gradually as women are beginning more and more to enter every trade and profession and to shoulder

the same responsibilities as the men. The State itself regularly calls upon women to sit on committees which have been set up for purposes of study. Women's Organisations are always consulted in regard to practically all the various domains. And the other day the Protestant ecclesiastical authorities of the Canton of Vaud decided that henceforth women can be elected, just like men, to the Parish Councils and even to the Synodical Council. This is tremendous progress, for religious considerations have often been invoked in the past in order to plead the fundamental, essential and natural inequality which exists between men and women, just as if this inequality was the result of the Divine Will. This is a thesis which cannot be supported today.

This evolution which has taken place in people's minds allows us to put our finger right on the results acquired by the suffragist associations. In the Canton of Vaud — where the aforesaid partial result has been attained — the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the existence of the Association for Women's Suffrage took place the other day. The struggle has now been going on for half a century. At first it was carried out by a very small group. Nowadays it is supported by the majority of women, and also by an increasing number of men, who are growing more and more convinced of its rightness. It would not appear to be too venturesome to predict that we are now approaching the final results. For this it has needed fifty years and more. That seems a long time. But, when you think of it, it took much longer to institute universal suffrage for men. After all, this has only existed for a century. Patience is always rewarded!

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