

# Home affairs

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**HOME AFFAIRS.**

by MAX NEF.

*"Women's Votes in Switzerland."*

Women's influence on the political life of a country, constitutes a problem which is always arising afresh, for discussion in Switzerland. Just at the present moment, this question has sprung into the limelight again because of a so-called questioning of women, which is being carried out in the City of Zurich, in order to find out what the women themselves think about the introduction of the right to vote for women. During the last few years, enquiries of this kind have taken place in various Swiss cantons and towns. Most of these enquiries were undertaken on a private and voluntary basis, but sometimes participation in them proved to be so great that the results could be considered as being more or less representative. In Zurich, the authorities themselves sent questionnaires on this subject to Swiss women of twenty years and over, who were living in the municipal district concerned. In this way about 150,000 women were asked about their views on the introduction of women's suffrage, and slightly over ninety per cent of them sent back replies.

About twenty per cent of the persons questioned stated that they were against the right to vote and to elect, for women. As regards the remaining eighty per cent, half the women were in favour of the granting of an integral, comprehensive right to vote, whereas the other half was in favour of the introduction of limited women's suffrage. For the present only the general results are available. A more detailed evaluation of the statistical material will make it possible to obtain a better interpretation of the desiderata put forward. When judging the results of this Zurich enquiry it should be borne in mind that it was limited to urban dwellers, so that women from the countryside, belonging to the farming classes, did not take part in it.

Foreign observers find it very difficult to understand how it is that in Switzerland, which is the oldest Democracy in the world, only male citizens have the right to vote. In order, however, that no false comparisons be drawn in respect of foreign conditions, attention must be drawn to a very important difference which exists between them. In a great many foreign countries, the political rights of men and women who

are eligible to vote, are limited solely to the parliamentary elections which take place once, every two or three years. In Switzerland, on the other hand, the citizen does not only possess a voting power on the Federal level, but he also has to elect a number of other authorities, in the Canton and in the Commune. In addition to this, the Swiss citizen also possesses the competency to take decisions in regard to numerous and varied practical questions, and this again in regard to the Confederation, the Canton and the Commune.

It must not be thought, however, that the Swiss woman is completely excluded from all these manifestations of the will of the people in the public and political life of the country. Feminine suffrage is being accepted more and more in matters pertaining to the Church. Moreover, women are being elected to an ever increasing extent to sit on School Boards and to be on Committees for Public Welfare, for Health, and the care of the sick, for the Protection of Youth and other similar activities. There are Cantons in which women are eligible for all offices, except purely political ones, and this including the office of a Judge. They can also participate in the work of Administrative and Expert Commissions, in which the drafts for Laws and Official Decrees are prepared and, indeed, often established. Such extra-parliamentary bodies are often more important for the decisions passed on future regulations than are the competent Authorities themselves.

In a great many political Parties, which are, after all, formed for the purpose of the education of the political will of the country, women are accepted as fully qualified members, so that they can have a voice in the discussion regarding all the decisive affairs of the State.

Another thing which is of very considerable importance is the activity shown by the numerous Associations and other Unions and Organisations in which the women are united and which are incorporated into the Federation of Swiss Women's Associations, a very active Central Organisation, which is often consulted on matters of public interest, and which has proved successful in gaining the ear of the Authorities and of Parliament, in regard to various petitions.

With all these possibilities which are available to the Swiss woman for taking an active part in the public political life of the country and in the formation of a common will, the voting right allowed to women in many another country, is greatly exceeded in its efficacy here, from many a point of view.

**PETITES CHOSES QUI FONT PLAISIR.**

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(Semaine Suisse)

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