

Bobbed Hair and Maiden Names for Wives!

That Might Be Adopted as the Slogan of the New Freedom for Women, if a Recent Meeting in New York Is to be a Criterion

By HELEN M. WAYNE.

I WAS a little flustered the other day to find myself at a meeting of the Women's Freedom Congress, but curiosity held me there.

As I looked at my program I observed that there had been a morning session at which Henrietta Rodman, Helen Marot, Juliette Poynty, Rose Schneiderman, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Therese Malkiel, Jessie W. Hughan and other Greenwich Village notables had spoken, and I was sorry to have missed the fun. Still, knowing as I did that each speaker was either an avowed Socialist or anarchist, I could be sure that each one had used her particular hobby or grievance—as the case might be—to urge Socialist measures of improvement. I therefore banished regrets and settled down to the enjoyment of the moment.

Rarely had I seen such a large gathering of the faithful as on that day. Mixed in with the usual bobbed-hair types (oh, but the ugly ones are more ugly for the bobbing!) and the aforementioned uplifters were some clear cut, gentle faces—women with that air of fine bearing and breeding which rarely if ever is found in the militant type. Charming are the agitators as a rule, and the sincere ones among them courageous, and fine in their way; but gentle—never! What then were these gentlewomen doing in this assembly?

Just then there was a little lull, during which I overheard a conversation between two women immediately ahead of me. The middle-aged one with the bobbed hair was saying to the middle-aged one with long hair:

"You know the old-fashioned Jewess, no matter how brilliant she is, often falls



"The middle-aged one with bobbed hair was saying to the middle-aged one with long hair —."

slavishly in love with her husband, spends her entire life taking care of him and his children, and never accomplishes a single thing."

There was a little pause, after which the other woman said quietly:

"Perhaps that's why the race has survived."

"Heavens!" remarked Short Hair scornfully; "you talk like a conservative."

"Well," the long-haired lady rejoined, "maybe so! But I tell you it takes a pretty radical person to be even a little conservative in these wild days."

Bobbed Hair had the grace to smile at this and would, I know, have said something cutting and clever, but just then a lady two rows ahead called out very loudly:

"I want to hear the speaker and they're jabbering back of me."

Evidently time had been called on the platform while the two ladies had been engrossed in their little controversy. Now they tried to look unconscious and listened

closely, this time to an impassioned plea by Fola La Follette that all women retain their maiden names after marriage. Miss La Follette, who has retained her individuality by refusing to be known by the name of her husband, George Middleton, doesn't seem to have much use for men anyway. She explained with pathetic earnestness that if as a spinster you had made a name for yourself in any profession, that name, being an asset in the economic world, should surely be retained after marriage.

There were other eloquent arguments for this important cause, the last one being that, even if you did consent to take your husband's name (thus merging your business standing in his, so to speak) and then got divorced and then married once more, you would have to change your name—and perhaps business interests—all over again! This vital after-the-war problem was debated pro and con, another champion of the "maiden name school" being one Margaret Lane, who also seemed to have a real grouch against men in general. I never did know how she finally decided the question, for before the smoke of battle had cleared up another pretty woman had mounted the platform and was hurling at us her views on birth control.

As I looked around I saw a few mere men standing sheepishly about, and that fact steadied me. Not that the ladies minded them in the least! They said whatever they liked and, indeed, left very little unsaid with the greatest apparent enjoyment. There were, however, some sane and balanced things spoken as opposed to some that were both hysterical and ill advised. For instance, the clear ringing voice of Laura Garrett—teacher of sex hygiene—rose like a bell, warning some of the extremists that young people would better be taught some of the old-fashioned virtues and some sex hygiene even at the expense of birth control. Evidently here was another woman radical enough to be conservative in topsy-turvy times!

There now followed little talks on such topics as marriage and divorce and the rights of married women by Sique Toksvig, wedded wife of Francis Hackett, and Anna Strunsky Walling, wedded wife of William English Walling. Whatever their

beliefs before marriage, it is certain that they now believed firmly in the rights of the married woman, though they differed a little as to technicalities. Just what these were I missed, but Mrs. Walling seemed to think we should surely understand when she announced herself as a "romantic monogamist!"

After this came Margaret Naumberg, director of an all day modern school for very young children, who urged that all such children would be better away from



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their mothers, (she said she could prove this by psycho analysis!) and brought up in a sort of big brooder house. At this two or three of the despised conservatives protested with some eloquence and received the greatest applause of the day, but a boyish looking and clear voiced young woman from Australia finally settled the matter in a Solomon-like way:

"If some women prefer to make the

bringing up of their children their profession," she said tolerantly, "we won't criticise them. But if you don't care for the mothering job and still have brought children into the world, then send 'em to one of the all day schools."

After so much more was settled we had two little talks on community kitchens, but the consensus here was that domestic activities didn't somehow draw women nowadays, and certainly didn't stimulate women's minds. Each speaker reported definitely that her experiment along the community kitchen line was a flat failure.

This was a genuine disappointment to me. (I may as well admit my great interest in all questions of good and cheap food.) Unfortunately, I couldn't wait to hear Agnes Warbasse talk on "The Co-operative Movement" or Louise Bryant, wife of John Reed, who has lately been championing the Bolsheviki before the Senate committee, on "Soviet Russia." But though I felt sure that each speaker would whoop up her subject in great form and feared the effect on their followers in the audience, I took some comfort in the thought of that new-born "conservative-radical" voice which had been heard several times already.

As I tipped out, Timmins, a mere man, emerged from the shadows at the back of the room.

"What does it mean?" I asked. "Are they all being Bolshevized?"

"Cheer up," he said. "Don't you know they must have something to speed up now the war's about over?"

"But they're stirring up a lot of trouble and mostly for nothing. Don't you think there's German stuff back of it all?—The more discord and fool ideas over here all the better for Germany!"

"Nonsense!" said Timmins. "Let 'em have their fun. They adore being anarchistic. And couldn't you see there were some level heads among 'em?"

"Not many," I insisted. "And just you look at the whole bunch of speakers. With hardly an exception they were pro-German, pacifist, Socialist, or I. W. W. during the war. What was that Lenine said about getting the women sympathetic to Bolshevism?"

"Nonsense!" said Timmins again. But he looked a little thoughtful.