

# The White Ribbon

FOR GOD, HOME AND HUMANITY

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## FIRST ALL-INDIA WOMEN'S CONFERENCE.

A unique event in the history of the women of India. It met in the great amphitheatre of the Ferguson College at Poona. There were 60 delegates present, who were the elected representatives of 21 constituent Conferences, the total attendance at which had exceeded seven thousand. They came from all parts of India, and included several Englishwomen, and Indians of all religions, castes and classes.

The Assembly was presided over by the Maharani of Baroda, whose presidential address was worthy of her great attainments. Her general theme centred round the thought: "Can man be free if woman be a slave?" She pleaded eloquently for a reform of the Marriage Laws and the education of the masses of Indian womanhood.

A Hindu visitor to that Conference wrote: "Seldom in any part of the world have I participated in an Assembly more delightful, more significant, or more fraught with rich and beneficent promise and achievement alike. Literally from the Himalayas to Cape Camorin, from the Indus to the Brahmaputra, there came the gifted representatives of Indian womanhood of all ranks, all races, all creeds; old women, young women, women signally successful in all departments of public life, in literature, art, science, education, law, medicine, philanthropy and social service administration; brave women, proud women, dedicated to

the regeneration of India, bound by an indivisible bond of Womanhood. What talent, what energy, what enthusiasm, what power, what hope, what prophecy of that larger day, when Indian Womanhood shall light the beacon fire of National Freedom!"

The Conference opened with three prayers, the first offered by a Mahomedan lady, the second by a Hindu, and the third by an English Missionary. This spirit of tolerance was maintained right through the gathering, even at meals served in an orthodox Hindu dining room, high caste Hindu women sat and dined, side-by-side, with their English, Mahomedan and Christian fellow-delegates.

The delegates were unanimous that the curse of early marriage could only be removed by the women of India themselves, and that the time had come to undertake a regular campaign against it.

Many resolutions were adopted in regard to the education of the girlhood of India. Moral training based upon religious ideals should be compulsory; so should a complete course of physical training; also medical inspection; and where possible school clinics; the ideal of motherhood and making home attractive to be kept uppermost; special facilities for teaching those who observe purdah. Many other matters were dealt with, such as school for defective children; raising the salaries of teachers; their mother tongue to be the medium of instruction, English being a compulsory second subject.

It has been decided to make the Conference an annual one.

THROUGH MOHAMMEDAN EYES.

In her Presidential address, the Maharani of Baroda made the following thought-provoking remarks: It should awaken us to our responsibilities to hear it stated that Islam had raised womanhood, and that in so-called Christian lands it is being lowered.

"The unrestricted license which women in other countries have acquired is not based on such sense and propriety as to warrant our copying it. Before the advent of Islam, in all countries, whether they were civilised or barbarous and whether the rules of their society were complete or defective, woman was the most degraded being. It was Islam which dragged her out of that degradation, placed her in her right position, fixed and prescribed her rights, established her respect in society and the nation and held her to be equally entitled with men to enjoy a pure life. Modern women adopt such fashions and hold such views the very thought of which made one humble. In some countries the up-to-date view-point is to do away with dress even and women take nudity itself to be the best apparel. It is commonly seen that they are giving up the happiness of home and falling in respect and honour. They are becoming disgusted with matrimonial life, and in some countries the number of divorces exceed that of marriages in a year. They even are evading to be mothers."