

### THE TROUBLE WITH SUFFRAGISM

If 1908 was remarkable for George's productivity as a reviewer, it was even more remarkable for a totally new development in his life: he became a political activist.

The Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), whose members were known as 'suffragettes', was founded in 1903 to hasten the enfranchisement of women by militant methods. The much older and more popular National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) sought to bring pressure to bear on Parliament by peaceful methods and should be referred to as 'suffragists'. Although the suffragettes had been heckling Cabinet ministers, chaining themselves to public monuments and assaulting policemen for some years, after Asquith became Prime Minister in April 1908 their campaign moved to a new level of mass lobbying, window smashing, and hunger strikes. Not only was women's suffrage the great domestic issue of the day, Hampstead was a hot-spot of debate about it as so many intellectuals lived there.

Calderon contributed to public meetings in Hampstead about the female franchise, and 'hearing that a Hampstead lady intended to publish a pamphlet in favour of Woman Suffrage, with the Priory Press [Hampstead printers]', he 'undertook to publish another in answer to it'. According to him,

when the time came, the lady, still mindful of the privileges of her sex, changed her mind, and proposed on the contrary that I should set up the ninepins and she should knock them down; a proposal to which I was obliged to consent.

Thus (he would have us believe) was born his 9000-word pamphlet *Woman in Relation to the State: A Consideration of the Arguments Advanced for the Extension of the Parliamentary Suffrage to Women*, published in August 1908.

Nothing, probably, has put people off George Calderon more than his opposition to votes for women. Yet as well as considering his arguments, we must view them in their full historical context – which has been painstakingly reconstructed over the last thirty-five years by 'revisionists' such as Brian Harrison, Martin Pugh, and Julia Bush. It should be remembered that women did have the franchise in local

government. Successive opinion polls had established that the majority of them did not want the parliamentary vote. Several of George's arguments are identical to those presented by the Women's National Anti-Suffrage League (WNASL) in its manifesto. The thrust of his case, therefore, would not have seemed strange to contemporary readers. It was the way in which he elaborated it, and his tone, that were peculiar.

Characteristically, he had researched the literature in several languages and even listed it in a bibliography. 'The arguments of Mill, Condorcet, Bebel,' he concluded, 'tend only to assert what I, for one, joyfully admit: that in mental and moral capacity Woman is at least the equal of Man.' This was a restatement of what he had written to Kittie on 13 February 1899: 'Men are equal and women too.' In the opinion of a reviewer in the *New Age*, it 'gives his whole case away'. 'After that, why clink the cannikin?' 'But', Calderon swept on, 'that is no argument for giving [Woman] the suffrage.'

To us this may seem incomprehensible, since if men and women are 'mentally and morally' equal subjects of a single state, they must qualify for equal political rights. In George's view, however, this would be false logic. He did not even consider the inference, because like most people who opposed female suffrage he was overwhelmingly concerned with the *difference* between men and women.

He starts from the belief that 'Man' created 'the State'. In a passage of potted anthropology, he recounts how, whilst 'Man' went out to hunt and make war, 'Woman specialised more narrowly and developed the home; grew lovely, and softened the manners of men'. 'Both sexes desired justice, and sought to establish it by different methods.' 'Woman invented persuasion; but the most immediately effective method was Man's own, of Force', and with it 'Man [...] established justice-by-compulsion and called it the State'. The 'great Woman's Grievance Myth' of the time is that 'Man has somehow "collared" the State for his advantage over downtrodden Woman'. But having created the State, 'Man did not "exclude" Woman; she never had any part in it'. Woman is 'an important member of the Community, but has no part whatever in the State, except to enjoy the benefits which it secures her'. One of these is protection (by males). Christabel Pankhurst claimed that 'with the progress of civilisation spiritual force replaces physical force as the controlling element in human affairs', but 'with what spiritual force shall we repel invaders?' asked George, invoking the spectre of 'German regiments dropping from the clouds in Zeppelin airships'.

Moving swiftly on from the premise that women have no Nature-given role in the management of the State, he focussed on what he called ‘the essence of the grievance’, namely ‘that woman’s voice is not heard in the councils of the world’. He refuted this with spirited rhetoric:

Now in what conceivable sense is this so? They write books, have journals of their own, swarm on the staff of the public newspapers (men have no papers of their own); we hear them speak on every platform, and hear them gladly when they are not merely ejaculating or ringing dinner-bells. If ever a Royal or Parliamentary Commission sits on a question affecting both men and women, it is an open scandal what partiality the members of it show towards a woman witness. Competent women are heard willingly in every department. The historic names which the women suffragists hurl at us so defiantly from their procession-banners, are all memorials of men’s readiness to listen. In what wild realm of imagination, one wonders, can these ladies have lived who complain that woman’s opinion goes for nothing in this man-ridden world?

Woman has powers at her disposal for moulding the destinies of the people, far transcending our pitiful politics; and these are social opinion and sexual selection. [...] Everywhere deprived of political power, everywhere Woman governs Man; and we rejoice in our servitude. Who made the goddesses and worshipped them? Man.

Calderon then argued, with many concrete examples, that women had as much freedom in British society as men; that in law ‘woman really holds a position of enormous advantage’ because her husband is in many cases held responsible for her actions; and in matters of property married women were excessively protected by the male State, even being able to ‘repudiate their debts and evade bankruptcy’.

Next he attacked the suffragists for believing that their acquisition of the vote would ‘mend’ a whole series of ‘grievances’ concerning ‘things which lie altogether outside the law’. Primogeniture and paternal custody of children were ‘prehistoric customs’ that were ‘not the work of Parliament at all’ and in practice had already been adjusted in women’s favour. Admitting women to university degrees was not a matter for Parliament, although ‘personally I think it a pity that Universities, College of Surgeons, etc, do not admit women to these degrees’, because ‘it is a matter of public

convenience to have all useful talents measured by the same standards'. Suffragists obsessed about the lack of wage equality, but this was not the result of male discrimination, it was caused by the 'competition of women for whom the wage is a supplement and not a livelihood'. Being herself a political economist, not even Millicent Fawcett (president of the NUWSS) thought that 'legislation is one of the possible means of raising wages'.

But his real target was the suffragettes. They were so counter-suggestible that they opposed 'legislation proposed for the protection of their own sex against degrading occupations' and extending the maternity leave of women employed in factories. 'If some doctor discovered a drug capable of giving us all perfect health, it is certain that Miss Pankhurst and Miss Gore Booth would lead processions of hospital nurses to Hyde Park to protest against the use of it.' The violent methods of the suffragettes were 'frankly anti-social'. They claim that interrupting meetings and attacking the police are 'the only way', but when they get their wish and are imprisoned they re-invent themselves as victims:

I must confess that the glamour of their heroism is a little dimmed for me when they keep writing to the papers explaining to an indifferent public what a hardship it really is to be in Holloway [...]. There was never any need to explain this sort of thing about being burnt at the stake or thrown to the lions. Nor is it made any better by those who agitate and petition Mr Gladstone [Home Secretary] to make it more comfortable in their jail; as who should plead for not quite such big lions or not quite such a hot fire.

The 'genius' of the WSPU founders had been to replace the 'tedious old meetings' of the NUWSS with 'a jolly uproar with young folk at Caxton Hall [...] such spouting and shouting and banner-waving and general freedom from "deportment"; [...] with expeditions and amusements together [...] keen arguments and long cosy talks, arms twining round waists'. 'With the advent of Miss Pankhurst the spirit of Dionysos descended on the movement.'

It is clear by the middle of George's pamphlet that what he believes the suffragettes want is 'political power' and what he most fears is 'Feminism'. Both mean to him the same thing: female hegemony. In its historical context, this was a common and understandable fear. No-one knew how enfranchised women would

vote; successful suffragism could lead to a Woman's Party; and the female population was over a million greater than the male. The 'leaders of the suffrage party' had stirred up 'a bitterness and jealousy against our sex'. They had lost their 'self-control'. The suffragettes claimed that when they had got what they wanted they would 'behave like reasonable people'; but given their penchant for violence perhaps they would behave like Maenads?

The core of George's argument is the classic one of contemporary female and male anti-suffragists that the 'spheres' of women's and men's activities are 'separate'. His presentation of it, however, is extreme and dogmatic. 'Antis' like Mrs Humphry (Mary) Ward and Lady Margaret Jersey were less concerned with the *apartness* of the spheres than their pragmatic *difference*: women were best at philanthropic activity in the community, at nurturing, at helping the disadvantaged. Since they had the vote in local government, on school boards and in health authorities, there was enormous scope for their vital work. It had a future and could complement men's work. But by locating gender difference in prehistory, George made it quasi-absolute and deprived it of a future. A franchise was merely 'a particular licence [...] from the sovereign power', not a right. And the 'position of women in relation to the State is fixed once and for all by their physical constitution': because their 'muscular force amounts perhaps to about 35 per cent of the whole adult muscular force of the country', they are incapable of enforcing anything and therefore unqualified for the 'licence'. 'While the State lasts, it is men's.'

Throughout the pamphlet there are flashes of chivalric charm which may well be genuine. 'In thought' the whole thing is 'dedicated' to 'dear Madam', who has a 'vague but noble political faith which is all your own', and

if you [...] descend from the splendour of the general to the mean detail of the particular, if you hold me out a programme in place of an ideal, and label yourself mere Liberal, Tory, Socialist or what not, then your pedestal is no longer a pedestal but a platform, and your political influence over me no more than that of Mr Balfour or Mr Asquith.

But there were hardly any 'particulars' about the real work of hundreds of thousands of real women in the real 'Community' without which, in fact, the 'State' in the wider sense would have collapsed. There is no sense in George's pamphlet of

complementarity or what the future of women might be. It is almost entirely negative, even sterile.

The apparent intransigence is reinforced by his tone, which is set by a Latin epigraph adapted from Juvenal and meaning ‘indignation makes the book’. Irony, sarcasm and satiric exaggeration abound. ‘Women have practised medicine ever since the world began, but so inefficiently, that in all these centuries their collective medical wisdom has never risen above a few health-destroying superstitions.’ ‘The legend that woman is neglected and unheard has spread (for the communicability of such hallucinations see Esquirol, *Des Maladies Mentales*).’ One could understand George’s ‘indignation’ at single-issue fanatics, but here it seems to engulf suffragettes, suffragists, and women in general. Nevertheless, as the passage quoted above about lions illustrates, he had not lost his gift for the ridiculous. His portrayal of the ‘Lambs of the Men’s League for Women’s Suffrage, the society formed by some of our sex for transferring our political power to the other’ is hilarious.

In fact the pamphlet may have been too amusing to have an impact. The WSPU’s *Votes for Women* did not comment on it. William Rothenstein appreciated it and in early autumn 1908 George wrote to him:

It is charming to be praised by a person of understanding, when so many people of no understanding see no merit in one’s performance. The two or three reviews which I have had all agree that I have no serious views on woman suffrage, and wrote a pamphlet for a joke. One of them tells its readers that I am a suffragist and wrote against woman suffrage out of good nature, because someone else who was to have done it failed at the last moment.

He then gives an interesting account of how he and Kittie spend their time (he was writing from a country house in Hampshire):

I look forward to the Autumn and the beginning of a new London year, with its street and café life, its hopes and delusions, and the meetings of the learned and unlearned societies which I frequent. Meanwhile we wander for another few weeks; on Friday to the Lubbocks in Kent for the second time, then Kittie

to Shropshire, and myself, to wind up the gaieties of the summer, with a Congress on Religions at Oxford.

The latter was the Third International Congress for the History of Religions, held between 15 and 18 September 1908. Although George did not give a paper himself, he was a discussant at the sections on 'Religions of the Lower Culture' and 'Comparative Religion and Sociology'. After a sensation-seeking German paper entitled 'The Ethnology of Galilee; or, Was Jesus a Jew by race?', according to the *Manchester Guardian* George stated that 'there was no Aryan race, and Jesus was undoubtedly a Jew by religion and nationality'.

But the autumn of 1908 turned out very differently for the Calderons from his prediction. Whilst they were away, prominent male anti-suffragists led by the imperialist Lords Cromer and Curzon and the Liberal M.P. John Massie had moved towards organising men opponents into a parallel body to WNASL. It is not clear how Calderon came to be in this network, but there was a strong Oxford component to the anti-suffrage movement of both sexes. He evidently volunteered to organise the calling of a Men's Committee for Opposing Woman Suffrage and to make Heathland Lodge its temporary address. As many eminent supporters as possible had to be found. Arrangements for the first meeting had to be clandestine in order to minimize suffragette disruption. When George did not have time to write a letter personally, Kittie acted as his secretary. The fluidity of the new organisation can be judged by the fact that she first headed a letter of 15 November to William Rothenstein 'C.O.W.S.', realised what it spelt out, and changed it to 'C.O.F.S.', the Committee for Opposing Female Suffrage, which it briefly became. The letter appealed on George's behalf for 'the names of any men that you think likely to be in sympathy with this movement which it would be desirable to invite' and George added his own postscript: 'Soldiers, sailors, millionaires, bishops, writers, lawyers, doctors, socialists etc are wanted.' Hundreds of such correspondences had to be conducted and it was possibly at this time that they had the five secretaries working in the house that Kittie mentions in her memoir. It is also possible that the Calderons paid for these themselves, as a later letter signed by George and preserved in the London Women's Library makes it clear that there was as yet no fixed subscription and 'the Committee will of course need money for its work'.

It met at Westminster on 3 December 1908 with John Massie in the chair. Lord Cromer moved that the time had now arrived when it was 'incumbent on those who believe that the extension of the franchise to women would be contrary to the best interests of the country and the Empire to give effect to their convictions by united action'. This was carried, the meeting resolved itself into a 'general committee for opposing female suffrage', and an executive committee was unanimously appointed. Messages of support were read from Curzon and Austen Chamberlain. The next day *The Times* published a list of 140 men who had 'already joined the committee'. They included a Duke, six earls, a score of members of the House of Lords, more M.P.'s, Charles Villiers Stanford, Rudyard Kipling, and Henry Newbolt. George is named last, as the 'hon. secretary'.

All through December he, Kittie and others laboured to recruit new members for the second meeting. Obviously, most of the personages named by *The Times* were too elevated to be involved in this donkey-work. An interesting sidelight on the Calderons' own commitment to it is provided by Kittie's comment that they often used to think how Mrs Hamilton would have 'loved to be *in it*', i.e. all the activity at Heathland Lodge, 'so much more than we did really!' Another question is to what extent Kittie agreed with George's anti-suffragism. She almost certainly opposed women's suffrage herself, as she believed passionately in female public service and most of her friends were from the class that was 'anti'. But she may well have objected to George's perceived misogyny in the matter. His references in his pamphlet to the legal privileges of 'my wife' suggested that he was a hard-done-by husband, which he clearly was not. Possibly the extreme aspects of his argument and expression led to one of the 'very rare' 'tornadoes' she refers to in her memoir. She felt that he sometimes 'prevented people seeing the truth of what he was upholding by being too violent'. Nevertheless she worked with him for the anti-suffrage cause.

At its second meeting, on 19 January 1909, the Committee was formally renamed the Men's League for Opposing Woman Suffrage (MLOWS), with Cromer as President. George remained Honorary Secretary, the League still operated from Heathland Lodge, and George was one of its most active members. On 26 January he attended what *The Times* described as 'a demonstration in support of woman suffrage' held in the Queen's Hall 'under the auspices of the Men's League for Women's Suffrage'. Sir John Cockburn moved the motion 'That the exclusion of women from the Parliamentary franchise is both unjust to women and detrimental to the best



interests of the State'. Whenever Asquith, Herbert Gladstone or Mary Ward were mentioned, the audience hissed. The resolution was carried 'with only a few dissentients', amongst whom was undoubtedly George, and they too were 'hissed as they held up their hands'.

A much fiercer encounter took place at the Queen's Gate Hall on 19 February 1909. Fliers announced a public debate on the motion 'That in the Opinion of this Meeting the Parliamentary Franchise should be extended to duly-qualified Women', proposed by Helen Ogston of WSPU and opposed by George representing MLOWS. Ogston already had a high profile. At a meeting of the Women's Liberal Federation addressed by Lloyd George at the Albert Hall on 5 December 1908 she had been 'first heckler'. When stewards tried to eject her she drew a dog-whip and flicked it at them, an event recorded on the front page of the *Illustrated London News*.

Since Ogston was twenty-six, tall and elegant, this is probably the debate witnessed and described by Percy Lubbock: 'the lady began it; her fluent, attractive appeal was listened to in a charmed silence, broken occasionally by a few happy sighings and purrings; she was a beautiful figure of a Diana, earnest and brave and free.' George, by contrast, seemed a 'Mephistopheles': 'with his arguments and his sarcasms, his crude interrogations, his facts and his dates, the atmosphere was chilled and the shining spaces contracted'. Instead of trying to win his audience over, he had decided to perpetuate the tone of his pamphlet. But the satirist is a man people fear. First the audience hissed, then it produced 'a running fire of indignant interruption', finally 'a squall of exasperated dissent'. The hall was packed with suffragists and it was probably a foregone conclusion that George would lose heavily, but he made no attempt to turn his considerable charm on them, or to attack the Achilles' heel of the motion – the words 'duly qualified'. Why did suffragists/-ettes want a female franchise limited by economic and marital status, rather than a universal one?

Calderon's next contribution was connected with this issue. A private member's bill brought in by Geoffrey Howard proposed adult suffrage for men and women subject to a three-month residential qualification. It was due to have its second reading on 20 March 1909. The day before, a long letter appeared in *The Times* signed by Lady Jersey and three others for WNASL, and Lord Cromer and three others for MLOWS, including George. It called on 'those members of the House of Commons who may have yielded, at one time or another, good-naturedly and somewhat light-heartedly, to the pressure put upon them, to lay aside all mere

personal considerations and take their stand against this revolutionary Bill', and appealed to the 'Press and the public' to support them. If passed the Bill would 'increase the electorate from seven and a half millions to at least twenty millions, and the majority of electors in the United Kingdom would be women'. This, of course, was these Antis' main objection, and they promptly repeated their classic arguments against the female franchise. They also stressed that even Millicent Fawcett and the Pankhursts rejected the Bill. Moreover, an anti-democratic note in general can be heard in the letter: there is no doubt that for Edwardians like Cromer 'democracy' was a pejorative word approximating to 'government by the ignorant'.

As this letter implied, M.P.'s had become steadily converted to the suffragists' cause. Howard's Bill passed its second reading by thirty-five votes and was going to a Committee of the Whole House. To keep up the pressure, WNASL presented to the House of Commons a petition containing 243,000 signatures and organised a large meeting at the Queen's Hall on 26 March. The platform was packed with peers, peers' wives, M.P.'s and other eminent persons, including Lady Lubbock and George. Mary Ward was repeatedly cheered as she described the 'practical work' that WNASL had achieved in the eight months of its existence. Intriguingly, however, the rest of the evening was devoted to speeches by Lord Cromer and Austen Chamberlain. In fact Howard's Bill had no chance of becoming law, as the Conservatives had an impregnable majority in the House of Lords.

By now the MLOWS office had moved from Heathland Lodge to Bridge Street in Westminster, but George remained Honorary Secretary. On 13 April 1909 *The Times* published a long letter from him in that capacity, dissecting the common claims of suffrage supporters that having the vote would raise women's wages. He mocked the idea that market forces would 'magically' respond to the 'raised status' of enfranchised women by increasing their pay. He asked: 'if women workers are to be enriched, out of whose pockets is the money to come? Is it out of the employers', or out of men workers' in the same trades?' The suffragists appealed to the fact that women's wages had already risen in countries where they had been given the vote, but

when this statement is looked into it invariably turns out that the women whose wages have been increased are simply and solely Government *employées*, to whom their Governments, either corruptly or on the basis of a

false socialistic creed, have given, at the expense of the taxpayers, salaries above the market value of their work – schoolmistresses and post-office *employées* as a rule.

The interesting word here is ‘corruptly’. It may mean ‘in defiance of market realities’, ‘to buy them out’, or it may mean ‘in the name of equality’. Certainly, of course, equal rights have not led to equal pay for women, so George may have had a point about invidious market forces.

In the first six months of MLOWS’s existence Calderon must have been one of its most energetic members. Generally it did ‘very little work, much less than that of the women’, Cromer wrote to Curzon later. By July 1909 the Women’s League had held meetings all over the country, opened a hundred branches, and had more members than the WSPU. As Brian Harrison has written, the Men’s League was ‘more a collection of major public figures than a nation-wide movement’. These figures’ professional lives were centred on Parliament. George Calderon was not a public figure in that sense, he could find more time than they to be active in the anti-suffrage cause, and he obviously relished it. In the absence of branches of the Men’s League he spoke at branches of the Women’s League, for instance at Windsor Town Hall on 3 March 1909, at the Hampstead Conservatoire on 11 March, and at Hove on 29 April.

There is no documentary evidence of Calderon’s involvement in MLOWS between May 1909 and July 1910. Possibly he even relinquished the honorary secretaryship. There were no major political developments on the suffrage front in early summer 1909, presumably he and Kittie were at country houses through the summer itself, in the autumn they were in Glasgow for productions of George’s play *The Fountain* and his translation of *The Seagull*, for most of December they were living in St Andrews, and they spent Christmas with the Corbets at Acton Reynald. Generally, then, he must have followed events such as the mounting suffragette vandalism, the first forced feeding of hunger-strikers, and the physical attacks on politicians, from afar. In 1910 he was again based in London, the parliamentary struggle over suffragism took a new turn, and in the summer he became more actively involved than ever.

A Conciliation Bill to enfranchise a million women was put forward by an All-Party Committee and passed its second reading on 7 July 1910 by 299 votes to

189. Under pressure from his Cabinet, Asquith had agreed to give the Bill parliamentary time. It might therefore become law. The prospect galvanized both suffragists and anti-suffragists. As *The Times* remarked, 'it seems that the battle of women's suffrage is only just beginning in earnest.'

The MLOWS 'proconsuls' Cromer and Curzon eschewed open-air democracy and the senior leaders of WNASL preferred private meetings. According to WNASL's *Anti-Suffrage Review*, however, in July 1910 an 'Anti-Suffrage Outdoor Campaign' was begun, when 'two members of the Men's League hired a cart and held a meeting on Hampstead Heath'. Most likely these were George Calderon and his friend Alfred Maconachie. It appears that younger bloods from both Leagues now formed a sub-committee to promote a 'forward' policy of open-air meetings in London, particularly at places favoured by their opponents, and this was called 'the Trafalgar Square movement'. Prominent on the sub-committee were George for MLOWS and his exact contemporary the linguist and archaeologist Gertrude Bell for WNASL.

Calderon and Maconachie appear to have been responsible for organising and publicising the large anti-suffrage demonstration held in Trafalgar Square on the afternoon of Saturday 16 July 1910, whilst Bell's task was to arrange for WNASL members to attend in force and even speak. The handbill for the event, which can be seen in the Museum of London and is headed **VOTES FOR WOMEN. NEVER!**, names the instigator as 'Anti-Suffrage Campaign' (at the MLOWS address) and talks only of 'Several Platforms. Several Speakers'. There seems little doubt, however, that the demonstration was intended to be a joint MLOWS/WNASL venture – Bell had sent George £150 'to cover the expenses of the meeting', and her father was donating another £50.

On the morning of the demonstration an 'atrocious article', as Kittie described it, appeared in *The Times*. Most of it was devoted to enunciating the 'six reasons why Lord Cromer objects to granting the suffrage to women' as contained in 'a special leaflet which Lord Cromer has drawn up for the occasion'. It then gave a long list of men from whom 'messages of sympathy with the object of the meeting' would be read out in Trafalgar Square, but who were possibly too grand to attend. The final paragraph read: 'The meeting is organised by the Men's League for Opposing Woman Suffrage; it is not a demonstration by the Women's National Anti-Suffrage League and women are not expected largely to attend.'

When Bell and Calderon read this, they must have felt that the ground had been cut from under their feet. The whole object, of course, had been to demonstrate the solidarity between 'forward' male and female Antis in their common cause. Now the members of WNASL present would probably be outnumbered by female suffragists. Even Mary Ward would not be attending or speaking. Rather suggestively, however, when her message of support had been published in *The Times* with Curzon's two days before, unlike him she had not said she was *unable* to be present. It looks as though at the last moment the Executive of MLOWS had persuaded WNALS to pull out, or the Executive of WNALS had taken fright, and the 'Great Popular Meeting', as it was billed, would be an all-male affair. The 'atrocious article' was immediately followed by an account of a 'drawing-room meeting' the day before convened by the East Marylebone branch of WNALS and chaired by...Lady Cromer.

The somewhat bemused account of the demonstration that appeared in *The Times* on Monday 18 July 1910 remarked that the 'literature' available was 'irreconcilably divided into two streams', one of which was 'very much larger than the other'. The reason was simple: 'Shortly before the speaking began one or two hawkers distributed leaflets on behalf of the promoters of the demonstration, but they were anticipated by an hour by "suffragettes", who showered their leaflets and their badges on friend and foe alike.' About 2000 people were present, but were 'fairly evenly divided into men and women' and most of the hecklers at the five platforms addressed by M.P.'s and others were women. The reporter claimed that 'the promoters were well satisfied with the result', but the resolution put from each platform – 'That this meeting protests against woman suffrage in any shape or form, and calls upon the Government to give no further facilities for any Bill enfranchising women without previous reference to the judgment of the electorate' – was carried by only 'a small majority'.

George immediately wrote to Bell asking her if she knew who had put the 'message' in *The Times* deterring WNASL members from attending. She replied in a letter of Monday 18 July that she did not, nor did anyone in 'the office of the Women's League'. On the contrary, 'when I read it I thought of course that it was of your drafting as I know no other source for any announcements that have appeared in the newspapers'. Obviously, Calderon and Bell had been overruled by the highest councils of MLOWS and WNASL. However, Bell's letter suggests that she and

George had themselves acted unilaterally: ‘My very strong feeling is [...] that we ought not to have embarked as a sub-committee upon a step which would compromise the reputation of the Leagues without their approval.’ Deeply embarrassed, she had to ask for her father’s cheque back. She took the blame for ‘having been unable to help you in the way you should have been helped’. ‘Fortunately,’ she wrote, ‘thanks to your strenuous endeavours, the meeting was not a disaster; it was only a little absurd.’

There is no documentary evidence that George was associated with either League after this date. Perhaps he did not agree with plans to merge the two, as his name does not appear on a list of supporters of the proposal published in the *Anti-Suffrage Review*. Amalgamation happened on 6 December 1910, when they became the National League for Opposing Woman Suffrage (NLOWS). Cromer told Curzon that dissolving MLOWS’s Committee was ‘rather a troublesome business’ and eventually he had had to ‘squash out the Men’s League’. Did George fall victim, then, to this purge?

It seems unlikely. NLOWS would need a full-time organising secretary and office secretary, and Cromer and Curzon had raised the funds to pay for them. Obviously Calderon did not have time to do the first of these jobs, even if Cromer had wanted him to. In the first week of September 1910 George took himself off with Walter Crum, the Coptic scholar, to the World Fair in Brussels. By 28 September a Mr Scott had been appointed Organising Agent of NLOWS. In November, incidentally, the Conciliation Bill was dropped, because another general election had to be called. In the ensuing protest, 200 suffragettes were assaulted by the police.

Percy Lubbock’s assumption was that Calderon dropped the anti-suffrage movement suddenly, as (Lubbock thought) he did other campaigns: ‘He knew precisely the moment when he had made his peculiar contribution to a cause and could not usefully give more. At that point [...] he would be gone, like the Red Queen.’ But this is manifestly not so. Calderon continued to write biting letters to the press about suffragism over the next three years, and above all in 1911 he published a fourteen-page pamphlet with the Priory Press entitled *The Organisation of Buying: A Policy for Women*.

This is far less conservative than his anti-suffrage pamphlet. In the febrile atmosphere of 1910 following the ‘People’s Budget’, there was widespread fear of rising food prices and resentment that consumers were becoming political footballs. George proposed forming a National Consumers’ League which would not only

regulate fair trading, vet quality and ‘encourage sound workmanship’, but ‘put an end to under-payment, to over-work and non-employment’, secure a realistic minimum wage, produce a kind of *Which?* of good employers, abolish sweat-shop production, award a ‘registered label to be affixed to goods produced under satisfactory conditions’, and monitor ‘workshop sanitation, wages, pensions, overtime, holidays’! Obviously this shares certain ideals with the Cooperative movement and the Labour Party. In calling for fair trade and a National Consumer Council George was well ahead of his time. But his most radical proposal was that all this should be run by women. Women consumed ‘a good deal more than half’ of the ‘marketable wealth of the country’; ‘in the act of buying, each woman has daily in her grasp the control of all the mysteries that go to the making and distributing of what she buys’; and women excelled at ‘voluntary or local’ organisation. A women’s consumer protection league should be set up ‘at once’ and George ended the pamphlet by giving the address of a Miss E.H. Tipple, who had ‘kindly undertaken the first steps’ to organising it.

It has not been possible to discover what became of this initiative. One has the impression, however, that it was grounded in a much humbler appreciation of the scale and seriousness of women’s civic work in Edwardian Britain than he had evinced in *Woman in Relation to the State*. According to George in his 1911 pamphlet, woman’s ‘communal activity’ was directed to a nation’s ‘health and comfort, as rearing, teaching, tending’, but also, intriguingly, to ‘equalising the distribution of wealth’.

What did Calderon’s activism on behalf of anti-suffragism achieve? How, a hundred years later, should we make sense of his views on the subject?

In March 1912 Lord Curzon succeeded to the presidency of NLOWS and, as Brian Harrison has observed, ‘Curzon’s movement [...] was, up to August 1914, on the winning side’. In George’s lifetime anti-suffragism did not fail. Surely his own efforts contributed significantly to the fact. After women over thirty received the vote in 1918, however, Kittie wondered whether ‘that great energy that he poured forth’ for the cause had been wasted. Some of his friends regarded all of his activism as ‘Quixotic’. But as the 1920s wore on Kittie became ‘more certain’ than ever that his efforts had not been in vain, for

energy of that absolute great-hearted sort – the child of deep straight thinking – breeds energy in others *of the same type* – it may only be in flickers by

comparison – but it is by the spreading abroad of that sort of energy in the souls of men that at last regeneration will come.

It could, indeed, be claimed that enfranchisement was a victory for conservative women. On the outbreak of war, Emmeline Pankhurst called a halt to all militancy and the suffragettes threw themselves into voluntary work. WNASL members like Lady Jersey, Mary Ward, Violet Markham, or Gertrude Bell – feminists in their own right – had, of course, always identified this as women's special sphere of activity, and they provided outstanding public service now. There seems little doubt that these developments between 1914 and 1918 complexly assisted the achievement of women's suffrage. George too, in his pamphlets and a long letter published in *The Times* on 23 May 1913, had argued strongly for women to 'get themselves a life'.

Given that George Calderon was a rationalist and a qualified barrister, it is not surprising that he derived his anti-suffragism legalistically from the 'masculine functions' of the State. His basic arguments do not differ substantially from those of the chief theoretician of male anti-suffragism, the Vinerian Professor of English Law at Oxford Alfred Dicey. They are put far more dogmatically than Dicey's, however, and one finds oneself wondering what was behind George's vehemence.

Among the male Antis there was, of course, a faction who simply did not like women. Calderon cannot conceivably be classed with them. We know from various letters that both before and after he met Kittie he was strongly attracted to many women, and they found him unthreatening, chivalrous, entertaining, even magnetic. He always worked well with women. In *Woman in Relation to the State* he wrote: 'We men, with few exceptions, are all Mormons at heart. We have made the great sacrifice of monogamy, and much must be forgiven us.' The inclusive 'we' suggests he knew only too well that this described himself. Yet there is absolutely no evidence that he ever broke his own marriage vows; the idea is unthinkable, given his lifelong belief in straight-thinking and plain-dealing. More than that, he could not *live* without Kittie. As she wrote later:

He seemed acutely conscious all the time that one was there – and to need one to be there – with the result that I hardly ever went away even for a day when he was at home. He at once seemed to feel left and lost. He absolutely *needed* one. Of course I did not want to go away. I only say this to show how



closely natural human life held him though seemingly so up to the eyes in ideas, work, and play.

Woman seems to have been for him the ultimate 'other'. Conceivably, his reaction to suffragists and suffragettes was so bitter because they deeply threatened the identity of this 'other' in his mind and heart. In particular, perhaps, he found suffragettes frighteningly masculinized, or as Lord Cromer put it 'unsexed'. Some of them he called 'Viragettes'. As he saw it, the Pankursts' fanaticism had unleashed on society a wave of Bacchae-like frenzy.

In her important study *Women against the Vote: Female Anti-Suffragism in Britain*, Julia Bush has written that 'from a longer-term perspective' the women Antis' 'sturdy defence of gender difference' was 'far from irrelevant to later generations'. Indeed, there is a debate to be had about gender difference and it is being had. I suggest that Calderon's activity on behalf of anti-suffragism was at root about his emotional perception of women's identity. In any 'broader project to restore neglected conservative dimensions to British women's history', as Bush expresses it, Calderon's views on gender difference deserve to be consulted.