MUSSOLINI AND THE WOMEN OF ITALY.

A year and a half ago Benito Mussolini saw to it that the Italian Parliament granted Municipal Suffrage to the women of Italy. The debate was amusing. Mussolini's own supporters told him quite frankly that they did not believe in suffrage for women, but they supposed that what they thought made no difference, he would insist that it be granted. There was more of amusement than of anger in their reproach, only a baker's duzen could think of "votes for women" as a serious issue.

Mussolini was quite as frank and quite as amusing in his reply, "Give it to them. It will do them no harm and it will please them. You must not forget that the women did during the War. You must not forget what they are doing to restore the country now. They are sharing equally in all our burden's and their leaders want suffrage. Moreover, see how nice they have been in their campaigning. They have not broken windows or heckled Parliament or paraded in spectacular fashi n. If they have been persistent they have been reasonable and well behaved. Think what the women in some other countries have done in their suffrage campaigns. We ought to give it to them because of their good behavior, if nothing else.

"Do not think that I expect much help in this matter of Government from women. They will never give it. A woman's brain is not synthetic. It is hard for her to put two and two together, build up combinations of thought and action. But she has other qualities so I say give her the suffrage."

And give her Municipal suffrage they did, both the chamber and the senate passing the bill in 1925. That is, they gave it to all women who were twenty-five years old, who could read and write and paid an annual tax of not less than forty lire. However, if you had a little more education than is required to read and write and had been able to pass certain elementary school examinations, you could vote even if you did not pay the tax of forty lire.

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Then, beside the vote was given to all women who had been of special value to the nation, quite independent of education and taxation:- such as women who had been decorated for valor in War or for special service in public health work, in public education and at a time of calamity. All war mothers, war widows, and guardians of children were included.

The law went on the books but precious little good it has done the women of Italy. In the first place in the transformation that is going on from the old parliamentary state to the new corporate state, the machinery for carrying on affairs in towns has been shut down and the new is not yet in full working order, so that there have been comparatively few elections in the last year. When they do come, if they ever do! they will be of an entirely new order. You ill vote with the syndicate to which you belong instead of with a political party.

The suspension of elections does not apply to all communes as yet. They were going on in various places in Italy when I was there last summer, but the women were taking little part. That is not to be wondered at. Even if they were endowed with the synthetical qualities which Mussolini denies them, they would have a bewildering task in finding out just where they belong in the new Italy.

There is something worth considering in this new Italy. It attempts to estimate the value of a man or women to the country, not upon his vote, but by his power to produce. The whole country is divided now into thirteen syndicates: farmers and farmers employees, manufacturers and manufacturer's employees, transporters on land and on sea and those that work for them, and so on. As women are productive factors almost invariably in the Italian scheme, they all come into these great syndicates and they are subject as workers or as employees to all the severe new labor laws that have been passed. But these

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new laws have been framed to protect them in many ways. Among the many interesting things now going on in Italy is the operation of the new Maternity laws. Every working woman, her employer and the State, unite to build up a fund to take care of her when the baby comes, and the employer and the state combine to give her a creche where she can put her baby when she goes back to work.

Then, too, the Italian Government has set out to give her a decent place to live and for thatshe ought to burn extra candles. Housing in Italy for the workers is, in most places, wretchedly insufficient, dark and unsanitary and a valient effort is making all over the land to rebuild. Mussolini gives special interest to this. He will pound the desk, if you talk to him about housing and say, "we have asked too much of women when we asked them to live in these wretched places. They must have comfortable houses, they will be better women and raise better children. That is what Italy must have," and so he prods and prods and prods, from end end of the "Boot" to another, driving all kinds of agencies to tear down the old and put up new houses, fitted to the pocketbooks of the poor. When I was in Rome last summer an order went out stopping work on De luxe apartments. Building must concentrate on the houses for the poor. To be sure, it is not only the poor that are to be served by these buildings. Mussolini has set out to restore old Rome. To liberate many of the marvelous ruins requires the destruction of blocks of ancient houses, crowded with people, utterly unfit for the most part, for living quarters, but all hundreds can afford. If turned out of these places they must have as cheap quarters somewhere else, that is what the Government is hastening to build. Here we have two enthusiasms that work together - freeing historic ruins and giving the poor decent places in which to live.

So, if thesuffrage Mussolini has given the women of Italy is not much, at least as yet, he is pushing many things to make their lives more endurable which are worth while.

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