

Verbatim Report of Miss
Billinghurst's Speech.

THE SUFFRAGETTE'S CREED.

**“The Guilt Lies on the Shoulders
of the Government.”**

GENTLEMEN OF THE JURY,—I will ask you to allow me to explain some of the circumstances which have led me to be standing before you to-day in this dock, to fight for the liberation of women that they may be freed to take their part in legislation for the good of our country.

The first time I realised the pressing need for this reform was ten years ago, when I was working among the inmates of a workhouse. There I learnt the sad life-histories of the people who had been driven, through the imperfect economic laws of the country, the sweated condition of women, to end their days sitting listlessly and hopelessly in the workhouse waiting for death. My heart ached, and I thought surely if women were consulted in the management of the State, happier and better conditions must exist for hardworking, sweated lives such as these, many of whom had beautiful characters.

I also taught in a Sunday-school and Band of Hope, and my love for the children took me to their homes.

In these slum homes I became acquainted with such sorrow and suffering borne by the women that I could not sit comfortably at home and think of it. Many of these poor homes could not have been kept together without the mothers, who were their mainstay, and yet were not given the protection of the vote. Some husbands were drunkards, some openly unfaithful. Some deserted their wives and children, and many beat them, and it was gradually unfolded to me that the unequal laws which made women appear inferior to men were the main cause of these evils. I found that the man-made laws of marriage, parentage, and divorce placed women in every way in a condition of slavery, and were as harmful to men, by giving them power to be tyrants, as they were harmful to the women. At this time I also became acquainted with the rescue work in the streets of London through my sister, who was a rescue worker. I cannot speak of all the horrors that were revealed to me in this work. It was quite a common occurrence for little girls of 12 and 13 years to be brought to the Rescue Home because they were about to become mothers. The men who had ruined these children's lives almost always escaped. Sometimes, however, a man was brought to account, and then the punishment was so inadequate to the fearful crime.

I felt then that for the protection of the young, women must without delay find some means to get a voice not only in the making of the laws of the country, but in the administering of the laws also.