

Miss Clara Brett Martin.

By Faith Fenton.

FEBRUARY 2nd of 1897, should be viewed as one of the red letter days in the calendar of Canadian women, since it marked the admission to the Canadian bar of the first woman lawyer, in the person of Miss Clara Brett Martin.

It was a very brief ceremony, so brief and simple that it attracted little attention, and few were present to witness it. Only an ordinary meeting of benchers consisting of perhaps a dozen well known lawyers, in one of the Osgoode Hall courts; only a couple of candidates to be formally "called" to the bar; a few formal oaths to be taken and a book to be signed, that was all. The ceremony had been repeated a hundred times in the past, until it had become commonplace; but on this day it was marked by an unprecedented event—one of the candidates was a woman.

She stood, a tall and slender Portia, in black gown and white tie, with fair uncovered head; she recited the oaths clearly, and affixed her signature with steady hand, then walked quietly out, a fully credentialed lawyer, qualified to practice and plead at the Ontario bar.

A simple ceremony of a truth, but it marked the victorious close of a long struggle against prejudice and selfishness; it signalled another barrier down, and another profession open to Canadian women.

It is six years since Miss Martin having taken her B.A. degree notified the benchers of her desire to enter as a law student. Naturally these conservative gentlemen were considerably disturbed at this unusual request. They took nine months to consider the matter, and then notified the young lady that they had not the power to grant her request, since the regulations did not admit the enrolment of women.

Nothing daunted, Miss Martin began working among the members of the Ontario Parliament, and succeeded so far in enlisting their sympathies that in 1892 a bill permitting benchers to admit women was brought in, fought fiercely over, and carried by majority of one.

Next came the difficulty of finding a firm that would take her as articled clerk; that was accomplished in 1893, when she entered the office of Messrs. Mulock, Miller, Crowther & Montgomery.

Then followed three years of struggle and annoyances too petty to be put on record, but none the less real.

The young woman student resolutely endured and closed her lips upon all complaining; but from the male students themselves we have gathered something of what she has borne, in sneers, in lack of courtesy, if not actual rudeness; in the unnecessary emphasis upon certain lecture points; in the thousand ways that men can make a woman suffer who stands among them alone. In those three years she met with courtesy from the true gentlemen, as a woman always does; but there were others, who resented her entrance into law as one poaching on choice preserves, and these were something less than kind.

But the bill of 1892 permitted women to practice as solicitors only, which would limit their work and prevent them from pleading before a judge in high or county courts. Miss Martin desired full barristership. The Legislature had grown somewhat broader minded in the intervening time, and upon being again approached, a majority of thirty-seven authorized the benchers to call women to the bar as full-fledged barristers.

Miss Martin was ready, but the benchers were

not. They postponed, they delayed, they discussed and argued behind closed doors.

Sir Oliver Mowat was won over, and gave her his strong influence; Hon. A. S. Hardy followed. Miss Martin enlisted the active service of many sympathizers; and influence was brought to bear upon the benchers through influential clients. Her case came up seven times during the last six months of the year. Rather interesting those star-chamber discussions must have been. Benchers, unwilling to commit themselves, and equally unwilling to offend profitable clients, failed to attend.

When a question reaches a point necessitating the absence of opponents from its discussion, the cause may be considered won.

It was fulfilled in this instance, and Miss Martin's choicest Christmas gift was the notification received in late December, 1896, that she could present herself to be formally admitted to the Ontario bar on February second.

"What apology does Miss Martin offer for de-

women into the field of medicine, it were the height of inconsistency to debar her from entering law on plea of sex.

Again it were equally absurd to argue that there is no demand for her in the profession. The supply will in this instance create the demand. And a woman is needed wherever she can make a place for herself. There is plenty of room for woman in law, for the whole law as it affects women is her field. Miss Martin purposes making an especial study of law as it relates to women, concerning her individual responsibilities, her estates, her children, her citizenship.

And yet again there is almost as great a need of consulting woman lawyers as consulting woman physicians. A lawyer must receive confidences, must advise and act for his clients, and in many instances a woman clothed with legal authority can do this for other women better than one of the opposite sex. The confidences she receives will be less reserved, her advice and action, therefore, more assured.

Concerning that bogie that has so disturbed the male legal fraternity—the vision of a woman pleading in court; could anything be more fitting than that one woman should plead the cause of another, guarding her interests, defending her name, and doing her utmost to obtain justice, or it may be mercy?

It is a beautiful vision to some of us, who believe that with the entrance of women into the public courts the atmosphere thereof will become purified, and a more wholesome air obtain, even in a breach of promise case.

Miss Martin is an attractive and earnest woman, with youth, sincerity and an indomitable perseverance and splendid brain to help her in this chosen path of work, which she is the first of her sex to tread in Canada. Her steps are sure to be well planted, her pace steadily advancing, and others will follow more easily in the way she has so bravely opened.

It is not merely the duty, but the privilege of Canadian women to give her every support possible, by their endorsement, influence and patronage, and the legal work belonging to Canadian women's organizations should be placed in her hands.

The firm of Shilton, Wallbridge & Co., are to be congratulated on their clear-sightedness in securing Miss Martin, since they can now claim to be the only Canadian law firm that contains a duly qualified woman as an active member. It is now entitled Shilton, Wallbridge & Martin.

Although only called to the bar on Feb. 2nd., Miss Martin appeared in her first case—one in commercial law—on Feb. 23rd, before Judge Morson, and won for her client, which she may take as an omen of her future career.



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siring to enter law?" asked one of the benchers, severely during the earlier discussions.

No apology whatever, most august sir, but the right of a clear vocation.

"I would rather read and study law than do anything else in the world," she remarked, in the course of a quiet chat that took place after her admission. "I chose it because I like it, because it invites me as nothing else does. That perhaps has been the source of my persistent efforts."

To accept women in medicine and refuse them in law on the ground of sex difficulties, is absurd.

What unpleasant moral and material conditions have the latter to encounter, as compared with the former? Besides, a woman lawyer has choice in the matter of accepting or rejecting cases; a woman physician has little or none. She must go where she is called, for she deals with the issues of life and death.

A woman lawyer has no need to conduct a breach of promise case, but a woman physician must deal with the sad results of such cases whether she chooses or not. Having admitted

The best sacrifice a woman can make during Lent is the sacrifice of evil passions, malice, cruelty and jealousy. And to do this she should fill her days with sympathy and service of the poor, the outcast and the sinful.

Lent brings fruit when it is accepted as a time for meditation, for the celebration of the life of Christ and its striking events and when it brings consecration to loftier ideas.

Dr. Eaton recommends the following little poem as good food for Lenten meditation.

"No; 'tis a fast to dole
Thy sheaf of wheat
And meat
Unto the hungry soul.
It is to fast from strife,
From old debate,
And hate;
To circumscribe thy life,
To show a heart grief-riven
To starve thy sin,
Not bin,
And that's to keep thy Lent."