

An Eloquent Address

By Mrs. Geo. Drummond.

The following address upon the aims and influence of the women of to-day, was delivered by Mrs. George Drummond before the National Council of Canadian Women, held in Montreal in May.

We are glad to be able to reproduce it in full for the benefit and pleasure of our readers.

"YOUR Excellencies, and ladies and gentlemen:—I am happy, indeed, to second the vote of thanks proposed by His Excellency, the Governor-General, to the speakers of this evening, for the inspiration of their most kind and encouraging words. They have evidently learnt that the great secret of help is encouragement, not criticism, not even good advice, but the stimulus of confidence and approval. Not that, as a Council, we deprecate criticism, nor resent it should it sometimes be blame. No, but just criticism will help us, and unkind or misjudged criticism will not hurt us just in proportion to the faith that is in us, and that faith will neither faint nor fail while the leaders of our nation, in Church and State, believe in us. And now, at the close of this meeting, I would ask permission to say a few words to those who doubt, or who have doubted, the worth, perhaps even the worthiness, of our Women's Council.

"Three years have gone by since the inauguration of the Council, and you have heard to-night the summing up of our accounts for the time that is past. How do we and this movement stand at the close of the account? As every man shall be judged according to his works, so let our Council be judged, and let our right and our might at the end of the account be one and the same.

"You have heard that the Local Councils study to meet as best they can the more pressing needs in their respective communities. These needs vary in each locality, according to size and age and other conditions. But there are certain broader needs, which are found, not here or there, but in almost every place where human beings form themselves into a society; there are questions which force themselves upon all thinking men and women of to-day, social questions, labor questions; hard problems many of them; so hard, that weary thinkers could find it in their hearts to say, 'These things are too hard for us. Let us fall asleep and wake when the riddles are solved.'

"It may seem to some of you that if these riddles are too hard for men, women need not attempt their solution, but may well be content to restrict their attention to problems of the family and the home.

"But we do believe that as the world is made of men and women, so must its problems be met and its sorrows resolved by the combined thought and action of men and women. We believe that so awful in its reality is the tie that binds us all together, high and low, rich and poor, sinner and saint, that the woman whose knowledge and sympathy go never beyond her own, who has never realised her share of responsibility to the world that is without, is unfit to guide and guard the family and the home.

"With this belief, and with the earnest desire to do our part, we have turned our attention to some of the graver difficulties that beset the social and industrial life of to-day, and we gratefully acknowledge that in all our study and endeavour we have had the sympathy and co-operation of able and thoughtful men.

It may seem to some of you that we women, unless, indeed, we obtain the suffrage, can exer-

cise no authority and but little influence in matters such as these. But I believe that the woman's influence, even when exercised only from within, is greater and more far-reaching

than she knows, and that she can do much when rightly informed to prepare public opinion, to suggest and to enforce the best and wisest social measures. And here let me touch for a moment on the political question. It is assumed in some quarters that as a Council we are pledged to woman's suffrage. This is not so, although we have the honour to number some advocates of woman's suffrage and a society for the political enfranchisement of women within our ranks. But on this point, as on all others, there is perfect liberty of opinion, and while party spirit and party action are excluded by the fundamental principle of our Council, all parties are represented within it, so that, from the conflict of different minds, truth may be struck out for all to follow. Whilst some of us believe that woman's suffrage holds the potentiality of much good to the women and the world, others ask that woman be trained to work inwardly upon the spirit of the time, rather than that they should enter the political arena. In whichever way we make our influence felt, we believe that on the whole it will be a beneficial one, not because women are better than men (oh! foolish comparison!) but because, as I have said, only their combined judgment can solve the problems of this complex world, because, as a modern thinker and man of science has said, 'The hope of our future civilisation lies in the development in equal freedom of both the masculine and feminine elements in life.'

"The very faults of which you accuse us as unfitting us to hold any measure of political power, are indices of certain moral perceptions in the woman's nature, which, when our sense of proportion has been trained by experience, will supplement and complete the judgment of the man. It is said, for instance, that it is only the absurdly feminine mind that, in judging of a man's fitness for great public responsibilities, would take into account his private life, and the manner in which he discharges the commonplace domestic relations. In illustration, I may quote the familiar tale of the man and wife who were overheard discussing the qualifications of their cook. The wife was assured of her respectability and unimpeachable moral character; the husband confounded her moral character, and enquired if she could cook beans. The story points the laugh at the wife, but the fact is that both were right as far as they went, but the wife was wrong in stopping short at the morality, the husband in considering only the culinary qualifications. It needed both to ensure competency. No amount of morality would cook a good dinner; but, on the other hand, the moral inaptitude might some day make any dinner at all a matter of uncertainty. So I think that this feminine censorship of the private and domestic virtues serves to bring into clearer recognition the fact that 'character' is even greater than 'intellect' in determining the progress and ultimate standing of the individual and the nation, that as the foundation of our prosperity must be laid in pure domestic life, in integrity and in uprightness, so should these qualities rank highest in our estimate of those who fill the highest posts in the nation.

"Again, you may hear it said that women would be meddling in public affairs, that in their clamour for immediate and far-reaching 'reform' they would retard, rather than help, that progress which must be largely left to tendency and time. True, that only experience can teach the sobering lesson of limitation, as

well as the hopeful one that the tendency of all things is to progress and perfection. But true also that it is a spurious faith that would make this general tendency an excuse for less earnest and strenuous effort on the part of the individual. True, also, that it is a culpable lack of faith that would justify its policy of non-interference on the theory of the Roman philosopher, 'Men will continue to do the same things though we burst,' or, in modern phrase, on the principle that 'every man has a right to go to the devil if he likes.' As no man has the right to do a wrong, nor can go to the devil without taking others with him, so no man's effort to leave the world better than he found it is wholly thrown away upon the world.

"And so what you may call our faults of judgment are only, as all faults are, the other side of virtue or faulty as virtues carried to excess, which need but to be tempered by experience and balanced by the judgment of the man to show their right side again, and assert their true function and character.

"This then is our contention—not for supremacy of place and rule. No, we tender our thanks to that anonymous man who, awaking to this fact, has expressed it in the popular form of the toast, 'Woman, once our superior, now our equal.' For the age of that worship, when men burnt incense to our charms, was also the time of our deepest degradation. May the days of that idolatry never return.

"Nor do we ask for a vain and spurious liberty, a liberty that would violate the most tender and beautiful traditions of our womanhood, and set us free to yield all that make us most distinctively women.

"No, the freedom that we ask and the dignity that we seek are quite other than these, the dignity of service, God's service and the world's, and the freedom to use and to develop for that service in all their plenitude those varied gifts of mind and character which God has given us.

"The days of struggle and transition are passing away; the time of self-assertion, of foolish contrast and comparison, of worse than foolish recrimination, is rapidly emerging into that fuller day, when we shall all clearly understand that, as the dual runs through all nature, each thing being but a half and suggesting another thing to make it whole, so is it with the man and the woman, who also in their perfect union are the type and expression of that unity which is the ultimate principle of all things.

"And touching upon this word 'unity' we do indeed strike the keynote of our Council, that unity which is the pre-supposition and the goal of science, of philosophy, of theology, is also the ruling idea of our Council, and the mark towards which it strives.

"Unity of aim, transcending all difference of thought and of opinion!

"Unity of standard, replacing for ever that divided ideal which, in proclaiming purity to the woman, but to the man truth and honour and strength, does in effect make the man less manly and the woman less womanly, and proves its fallacy by causing half the sins and miseries of life.

"Unity of life whereby it shall no longer be falsely divided into secular and religious, sacred and profane, but shall in all its parts be inspired by the consciousness of a Divine purpose.

"A unity transcending all difference, comprehending all peoples, and nations, and tongues, in whose infinite embrace all shall at last be harmonised and reconciled.

"This is the Council idea, this the principle that inspires it, and the end towards which it strives."