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Women in Parliament

ALREADY women are sitting in the Legislatures of several of our Western Provinces, and the right is now to be extended to them in Ontario and also in the Dominion House of Commons. It is not clear that women are at present excluded from the legislative bodies in which no specific provision has been made for their admission. The statutes on the subject were enacted at a time when evidently the admission of women was not in the mind of the legislators, but where there is no specific provision that a member shall be of the male sex probably a good case could be made out to support a claim that the wording of the laws, under the general principle of interpretation Acts, that words importing the masculine gender may include females as well, gives authority for the election of women. There was considerable agitation for women's right to vote, but little concerning their right to be legislators. Doubtless the women's view was that if they obtained the electoral franchise the other privilege would naturally follow, as, indeed, it does. When women are deemed qualified as voters, it is impossible to find any logical ground on which they can be excluded from the positions of representatives. And with some of the problems of the day intelligent women are particularly qualified to deal.

The Speech from the Throne at Ottawa states that provision is to be made for conferring upon women "the privilege of sitting in Parliament." Some of the ladies probably would prefer the word "right" to privilege, since the latter may be held to mean the granting as a favor of that which our feminine leaders will of course insist is a simple right. Perhaps, however, the ladies will feel that it is a case in which a rose by another name smells as sweet.

But what do the Government mean by the word "Parliament" in His Excellency's speech? We so commonly speak of a representative in the House of Commons as a "Member of Parliament" that admission to the House of Commons may be all that is contemplated by the official announcement. "Parliament," however, does not mean the House of Commons alone. The

Senate is a part of Parliament; a Senator is a Member of Parliament. Are we to have ladies in the Senate? If so, nobody will hereafter have the audacity to speak, as some have done in the past, of the "old ladies of the Senate." In England the new law, while admitting ladies to the House of Commons, does not go so far as to authorize women to be appointed to the House of Lords. Our Senate is inclined to follow the lead of the House of Lords in matters concerning its rights and privileges. Will it do so in this case and endeavor to exclude the ladies? There is no specific exclusion of them now and, as in the case of the Commons, quite an argument could be set up by those who might claim that women are even now eligible. If the Government bill be confined to the granting of eligibility for the House of Commons only, we may expect to find an immediate agitation for the admission of women to the Upper Chamber. The "soft snap" as it is sometimes rudely called, the privilege — if the word is allowable — of sitting in Parliament, with a life tenure, without any of the trouble, worry and expense attending the winning of elections, is one that the ladies will not long allow the mere men to monopolize.

If not to-day, to-morrow, the doors of the Senate will be battered down by the women's army. Then there will no longer be room for criticism respecting "contingent" accounts which include ladies' purses and dressing bags. "Contingencies" may then have to include many things that man is not free to mention now. In the United Kingdom the people have been slow to exercise their privilege of electing women as representatives. In several cases women were candidates in the recent elections, but all were ungallantly defeated, except a Sinn Fein lady in Ireland. As the Sinn Fein members refuse to take their seats at Westminster, the Imperial Parliament is still entirely a men's institution. We are inclined to think that when the right to sit in Parliament is granted to the women of Canada they will not be so slow in availing themselves of it. In the discussion of various branches of our public affairs many of the Canadian women have exhibited qualities that would do honor to the House of Com-