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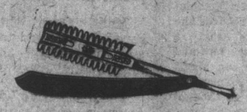

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Proceedings at the Legislative Council

OFFICIAL REPORT.

MONDAY, March 16.

(Continued).

HON. MR. ANDERSON was in full sympathy with the Bill and hoped the day would not be far distant when ladies would occupy seats in the House. Lady Astor had taken a foremost place in a debate in the House of Commons and had established a record not excelled elsewhere, although she had to contend with great opposition and ridicule. It would take a bold man to-day to oppose a Bill such as the one before the House. He hoped that none of the members would show the white feather, and he would agree with having the rules suspended so that the Bill could be passed at once. He believed it would pass without a dissenting voice and in a few hours become the law of the land.

HON. MR. AYRE—The subject of Woman's Franchise is a very fitting one for a maiden speech. Not for that reason, however, do I rise to speak to the motion now before this House, but because this Act brings before us a principle and opens a course that may be far reaching. The principle involved is that of equality of rights. In most of us there exists a strong spirit of conservatism. When wisely used this is a foundation of safety. Unfortunately, we sometimes allow it to influence us even to the extent of injustice.

We are more or less familiar with the antagonism to votes for women shown in other countries and the unseemly scenes attached thereto. For these there is no need of apology—practically every movement for liberty has been attended by lamentable happenings, necessary, in many cases, to arouse opinion. Fortunately, this country has been saved entirely from anything approaching such conditions. Requests have been presented in a dignified and moderate way. It seems inconceivable that they should have been ignored until now, yet such has been the case, in spite of the wonderful work done by our women during the War, in their homes, on war associations and committees and at the front, and the ample proofs given of their fitness and ability under the most trying circumstances. But the war was only an occasion, exceptional and abnormal and we, therefore, must consider women in her common and usual position. "Women's sphere is the home". Yes, I unreservedly agree with that, and it is the highest of all callings. To bring into the world, to train, the men and women of the future, calls for all the resources of the best and noblest of our race. It means continual self-denial, service and sacrifice, which make good mothers the best asset of a people. Yet it has been our practice to deny them the opportunity of a voice in saying in what sort of surroundings or in what conditions their children shall live, or what provision shall be made for their future. Is such a practice fair? Can we deny women equality of rights? I know there is sometimes a lot of talk about "equality," which does more harm than good. Men and women are not equal. The day will never come when they will. It was never intended in Divine Providence that they should be equal. They are the counterpart of each other, the men excelling in certain qualities and the women excelling in others that men are deficient in. Consequently, both should have the same fair treatment in order that the best interests of society may be served, and we trust to see the day soon when under the proposed new Distribution Act women will be returned to the Legislature.

There is one direction in which I have some fears for the results of the Bill before us. When it becomes law, to what extent will it be availed of? On our Statute Books are many excellent laws rarely, if ever, used. They may just as well not be there. I hope that the patriotic women who have taken such a noble interest in this matter will still continue their work and so educate and influence their sisters throughout the whole of this country that they will recognize the power placed in their hands and use it to the utmost at the polling booth. Such a conception is full of hope and there is every reason for confidence in the future welfare of Newfoundland when the women vote to this extent. I have much pleasure in supporting the second reading of the Bill.

HON. MR. ELLIS—I rise to record my support of this measure. When a petition in favor of Woman Suffrage was before this House a few years ago I expressed my strong endorsement of it, and again on the opening day of the present Session, in seconding the Address in Reply, I expressed myself in its favor.

I think this Bill comes none too soon, and I am glad it passed the other House unanimously. I hope it will meet an equally favorable reception in this Chamber. When I was connected with the Municipal Council some years ago, I was struck with the unfairness of women having to pay taxes on their property in the city, and yet not being allowed a vote. I have the same feeling about woman being taxed by the Colony just as we men are, and being denied a vote.

From my boyhood days, I have been impressed with the beneficial influence of Woman in the home life, how their influence is always for good and in the direction of morality and right. I think that influence if introduced into our political life is going to have the same beneficial results there, and I welcome it accordingly.

The State of California, where I spent a part of the winter for some years past, was one of the first in the United States to grant woman the right to vote, and it is universally agreed there that the measure was fruitful of good results, particularly in the enactment and the enforcement of laws for the suppression of crime etc., and moral uplift has woman's influence been felt.

I have a personal feeling, however, that I would not like to see woman either offering as candidates or serving on juries, at any rate until they have attained to mature years and brought up their families. I believe, that broadly speaking, the woman's place is in her home The exercise of her franchise at an election every four years is not going to affect her position in that regard, but it may become a different matter when she enters the political arena as a candidate, or takes her place in the jury box. However, these are contingences that need not be further discussed now; for the present it will suffice that I am in favor of this Bill and strongly endorse the motion for its second reading.

HON. MR. MORINE did not agree with the suggestion of Hon. Mr. Anderson that suspension of rules take place, and it could not be entertained as we were too glad of the opportunity to discuss the measure where and when it was possible, and to show respect by discussing it from every angle. The Hon. gentleman had spoken of the "white feather." He could remind him that some in the Chamber wore the "white feather" and the gang were all there, but none of them wanted to oppose this Bill, not because they were afraid, but convinced it is right. The passage of this Bill is a great victory to the women of the country, which they had won by right, tact and worth. When we considered the great work of the women of all the Allied nations during the great war there was no ground for objection or disapproval, for we were under a debt to the women that could never be repaid It was his great privilege to be associated with many important measures of such like which has passed the Legislature. He was a member of Parliament in 1889 when the Suffrage was granted all males of 25 years and upwards. He was also a member when Suffrage was granted in 1893 to males of 21 years and upwards He was not sure however, if the latter was an improvement on the former and felt that it was not. It was a pleasure to him to be helping along the Woman's Franchise Bill during the present session and also the Redistribution Bill It was fortunate the two Bills were coming together. If no bye-election takes place in the meantime the women's vote will first be effective when the Re-distribution Bill comes into effect, and when there will be less trouble and confusion than under the old condition. He did not agree with Hon. Mr. Ellis that women should not offer themselves as candidates. There should be no objection to this. If the female was better qualified than the male, then by all means elect them. He hoped the day would come when women would seek and be elected. There was nothing to disqualify women from taking their place in the Legislative Chamber. Their presence would grace the Chamber and make things brighter than they are at present and there was nothing to hinder His Excellency the Governor from appointing them at any time The talk against woman suffrage that women were not as well fitted as men and that men had greater experience and were more fitted to vote, did not appeal to him. It was said on the other hand that it would unsex the women. There was no reason in these arguments. Women should be given equal rights. They would not become degraded or lose their womanhood in taking part in politics. To admit that we have become degraded. He denied that Newfoundlanders were even as corrupt in politics as the peoples of the other British Colonies, and he spoke with both experience and from what he had read with the introduction of women into politics we could hope for the improvement of the moral standard in public life. Women will be more anxious for the home, health and education of the people. It was natural to expect to see the women carried more away by emotional feeling than men Some one had said women's sphere is the home. I would rather say home is the women's sphere not that she should be confined to that, but that is where her greatest interest is After all the greatest portion of our Legislation dealt with the home. He did not think that the passage of the Bill would bring about a women's party, nor that the women's vote would be a sex vote. He did not believe the vote would affect the party vote so as to change the balance of power very much, as they would naturally vote on all sides of politics. It would be a matter of deep regret to have men and women parties which would create an unfortunate antagonism. The passage of the measure would add 100 per. cent. to the voting power of the people, but will not upset the party balance. In conclusion he wished to sincerely congratulate the women on the great victory achieved, which had been won by hard work and zeal, and he hoped, as in the Lower House, the Bill would pass without a dissenting voice.

HON. MR. ALDERDICE—I desire to record my suport to the measure now before us.

The enactment of this Bill renders nothing more than simple justice to the women of Newfoundland. It is bound to be productive of much good.

As regards the age qualification. A limitation is set in this respect. As time moves on no doubt this will be altered.

I have not the slightest doubt but that the placing of the vote in the hands of the women will be the means of raising the tone of our politics.

Let us hope woman's instinctive desire for moral as well as physical cleanliness will demand a clean living, honorable type of legislative representative.

Mr. President, it requires no ingenuity of mind to persuade ourselves into supporting this Bill.

Everyone of us, within his own particular circle, has knowledge of perhaps scores of fine high minded women who are as fully qualified as any of us to take on the full duties of citizenship.

It is not towards these outstanding types of womanhood that my thoughts travel, but rather to the woman not so fortunately circumstanced. I refer to the woman whose sole occupation, and I am afraid whose sole recreation, is centered in the care and management of the home. Her whole life is spent in service for others. Wherever there is sickness or sorrow she is there. Oft times her life is one long sacrifice. It is to be feared she has never had the time to read, much less discuss, the questions of the day.

Into her hands we are now considering the placing of the power of the part, I have no fear; for I feel sure her sympathy and support will ever be with that which is right and true.

Mr. President, I have mentioned the word sacrifice, and I am wondering if I might from my place here connect this virtue with the name of one who gave up her life in the service of others. Hers was indeed a noble sacrifice. Her life remains for ever an example of all that is good and fine in womanhood and Sir, through you, I would ask the honorable members of this House to permit a remembrance of her life and death to enter into their thoughts when they are about to record their votes at this, the second reading of the Women's Suffrage Bill.

HON. MR. MacNAMARA—I just want to say a few words on this measure, and may state that I am already committed to this bill inasmuch as I voted for it several years ago when serving as a City Commissioner, and you will possibly remember that the right for the women to vote was incorporated in the City Charter, and it is interesting to note that the women property holders in the city registered their votes for the first time in the last Civic Election held in 1920 or 21, I do not know which.

The great part women took in the war and the great part they are taking in the industrial world to-day has pretty well outlived the unreasonable prejudice that existed in the past against their having the right to use the Franchise, and when we consider that all the enlightened and self-governing Dominions save "South Africa' have Woman Suffrage we certainly can't be astray here in copying Great Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand in granting this privilege to the women of Newfoundland.

It may be just as well, however, to remind women voters when they get the privilege of voting they will automatically get a full measure of citizenship, and in return for this privilege will I presume be liable to serve as jurors, and in this way will be obliged to share the responsibilities of serving the State, and perhaps eventually have the experience of being on a manslaughter or murder case.

However, I hope it will be a long time before they are pressed to serve His Majesty the King in this particular.

I am sorry there is no literary provison in this Bill as I am persuaded that a person unable to mark a ballot should not have the privilege of doing so—more particular in this case with women voters.

The girl members of a family have better opportunities of learning to read and write than the boys—who are often obliged to work early in life to help the family income, and there is hardly any reason why an illiterate woman voter should have the right to mark her ballot paper.

It is about time that we heard the last of "How is the illiterate vote?" and it occurs to me that now is an opportune time to do something to wipe out this sad reflection on our intelligence—and if possible have a clause inserted in the present Act allowing votes only to women able to mark their ballots.

Now that the Schoolmaster is abroad and with the likelihood of compulsory education in the near future it is not too much to hope that after another few years that there will be no such thing as illiterate voting in Newfoundland I have much pleasure in supporting the second reading of this Bill.

HON. MR. POWER had great pleasure in supporting the second reading of the Bill. When it came before the Council some years ago, he and the late Hon. John Browning were strong supporters of the measure and he had not changed his views since then. The women of Newfoundland in his opinion were as intelligent as any others and our neighbours had given the franchise to women so why should not Newfoundland do so He gave his unbounded support to the Bill.

HON. MR. MURPHY said it was the first time in his recollection where such a gathering of women was present, and that they did not do all the talking but believed when the opportunity occurred both on the floors of the House of Assembly and in the Legislative Council they would be able to sustain themselves with those

(Continued on page 10.)

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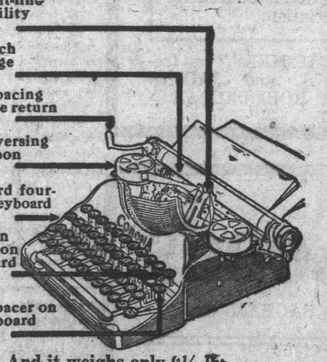

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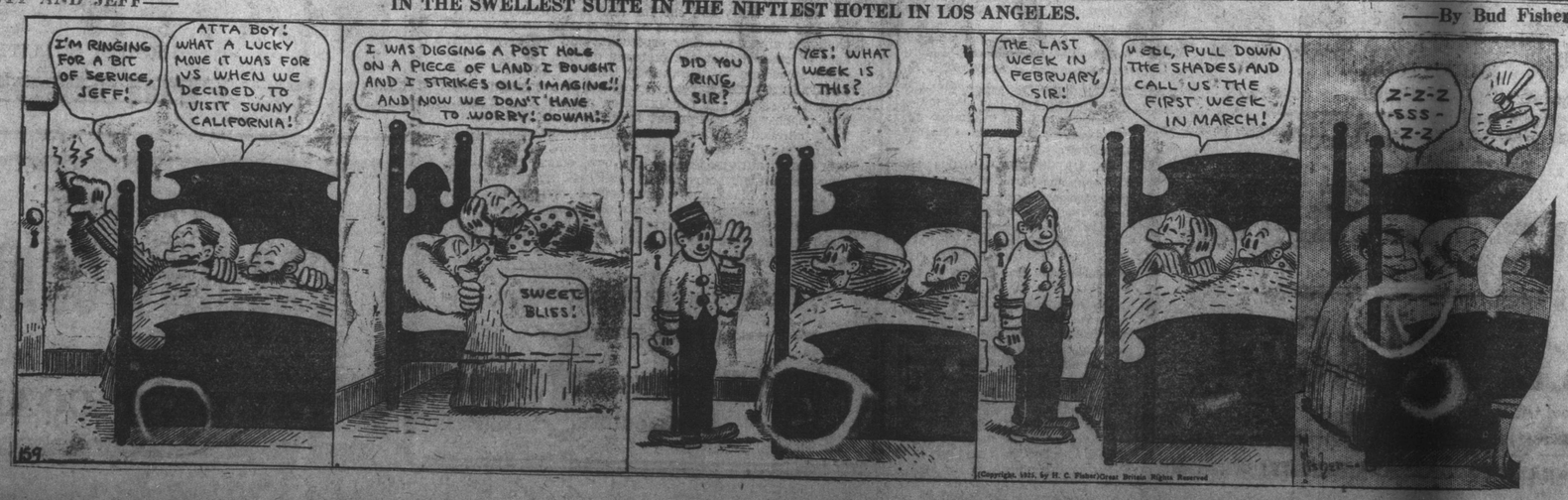

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