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HEADQUARTERS: 55-57 PRATT STREET, HARTFORD
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new
1917

SUFFRAGE NEWS AND NOTES.

By Annie G. Porritt.

The most important suffrage news this week comes from Canada. ~~Five~~ out of the nine provinces of Canada have granted votes to women. The provinces in each case have granted the vote freely and generously--giving all that the province could give. How much this "all" was has been a matter of controversy. In some of the provinces the provincial legislature has complete control over the matter of the franchise. In all the provinces at the present time the provincial electoral lists are accepted as the basis of the Dominion elections. But in Saskatchewan and Alberta the constitutions granted by the Dominion Parliament in 1905 were not so liberal or inclusive as the constitutions of the provinces which voluntarily came into Confederation, nor as the constitution of Manitoba which was created into a province in 1870; and it is now claimed that the women have a right to vote for members of the Dominion Parliament in Ontario, British Columbia ~~New Brunswick~~ and ~~Manitoba~~, but not in Saskatchewan and Alberta.

To clear up the difficulty a resolution was introduced into the Dominion Parliament last year by Mr. Fugsley, an ex-Minister, and a Liberal, extending the Dominion franchise to all women enfranchised by their own Provinces. This resolution was not satisfactory and the Government refused to support it. The matter had no immediate public importance for no election of Parliament was expected to take place last year, and the question was postponed to the present session.

Last week a new and much more sweeping resolution was introduced in the House of Commons at Ottawa. The Resolution is as follows:--"That in the opinion of the House the question of extending the franchise to women should engage



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engage the attention of the government at the present session." in the debate that followed it was pointed out that much confusion would ensue if there were an election under present circumstances. If the women voted in Ontario, British Columbia and Manitoba, it would certainly be the case that some opponents would challenge their right to do so, and if they were prevented from voting, the women would challenge the result of an election from which they would claim that they had been wrongfully excluded. The result would be that the elections would remain in doubt.

The whole ground of the present condition of the franchise was gone over. It was pointed out that Parliament had the supreme control over dominion elections, but that so far parliament had been content to accept the voters' lists of the provinces. The clause of the Dominion Elections Law establishing the provincial lists as the lists for Dominion elections is as follows: "The qualifications necessary to entitle any person to vote at a Dominion election in any province shall, except as herein otherwise provided, be those established by the laws of that province as necessary to entitle such person to vote in the same part of the province at a provincial election."

The exception noted here occurs in a later section which reads: In the Provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta...every male person shall be qualified to vote." This limitation to "male persons" in these two provinces is emphasized in the oath which may be administered to any elector. This oath begins: --"You do swear that you are of the male sex and a British subject". Of course it is evident that no woman could take that oath, and the exclusion of women from the Dominion franchise in these two prairie provinces is hardly questioned.

The general feeling in parliament was that it was time for parliament to decide for all the women of Canada whether or not they should be allowed to vote. It would be possible, no doubt, for parliament to exclude women from Dominion elections even in those provinces where they already have

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the vote. The authority of parliament in Canada is supreme, and there is no doubt whatever of its power to prescribe the franchise for Dominion election. But there was no evidence of any desire to do this. The representatives from the provinces in which women vote are in a majority in Parliament, and they are urging the government to act in favor of the women. The more likely step will be that women will be admitted to the Dominion franchise all over the Dominion, even in those provinces which have not granted the provincial franchise.

In any case Sir Robert Borden, the Premier, has pledged himself that the question of the suffrage for women shall be considered and decided before there is another parliamentary election. It can be decided only in one of two ways--either by making clear that the admission to the provincial franchise shall carry in every case admission to the Dominion franchise; or by removing the sex qualification entirely so far as elections to the Dominion Parliament are concerned.

Two points are cleared up by this debate in the House of Commons at Ottawa:--the first is that already the women in three provinces have the right to vote in Dominion as well as in Provincial elections; and the second that no parliamentary election will be held in Canada until the position of the women voter has been clearly defined, and that this definition will certainly extend the Dominion franchise to the women of Alberta and Saskatchewan, and will probably extend it also to the still unenfranchised women of Quebec and the Maritime Provinces.

Sir Wilfrid Laurier, who from 1896 to 1911 was Premier of the Dominion and who is now the leader of the Liberal Opposition, has never been counted among the friends of women suffrage. Nevertheless in the debate he took the position that Parliament ought to make clear that the women who were enfranchised by their provincial legislatures enjoyed also the Dominion franchise. "The peace, order and good government of Canada", he said, "require

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that we should make it clear that in all the provinces which have given the franchise to women in respect of provincial elections, the franchise should be given to women ~~in respect of~~ for Dominion elections as well." This statement from their leader makes it certain that there will be no opposition from the Liberals when the Government brings in its measure for securing the franchise rights of the women. With regard to further extension of the franchise Sir Wilfrid Laurier was less liberal, but in this he does not speak for all his followers, many of whom are pronounced suffragists.

"I do not care for instance, continued Sir Wilfrid, "to give the franchise to the women of my own province (Quebec). I belong to a gallant race, which I think, always takes a fair view in matters pertaining to the female sex, but I do not want to give the franchise to the women of my own province, because they do not seem to desire it."

Sir Wilfrid has at once been taken up by some of the women of his province. He is asked how he knows that the women of Quebec do not want the vote, and a long list of women's associations of that Province, many of them Catholic association is quoted to show that women have gone on record as favoring votes for women, even in Quebec. It is also pointed out that women, especially the French-speaking Catholic women of Quebec, are to a large extent inarticulate, but that this lack of speech does not necessarily imply content with their condition. "When Balaam's ass found her tongue", continues the protest as printed in the Montreal Gazette, "the first thing she did with it was to complain of injustice and tyranny. It must not be forgotten that few women are free agents, that in most cases they are bound hand and foot by tradition and convention, and that their economic dependence makes a large number of them reluctant to express themselves in opposition to their so-called lords and masters."

Early next month--on June 2nd--will appear the first number of the new woman's paper--"The Woman Citizen". Three papers are being merged to form

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the new journal--The Woman's Journal of Boston, the Woman Voter of New York and the National Suffrage News--the organ of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. The publication of the new paper is being undertaken by the Leslie Woman Suffrage Commission, Inc., a fact which ensures that every subscriber will get much more than her money's worth when she receives the paper.

Miss Alice Stone Blackwell, who has so long conducted the Woman's Journal and whose editorials are welcomed by tens of thousands of readers every week, becomes a contributing editor of the Woman Citizen, which will contain every week some of the invaluable paragraphs of fact and comment which Miss Blackwell knows so well how to write. There will be news of present activities from all the states and there will be a wealth of matter which will aid every suffragist to understand better the arguments for suffrage and the duties of women as citizens.

The Woman Citizen is adopting for its motto the words of President Wilson in his war message to Congress:--"We shall fight for the things which we have always carried nearest our hearts--for democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own governments." This motto defines the aims of suffragists as exactly as if President Wilson had had them primarily in mind. It also upsets completely the false premises of those Antis who claim that to give women the ballot would be undemocratic, because a supposed majority of the women do not want it. It says nothing about whether people want a voice in their own government or not. Democracy means that they have a right to such a voice, and if a majority of other people want to exclude them from their right, it only argues that that majority is undemocratic and is acting totally beyond the rights of democracy. It is no part of democracy to shut other people out from their rights. If a majority of men vote against giving votes to women, that majority votes in favor of tyranny over a subject sex.