

THIRTEEN YEARS' EXPERIENCE

OF

WOMAN SUFFRAGE IN WYOMING.

Hon. John W. Hoyt, Governor of Wyoming, in his recent message to the Seventh Legislative Assembly of Wyoming, thus gives the result of thirteen years' experience of woman suffrage in that Territory.

THE GOVERNOR'S MESSAGE.

JANUARY 12, 1882.

Gentlemen of the Council and House of Representatives:

In bidding you welcome to the halls of legislation, I also offer you my congratulations; for you are convened under circumstances most auspicious. You, gentlemen of the legislative assembly, represent not only a larger constituency of citizens, in proportion to population, than is to be found elsewhere on the globe, but a constituency nearly half composed of a class everywhere in the world regarded as the most watchful guardians of public as well as private virtue, and you should be considered, therefore, as holding in solemn trust the guardianship they would exercise.

Woman Suffrage, although resting on equity, supported by reason, and confirmed by experience, has hitherto gained but partial acceptance as a principle of political philosophy. It commands more and more of public attention in many portions of our own land and in other countries whose political institutions look toward freedom of the people. But to-day the new territory of Wyoming is the only spot on the earth where the political privileges of women are equal and identical with those of men. It was a bold and gallant stroke on the side of reason and of justice long delayed, that act of our first legislative assembly; and what wonder that the eyes of the world have been turned on Wyoming ever since?

Elsewhere, objectors persist in calling this honorable statute of ours "an experiment." *We know it is not*; under it we have better laws, better officers, better institutions, better morals, and a higher social condition in general than could otherwise exist; not one of the predicted evils, such as loss of native delicacy and disturbance of home relations, has followed in its train; the great body of our women, and the best of them, have accepted the elective franchise as a precious boon, and exercise it as a patriotic duty; in a word, after twelve years of happy experience, woman suffrage is so thoroughly rooted and established in the minds and hearts of this people that, among them all, no voice is ever uplifted in protest against or in question of it. For these reasons, also, there rests on us the obligation to so guard and elevate

the social order as to make of Wyoming an ever-brightening star for the guidance of this new, grand movement in the interest of human freedom.

WYOMING SPEAKS FOR HERSELF.

The *Cheyenne Daily Leader* says:

The law conferring upon women the right of suffrage was enacted in 1869, at a time when the people of Wyoming were almost unanimously opposed to it. The situation was accepted with good nature and a general disposition to give the law a fair trial. At the end of two years, Gov. Campbell, in his message to the legislative assembly, expressed himself on the subject as follows:

There is upon our statute book "an act granting to the women of Wyoming Territory the right of suffrage and to hold office," which has now been in force two years. Under its liberal provisions women have voted in the Territory, served on juries and held office. It is simple justice to say that the women entering, for the first time in the history of the country, upon these new and untried duties, have conducted themselves in every respect with as much tact, sound judgment, and good sense, as men. While it would be claiming more than the facts justify, to say that this experiment, in a limited field, has demonstrated beyond a doubt the perfect fitness of woman, at all times and under all circumstances, for taking a part in government, it furnishes at least presumptive evidence in her favor, and she has a right to claim that, so long as none but good results are made manifest, the law should remain unrepealed.

A two years' trial, therefore, gave the ladies another chance, and while our legislators were disposed to dissent from the governor, the law was permitted to remain on our statute book.

Two more years passed by, and we give here Gov. Campbell's opinion of Woman Suffrage and its effects, after an experience of four years. The governor says to the legislators:

The experiment of granting to woman a voice in the government, which was inaugurated for the first time in the history of our country by the first legislative assembly of Wyoming, has now been tried for four years. I have heretofore taken occasion to express my views in regard to the wisdom and justice of this measure, and my conviction that its adoption has been attended only by good results. Two years more of observation of the practical working of the system have only served to deepen my conviction that what we, in this Territory, have done, has been well done; and that our system of impartial suffrage is an unqualified success.

The legislative assembly, coinciding in the governor's views, wisely refrained from tampering with our election laws, so far as concerned women, and consequently received the commendation of their constituents.

Before the end of the ensuing two years, we had another executive, Gen. J. M. Thayer, formerly a United States Senator, a gentleman experienced in public affairs, and familiar with legislative matters. In his message to the Legislature, Gov. Thayer pays the following compliment to the people of Wyoming:

Woman Suffrage has now been in practical operation in our Territory for six years, and has during the time increased in popularity and in the confidence of the people. In my judgment, its results have been beneficial, and its influence favorable to the best interests of the community. A right or privilege, once granted, is not easily surrendered. In this case it is difficult to perceive any reason why it should be.

At this time Woman Suffrage had become one of our popular institutions, approved by all; even its most bitter enemies had been made to succumb to its beneficent effects, and the boldest politician of the male sex had ceased to agitate a repeal of the law.

WYOMING SPEAKS AGAIN.

The *Laramie City Daily Sentinel* says:

We assert here, then, that Woman Suffrage in Wyoming has been in every particular a complete success.

That the women of Wyoming value as highly the political franchise, and as generally exercise it, as do the men of the Territory.

That being more helpless, more dependent, and more in need of the protection of good laws and good government than are men, they naturally use the power put into their hands to secure these results.

That they are controlled more by principle and less by party ties than men, and generally cast their votes for the best men and best measures.

That while women in this Territory frequently vote contrary to their husbands, we have never heard of a case where the family ties or domestic relations were disturbed by it, and we believe that among the pioneers of the West there is more honor and manhood than to abuse a wife because she does not think as we do about politics or religion.

We have never seen any of the evil results growing out of woman suffrage which we have heard predicted for it by its opponents.

On the contrary, its results have been only good, and that continually. Our elections have come to be conducted as quietly, orderly and civilly as our religious meetings or any of our social gatherings, and the best men are generally selected to make and enforce our laws.

We have long ago generally come to the conclusion that woman's influence is as wholesome and as much needed in the government of the State as in the government of the family. We do not know of a respectable woman in the Territory who objects to or neglects to use her political power, and we do not know of a decent man in the Territory who wishes it abolished, or who is not even glad to have woman's help in our government.

OFFICIAL DEMOCRATIC TESTIMONY.

Hon. N. L. Andrews, speaker of the House of Representatives of Wyoming (Democrat), in the *Boston Post*, says:

I came to this Territory in the fall of 1871, with the strongest prejudice possible against woman suffrage, and decidedly opposed to it in all its features. Yet, willing to be fair and candid on the subject, I became a close observer of the practical results of this innovation upon the rights of man. I have for three successive sessions been honored by an election to the Legislature of the Territory and twice as speaker of the House of Representatives, and my opportunities for seeing and judging of this matter have not been circumscribed; and I can now say that the more I have seen of it the less my objections have been realized, and the more it has commended itself to my judgment and good opinion.

And now I frankly acknowledge that under all my observations it has worked well, and been productive of much good in our Territory, and no evil that I have been able to discern. I am thoroughly convinced that it is the only true, consistent and honest method of exercising the right of franchise under our representative form of government; where we boast so much of intelligent freedom for the people. The only wonder to me is why the States of the Union have not adopted it long ago. There has been much said and written on the corrupt state of politics in all our large cities, but no one of the many political philosophers of the age has until now been able to prescribe the proper antidote for the political degeneracy of the day.

ANOTHER WITNESS.

Rev. Dr. Crary, presiding elder of the M. E. Church of Northern Colorado and Wyoming, says:

The statement has been made and widely circulated, that at the late election in the Territory of Wyoming "no women voted except those of the baser sort." I therefore deem it but just to say that I am well acquainted in Wyoming, having charge of the Methodist churches of that Territory, and that I know from many conversations held with women of the very highest character; from statements made to me by ministers, and by the highest officers of the Territory, and from my own personal associations with editors, lawyers, teachers, and business men, that all such statements about the women of Wyoming are utterly without foundation. The very best ladies of this Territory vote, and, as they generally vote on the right side of all questions, the lies told to their detriment originate with men of the "baser sort;" with defeated demagogues and disappointed strikers and the meanest kind of politicians, who hate the majority of the women because of their pure lives and independent ballots.

The women of Wyoming are an honor to their sex, and deserve the respect of all who wish good government.