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Page 10

Women Who Don't Want to Vote

Every year, Massachusetts legislators are petitioned to give suffrage to women. Last year three measures were brought to the attention of one or more branches of the General Assembly. These measures were: A proposed amendment to the constitution giving women full suffrage, a license suffrage bill, and a municipal suffrage bill. All three were defeated. "The Remonstrance," a little four-page anti-woman suffrage journal published annually at Boston, rejoices at these defeats.

It is to be presumed that these annual petitions emanating from Massachusetts woman suffragists are what call out the annual numbers of "The Remonstrance." But the paper does not confine its attention to Massachusetts. It has cheering words for anti-woman suffragists in many states of the Union. The organization of women that publishes the paper is

a long-named society – to wit the Massachusetts Association Opposed to the Further Extension of Suffrage to Women. The members of this association believe that the great majority of women “do not want the ballot, and that to force it upon them would not only be an injustice to women, but would lessen their influence for good and imperil the community.”

We do not find many facts in “The Remonstrance” to support the claim that, if women voted, the community would be imperiled, but figures are given to show that the “great majority” of women don’t want the ballot. Take the way women vote on school questions for example. “The Remonstrance” gives the following statistics from Chicago and Cleveland, with the remark that, they are “significant;”

CHICAGO

Women registered in 1894 to vote on school questions: Less than 80 percent voted.

Women registered in 1896; 5,636. About 50 percent voted.

Women registered in 1898; 1,488. About 75 percent voted.

CLEVELAND OHIO

Women registered in 1895; 5,831 of whom 4,845 voted.

Women registered in 1896: 2,728 of whom 1,632 voted.

Women registered in 1897: 408, of whom 228 voted.

Women registered in 1898: 82, of who 20 voted.

The registration and vote of women in Boston on school questions, for 16 years can be seen from this table:

YEAR.	Registration.	Vote.
1881	1,119	1,026
1885.....	2,238	2,063
1886.....	1,193	878
1887.....	837	725
1888.....	20,253	19,400
1889.....	10,689	10,051
1890.....	7,935	7,439
1891.....	6,008	5,428
1892.....	9,992	9,510
1893.....	10,296	8,915
1894.....	11,091	8,733
1895	12,073	9,049
1896	10,340	6,417
1897	9,262	5,721
1898	8,723	6,201
1899	10,385	7,090

“The Remonstrance” thinks that it is a question whether the growth last year will be permanent, or whether, “as has happened so often in the past, this vote on the vital question of the public schools will prove a fluctuating quantity.” To give an idea of the situation in New York state, the paper quotes from a letter sent January 7, 1899, by Charles R. Skinner, state superintendent of public instruction, to the Brooklyn auxiliary of the New York Anti-Suffrage Association. Mr. Skinner wrote:

Replying to your inquiry of the 6th, I advise you that so far as we have been able to secure statistics in reference to the participation of women in school meetings throughout the state, we find that less than 2 percent of the women take advantage of the power to vote at school meetings conferred by the law of 1880.

In February, 1898, the Legislature of Oregon, after “hasty consideration” – as “The Remonstrance” puts it – adopted a resolution to submit to the people a constitutional amendment conferring full suffrage upon women. This proposition will be voted on next June. “The Remonstrance” lets it be known that “representatives of the large majority” of the women of that state are aroused over the question. But, asks some suffragists, is this not because they want to vote? Bless you no; according to “The Remonstrance” the ballot is the last thing that they want. They have

formed an Oregon branch of the Massachusetts anti-woman suffrage society with a long name, and are out with an address to the voters of Oregon. Here are a few extracts from the address:

We believe that only a small percentage of the women of our state ask or desire the ballot. Our school elections prove as do those of every state in the Union which permits women to vote at such elections, that the great majority of Oregon women do not use the ballot even in school matters, in which they may be presumed to take special interest on account of their children.

We believe that the majority should rule in this as in other political matters, and that a small though eager minority of our sex should not force the ballot (and its attendant privileges of sitting on juries, and running for offices) upon the far larger number of women who do not desire to vote. We have no quarrel with our suffragist sisters; but we protest against their being regarded as representatives of the true opinion of Oregon women upon this vital subject.

We also believe that the adoption of this suffrage amendment would necessarily lead to serious complications in both the political and social conditions of the state, and that such complications would be harmful to the state in every way.

We ask you especially to record your vote on this amendment because, although any intelligent voter of this state knows that an overwhelming majority of his sex, as well as ours, are opposed to suffrage for women, yet there is a danger that the minority vote will be rallied to the polls by the suffragists, while the majority neglect to cast their votes against the amendment.

“The Remonstrance” prints the anti-woman suffrage platform on the first of its four pages. On the last page appears a list of the defeats of woman suffrage in 1897, 1898 and 1899. To the 1900 list, the association publishing the paper hopes to add an “anti” majority in the state of Oregon.