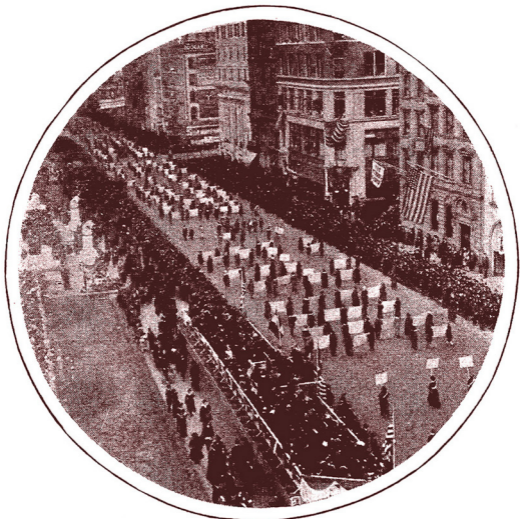


The Independent

Entering the Promised Land



A million women signed the petitions carried in this last march for woman suffrage in New York

Four Interviews Concerning Suffrage

By

Donald Wilhelm

WOMEN seem to have hung their rope ladders on the gates so long kept shut by their political lords and masters and climbed up the mossy old walls behind which for ages they have been condemned to water the vines and wait. And now it looks as tho they might draw their ladders up after them. For, as Governor Calvin Coolidge, the Republican candidate for Vice-President, admits, theirs is the power and the glory—and the responsibility, too. In other words, the Canaanites, the zealots of this changing day, have entered Canaan, and now perforce must cultivate it and make it flower supremely.

“But in national affairs, the touchstone of all affairs, how shall women do that best?” I asked no less a person than Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Democratic candidate for Vice-President, who for seven years has been Assistant Secretary of the Navy and is by common reputation one of the best informed men in Washington.

He enunciated his “message” to American women straightway:

“How shall women best express themselves in our national life?” Mr. Roosevelt repeated. “Well, read two papers, one representing each side. Read the platforms and the statements of the issues presented by the candidates. Get the national rather than the local point of view. Then make up your mind.”

He went on to explain:

“My fundamental thought is that women voters have to face the same danger that men voters have to face, or an even greater danger—the danger of getting their information about public questions from one side and taking that information as the absolute truth. Please understand, too, that I am not suggesting that women should read a Democratic paper and Democratic statements only. I am asking them to read both Democratic and Republican papers and statements, then to make up their minds. If they do that, and get the national rather than the local point of view, they will improve the entire running of our Government 50 per cent in a very few years.

“The great majority of women voters have come into the franchise so recently that they are not bound by the party traditions or inherited tendencies that men are bound by. Man, the average voting man, is more or less influenced from the age of fourteen up by the politics of his father, with the result that most men voters instinctively have a more or less distinct party trend. On the other hand I do not subscribe to the talk about

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women being emotional when they come to make up their minds. When it comes to making up their minds I can't believe women are any more emotional than men."

It was then suggested that the advent of the enormous woman electorate is much like the advent of a new state. "How then," the Secretary was asked, "shall women exactly express themselves in national affairs? With the ballot, merely?"

"Absolutely no," he replied, emphatically. "The most, and the least, and the best that women can do in and for the nation is for them exactly to express themselves not only with the ballot but also in the other ways that men express themselves. They ought by all means to seek public office, not for the office but for the service they can render the nation in office. I have no doubt on that score. In the various bureaus and boards that I have worked with the presence of women has without question improved the general tone of things and, I think, broadened efforts and made them more business-like."

"And how else should women express themselves?"

"Well, in a broad way, both collectively and individually, as men do. Thru their organizations. Individually, too. I hope, however, they will not put much faith in perfunctory propaganda directed at legislators. To illustrate, I observed when I was in the New York State Senate that as soon as measures of any large importance came up propaganda for or against these measures would appear—printed postal cards, for instance, or telegrams, furnished by some organization or other and sent to constituents to be signed and forwarded. Soon I paid very little attention, and I think legislators generally do, to such perfunctory communications that express no individual point of view. But when I received a personal call from a constituent I found unusually that he had given the matter in hand no little thought, and I knew I could learn something from him. He came to educate me, and I wanted to learn. Again, when I received a long, hand-written communication expressed in an individual's terms, I knew it meant individual thought and I gave it ten times the attention I gave a form letter, card or telegram."

The Secretary of Agriculture, Edwin T. Meredith, whose views, it was felt, ought to be of especial interest to women on the farms, next pondered the leading question. At the outset he granted that when rather recently he took office he was disconcerted by the traditional disharmony between Congress and the executive departments, which, he agreed, is disturbing when Congress and the President are of the same political faith and



all but disastrous to satisfactory governmental service when they are of different political faiths. He added that he believed women are too practical and direct long to endure such quibbling and cross-purpose. "Women," he smiled, "are quite too accustomed to bringing home in their market baskets what they go shopping for."

He added: "I feel that women are going to want and to demand better service on the part of the Government—better laws, more efficient management of public affairs, also the elimination of political interference and patronage."

Miss Anne Martin, candidate for United States Senator from Nevada, believes that "it is necessary for the welfare of the nation that women's viewpoint should be expressed in government"

It was suggested that the hundreds of women who attended the political conventions saw very clearly how, in both the major parties, professional politicians "interfered" by bargaining their influence for office.

"Men in politics," the Secretary replied, "usually belong to one of two groups. There is one great group who want their party to win because they want its policies applied for the good of the nation. There is another group who want their organization to win in order to secure patronage. I feel that women will not in the main belong, in the near future at least, to either of these groups, but that they will go into politics to get

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specific things done. It will be easier now for them to get things done, for when they express themselves to Congressmen and Senators, or State legislatures, those in office will know that half of their constituents are women. My thought is that women can and will accomplish a vast deal, largely from their own firesides, by education—by the creation of public opinion. It may be doubted if any great and enduring change in any nation's life was ever achieved except by change of public opinion. In general, I think women instinctively will accomplish most by devoting themselves to causes—to the improvement of the tone of politics, abolition of child labor, better health, better education and citizenship—causes such as these."

Causes, yes! Causes rather than presidential candidates, in this election surely, many leaders say. "But what kind of causes?" I asked a progressive United States Senator who has fretted the Republican old guard greatly by his liberalism.

"You want to know, for your own information," he replied, "what causes women can champion with best results to our national life?"

"Exactly."

"I'll tell you in a minute. They ought to take up the whole question of popular government. They ought to learn, they ought to establish schools in which to teach, the principles of popular government and the processes by which the people can control the politicians. Some of these principles are the initiative, the referendum, the mandatory primary, the preferential ballot and the short ballot, the use of the publicity pamphlet, the use of corrupt practices acts. It will never be possible to have a Government that is as good as honest people



Mayor Miller (center) and the four councilwomen round her defeated an all-man ticket for the city government of Jackson, Wyoming, this year. Two husbands ran for office in opposition to their wives, but were beaten. Jackson used to be a pretty fair sample of the "bad town" of the wild and woolly West, but even the men are strong in their approval of its petticoat government now

desire until principles and processes such as these are in effect."

But the writer doubts, so far as women are concerned, and apparently most of the experienced leaders of women also doubt, if now, when women have barely come of age politically, they could be rallied in support of causes as fundamental, and as abstract, as these that the Senator suggests. "For at this juncture," Miss Anne Martin, the first woman candidate for the United States Senate and now a second time candidate, told me, "women must not, of all times, risk the ground they have already gained."

"They must play safe?"

"Yes."

Then shall women express themselves by their sweet, clinging-vine appeals to galantry?

That would be to build the future of women on the most insecure foundation in the world. "In the South especially," one Southern woman, a national committee-woman in the Democratic party, said in an interview—"that is a great danger, a far greater danger than in the West, for instance."

"Then, by smashing precedents?" I asked Mrs. Annette Abbott Adams, the



Mrs. Annette Abbott Adams, a Californian, is the first woman to serve as Assistant Attorney General of the United States. "There are many men," says Mrs. Adams, "still slow to give women credit even when they have done good work"

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first woman—a California woman—to serve as an Assistant U. S. Attorney General.

“Precedents?” she pondered, with nice discrimination, “or conventionalities?”

“Well, isn’t it true,” I countered, “that when club women find a club constitution in the way they write a new constitution—every year if necessary?”

She merely smiled.

“Then,” she was asked, “how shall women exactly express themselves?”

“Why, by the use of the ballot, of course,” she answered. “That’s the interesting thing—the ballot gives women the power given men.”

“But aren’t women at a disadvantage, when men have had control of the parties all these years?”

“Yes,” she granted, “we are hampered by these long years in which the nation has neglected to make use of its woman-power. There is no use to deny that, but,” she added cheerfully, “I think we will soon qualify.”

And now, in the matter of entering public office: Should women strive behind the counters too?

Miss Martin answered decisively, in an interview. “It is necessary for the welfare of women and of the nation that women’s viewpoint should be expressed in government. And why? Because women are not as men; theirs is a ‘social motherhood’ men cannot know.”

And how? “I believe,” Miss Martin answered, “that women should be candidates for state legislatures and for both branches of Congress.”

And should they serve in office in the executive departments?

Without question. Scores already are in executive positions in Washington and elsewhere, in the executive departments. And why not? Would not a new state justly share in such responsibilities? One woman, Mrs. Frances C. Axtell, one of the three commissioners of the United States Employees’ Compensation Commission and for two years its chairman, has without question, one of her associates said, been able better to understand and judge of injuries received by women, and other ills and their cure, than a man could do. Again, Mrs. Helen H. Gardener, now one of the three civil service commissioners, whose rank is just short of Cabinet positions, and the first woman to hold that high office, indicated in an interview that she is amazed by the enormous complexities confronting anyone who attempts to get order and equality of conditions, pay and promotion, between grades, between men and women, up and down the great ranks of the 700,000 federal employees, a very large percentage of whom are women. One can see, then, that aside from the question of the rightfulness of fair representation of women’s natural interests in government, there are reasons enough why women should hold executive positions in the governmental departments.

“Why in the world shouldn’t women as well as men occupy governmental positions for which their experience qualifies them?” the Assistant Attorney General, Mrs. Adams, inquired.

“I confess,” I replied very hastily, “that for the life of me I can’t see why they shouldn’t!”

She added again that she couldn’t see that women’s interests in good government are different from men’s.

She was assured that since in fact the Canaanites had at last entered Canaan I for one was for calling them in numbers from where they dwelt to be given places in the land for which they had labored.

“That,” she answered, “should be a question of personal qualification.”

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"With women?"

"Yes—and with men!"

"And if the qualifications are the same?"

"Then there's an obligation for equal representation. As I said, it shouldn't be a question of sex but of personal qualification. And I should like to add that the women who go into governmental positions ought to give their best efforts to their jobs."

"And why, particularly?"

"Because there are still many men who doubt. Circumstances are such that there are many men who are slow to give women credit even when—"

"Yes, even when—?"

"Even when they have actually done good work."

Washington, D. C.

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