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Daughter of the House

By Thomas M. Fraser.

Ottawa June 10—As soon as the franchise was extended to the women of Canada it was realized by the old members of the House of Commons with foreboding that, sooner or later, the novelty of a woman in their midst must soon follow. They did not hail the innovation with enthusiasm or delight. Parliament here, as well as in the old country, is a very fine and comfortable club; where the members are not only provided with all possible aids to work and to loaf with the greatest degree of comfort, but are fed on the best the land affords at a rate which involves an annual deficit of a considerable amount—and to crown it all, are paid the handsome sum of four thousand dollars a year, together with passes and other perquisites. They did not desire to see an Eve enter this Paradise.

The Progressives have their points but they have certainly played hob with politics and parliament, in more ways than one. It was not that they did not learn the rules of the game quickly enough; when the proposal was made to increase the sessional indemnity from twenty-five hundred to four thousand dollars a year, there was not a cheep out of these sticklers for economical and democratic government. They do not pass up anything in the way of those little sessional emoluments fit in to their convenience as well as any of the other and older parties. But whether it is for good or ill, to them belongs the credit or responsibility of introducing the first woman to parliament.

Had it not been for the Progressive movement, it would probably have been some little time before the older and more conservative seat would have reconciled itself to the idea of being represented by a woman. There still prevails a belief here that "the women should keep silence in the synagogue." But on the crest for the Progressive wave in Ontario, the first woman member, Miss Agnes McPhail, slipped in to the House, and enjoys the distinction, if she should never have any other, of figuring in our history as the first of her sex to penetrate these historic and dignified precincts. Unfortunately, Miss McPhail began to talk long before she reached Ottawa. She was a novelty, and the Toronto newspapers made the most of her. She freely gave interviews, and talked not wisely but too much. She told the men reporters what she expected to do when she reached Ottawa, and she told the women reporters what she expected to wear. In fact, so much was said about the latter, that there seemed a danger that she might come garbed in motley. When she actually arrived, her costume was very inconspicuous, although recently she has been affecting a brilliant "heaven" blouse which has caught the eye of the galleries. Lady Astor told us here that she had adopted for herself a sort of parliamentary uniform of black and white.

Whatever may have been their prejudices, the old guard prepared to give her courteous treatment, a fair field, and even more favors than are usually extended to a new and unknown member. On the opening day, when the house was about to adjourn to the Senate chamber to hear the speech from the throne, Sir Lomer Gouin crossed the floor of the House and made Miss McPhail welcome with true Gallic courtesy. Other members followed his example and on the return to the chamber Hon. W. S. Fielding accompanied Miss McPhail. Her first feeble flights at parliamentary oratory were received with sympathetic references and kindly applause.

Now, Miss McPhail has herself emphasized the point that she is representing not the women alone, but all the electors of her constituency of South-east Grey; and has repeatedly urged in the House and elsewhere that she be treated in all respects as an ordinary member. One way, therefore, be perfectly frank and say that since entering the House the new woman in politics has not given the slightest indication that she is qualified or equipped to play the part of parliamentary representative, or that she has thought deeply or at all on the subjects to which she occasionally addresses herself.

This criticism is offered after having read Miss McPhail's speeches on the stump, her interviews in the press, and her attempts at speaking in the House. A failure through difference on her maiden attempts in parliament would have easily been understood, and would have created only sympathy without disposing anyone to a final judgment. Very many parliamentarians, including Disraeli, have made a failure on their first attempt to address the House. But there is no such word as diffidence in the bright lexicon of the member for South-East Grey. A more self-possessed person never addressed Mr. Speaker. She speaks loudly and distinctly and without the slightest trace of self-consciousness or embarrassment. Her perfect poise leaves no doubt that if the new lady member had anything to say, parliament would easily hear it all. Alas, she has not.

Miss McPhail's manner and intonations are querulous. Her speech-making consists of emitting little squibs of critical comment, without anything approaching an attempt at sustained speech or argument. Her longest effort thus far has been the unfortunate occasion when she arose and read twelve closely-printed pages from Premier McKenzie King's book, "Industry and Humanity,"

which one of the labor members had thrust into her hand for the occasion. Neither her preceding nor following remarks were such as to make the long reading particularly appropriate; so that the comment of the Prime Minister himself, who followed her, was very much to the point. He said: "I am sure that my honorable friend who has just taken her seat will not be surprised when I say that I agree whole-heartedly with the greater part, in not all, of what she has said." On this occasion the House lost its manners completely. The reading was prolonged to such an extent—and Mr. King's book, it must be recalled, is not in the class of light literature—that almost the entire audience absolutely turned its back on the lady, and carried on a series of conversations which arose to a prolonged hum, and made Miss McPhail's robust voice almost inaudible—the only time such a lapse from etiquette can be recalled. Miss McPhail's attempts at speech-making seem to be mainly to create an opportunity for emitting sententious phrases like the following:—

"But do you know what I thought before I came to this House? I thought the laws were made for the people; but I know now that that is not true—people are made for laws." "I am in a minority in the House of Commons. I hope I shall not be popular, for if I am, then I know I have been a failure."

Outside of Parliament the lady member has been even more unhappy in her utterances. With singularly bad taste she allowed herself to be quoted, in a Toronto paper as follows:—"Miss McPhail jocularly referred to Premier King as 'Little Willie'. 'The other day,' she said, 'I spoke and spoke to try and get 'Little Willie' to get up and say something, but he would not. He sat tight and never budged. They told me I was splitting hairs, and I said: 'It is not your parting it to look and see if there is anything inside.' This manner of referring to the Premier of Canada in had taste even in cheap attempts at humor in partisan papers and periodicals; by virtue of his office, if for no other reason, he is entitled to be treated respectfully. Coming from a member of the House and the (presumably) lady member, at that, it might fairly be said to be lacking in dignity. But the quotation carries a still more severe indictment of the member for South-East Grey; she is not entitled to whatever fame this not very witty observation might bring. She is brazenly plagiarizing. The remark about splitting hairs was not made by her, but by Mr. Meighen, and was not addressed to the Prime Minister.

In a recent address to her constituents, the new member undertook to give them an insight into some of the horrors of the place to which they had sent her. "Parliament," she said, "is a house of temptation; and when you fall for everything in the Green Chamber, you go to the Red Chamber (the Senate)." What this may mean is difficult to say; but the simplest explanation is that the new woman member is simply trying to raise the hair and make the flesh creep of the folks back home. If it means, as it seems to mean, to insinuate that new members of the House are subject to bribery or other undue influence—which is the obvious meaning—it is just foolish talk. The Ottawa Journal very properly commented on this statement: "We can only hope that when knowledge comes, wisdom will not linger, and that Miss McPhail will realize that when she returned the courtesy, the consideration and the chivalry with which Parliament has welcomed her with a thoughtless gratuitous sneer, she hardly played the game."

Frankly, there is not much in this "appreciation" of the new woman in parliament that is appreciative; but candour and frankness in such a case are desirable. Miss McPhail will probably be the forerunner of other female members of parliament. For the sake of the feminist movement it is very desirable that the women who come to parliament shall be of such a calibre as to command and hold the respect of the male portion of the House and of the country. They must expect as frank criticisms as is extended to their fellow-members; and they will probably be criticized even more frankly because of the novelty of their position and the fact that so much more is expected of them. And South-East Grey has done nothing at all as yet to justify the hope and belief of many of us that the entrance of women into politics would elevate and dignify the tone of the House.

SABBATH SCHOOLS HOLD CONVENTION

Prince Edward County Well Represented at Annual Meeting.

The annual convention of the Prince Edward County Sabbath School Association was held at the Methodist church, Cherry Valley, on

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June 7th. Fred Newman, mayor of Picton, presided. In addition to the reports from the departmental superintendents there was an inspiring address by T. F. Harrison, of Cobourg, on "Mistakes to Avoid in Sunday School Work." Clayton Burr, the secretary, said there are twenty-seven Sunday schools in the county. At the evening sessions the nominating committee reported as follows, and the appointments were made: President, Fred Newman; vice-president, F. W. C. Kent; secretary-treasurer, Clayton Burr, Bloomfield; departmental superintendents: boys' work, Ernest Case; girls' work, Miss Winifred Pearce; adult department, Mrs. G. Hobson; home department, Mrs. James Wild; teacher training, Rev. A. E. McCutcheon; temperance department, Rev. William Millar; missionary department, Mrs. F. W. Young; auditor, T. P. Smith.

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Late Francis Emmons Buried

The funeral of the late Francis Emmons took place from his late residence, Sixth street, to St. Mary's cemetery at 10 a.m. today under the direction of James Reid, undertaker. Dean Starr officiated. The casket was banked with beautiful flowers expressing the esteem and affectionate regard in which the deceased was held by relatives and friends whose deep sympathy goes out to Mrs. Emmons and the bereaved family in their sad and irreparable loss.

The Holiness Movement, Bishop's Mills, expect to hold a series of gospel tent meetings in Levi Robinson's grove, commencing Sunday, June 11th. Hearis may agree though heads differ.



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