

Woman Suffrage

By Miss Anne Martin

Chapter XLIII.

From the *History of Nevada*, edited by Sam P. Davis, Vol. II, pp 780-785 (1913)

The movement to enfranchise Nevada's women and give them full electoral and constitutional rights with men is not exclusively local, nor is it sporadic or ephemeral. It is part of the great world movement for democracy and freedom which is one of the dominant characteristics of the history of the nineteenth century, the realization of which will be the crowning achievement of the twentieth century. The establishment of this sounder democracy, which for so many decades has been the dominating influence in the thought and action of the dreamers of this world will create greater equality of opportunity for every human being, irrespective of sex, and many of the evils of our time will be eliminated by a process of evolution toward a higher and completer type of civilization.

That this great movement is not "anti-man," that it has not produced sex-antagonism, is proved by the fact that there are more than thirty men's leagues for woman suffrage in the United States, with a national organization and headquarters. There is also an international organization of men for woman suffrage.

When a democracy based on human instead of sex-rights is established, there will be less waste and destruction of human material by blind government Juggernauts which cannot see their goal, there will be more and more conservation of human and social forces, and greater usefulness and happiness for a far greater number. We are living in great and stirring times. Every Nevada woman who joins and lends her aid to the cause of equal suffrage is assisting constructive forces which will make the world a better place, will help to evolve the dream of one generation in to the reality of the next.

The history of the woman suffrage question in Nevada is part of the evolution of a great human movement. Referring to the Journals of the Nevada Legislature from the earliest times, we find the Hon. C. J. Hillyer delivering a speech for woman suffrage in the Assembly on February 16, 1869, which should be preserved among the orations on human rights and liberty. At a time when equal suffrage had not been tried in any modern government (except in the Territory of Wyoming), and in the same year that the women of the State of Wyoming were enfranchised, we find this man anticipating every argument urged today for woman suffrage, now based upon practical experience and the good use women have made of the vote in Wyoming, Colorado, Idaho, Utah, Washington, and California. His peroration is significant and interesting historically as well as intrinsically. At the time he spoke the Civil War and the great life of Lincoln were but four years ended :

"To my Republican friends I say : Look at your laurels. They are green and fresh, and magnificently abundant, but they may wither and fade, and your brow yet go uncrowned, unless fresh garlands are gathered. With us the past is at least secure. I would not barter for the highest political preferment which this nation can bestow the satisfaction that I have a part, however insignificant, that I share, however humbly, the rich glories which cluster around the history of our yet youthful party. But we must remember that we have

succeeded, not because we were the Republican party, but because we were right. We have won because, in a progressive age, we have been the part of progress ; because when the nation was marching we have marched in the van ; because we had the courage to pluck out, from the overwhelming mass of prejudice in which it was buried, a principle of eternal truth ; dared boldly to inscribe it on our banners and to march to battle with the watchword of universal freedom Beware of a halt The inexorable law of progress will not modify itself to suit our movements ; it will not stay its operation through either respect for our party name or past achievements, but, will as relentlessly consign us to defeat and oblivion as it has for the same cause there consigned our Democratic predecessors.”

“Here is the great question of the hour”

Although greeted with “round after round of applause” at the conclusion of his speech, “the loneliness of those who think beyond their time” was this statesman’s portion, as the proposed amendment to strike the word “male” from the suffrage clause of the Constitution was shortly afterward laid on the table. So far as attempted legislation goes, the woman suffrage question appears to have been quiescent for some years. Resolutions to amend Article II, Section I of the Constitution with reference to *male* suffrage were dealt with by successive Legislatures, notably in 1883, 1885, and 1893, but there seems to have been scant effort to reform the Constitution for the benefit of women.¹

An attempt was made in the Legislature of 1887 to secure a constitutional amendment as follows, taken from the Senate Journal of 1887, p. 321 : “Resolved by the Senate, the Assembly concurring, that Section I of Article II of the Constitution of the State of Nevada be amended by striking out the word ‘male’ in said Section I.” This resolution was lost by a vote of 7 for to 13 against. A resolution to amend the Constitution “relative to the right of suffrage” was defeated in the Assembly in 1889 by a vote of 12 for and 27 against. From the years 1885 to 1895 there were efforts on the part of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union of the State to bring the matter favorably before every successive Legislature through petitions, containing names from all over the State. We find one of these petitions briefly dealt with in the following laconic report in the Assembly Journal of February 15, 1889 : “Your committee on public morals . . . beg leave not to report on petitions on woman’s suffrage, as it has been before the house heretofore (sic). J. B. Williams, Chairman.”

As stated, these petitions continued to be presented to every Legislature, in spite of successive discouragements. In 1895, we find a petition from the W. C. T. U. relating to woman suffrage laid on the table in the Assembly, in conjunction with a joint resolution to amend the Constitution by striking out the word “male.” In spite of the efforts of Mr. H. H. Beck to rescue the measure, it was finally rejected by a vote of 14 for to 17 against, according to the Assembly Journal for 1895, pp. 74-75.

Following this defeat the Nevada State Equal Suffrage Association was organized in McKissick’s Opera House on October 29, 1895. Mrs. J. R. Williamson, of Austin, was elected president, Mrs. P. S. Marshall secretary, and the names of the members are a roll of honor in themselves : Miss E. C. Babcock, Mrs. D. B. Boyd, Miss H. K. Clapp, Mrs. C. Gulling, Mrs. J. N. Evans, Miss Mary Henry, Mrs. A. Chism, Mrs. Blossom and Mrs. Williamson, of Genoa ; Mrs.

¹The investigation of the Senate and Assembly Journals for the purposes of this article has been done by Miss Clara Smith, president of the College Equal Suffrage League of the University of Nevada.

Rinckel, of Carson ; Mrs. Shaw, of Virginia ; Mrs. Elda Orr, Mrs. Rousseau, Mrs. E. A. Morrill, Mrs. Van Buren, Mrs. May Gill, Mrs. Vandeventer, Mrs. Wentworth, Mrs. M. E. Pratt, Miss Martha Wright, Miss Eva Barnes, Mrs. C. A. Richardson, Mrs. William Webster, Miss Mary Taylor, Mrs. Flint, Mrs. C. B. Norcross – these and many others who have passed on were active suffragists in the days when, as in the life of Susan B. Anthony, to be a suffragist, to be an upholder of justice to women, meant to be ridiculed and misunderstood. All honor to these courageous, public-spirited women who kept the flag flying that we may win victory today!

The society started under splendid auspices. A letter from Susan B. Anthony, advising non-partisan methods, was read at the first convention, Rev. T. Magill and Dr. Stubbs, then recently appointed President of the University, spoke, and very successful meetings were held. Through the personal efforts of Mrs. Williamson, of Austin, the State president, some counties were organized, and the work throughout the State was advanced by the tour of Miss Susan B. Anthony and Dr. Anna Shaw in 1896. Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt, too, visited Nevada in the interests of equal suffrage, and spent some time in Reno as the guest of Mrs. Orr.

Through the efforts of the society a resolution was introduced into the Legislature of 1897 to amend the Constitution by striking out the word “male.” Majorities were pledged to the measure in both houses. It passed the Senate, but was finally defeated in the Assembly by a vote of 14 for and 16 against, one of the members pledged to the bill, voting in the negative. The women seemed disheartened by this defeat. During the following years petitions continued to be presented to the Legislature to enfranchise women, and backed by women’s organizations the age of protection for girls was raised from 14 to 16. But the work of the Nevada State Equal Suffrage Association lapsed, though interest in the question was kept alive by local clubs and organizations like the W. C. T. U. in different parts of the State.

Undoubtedly stimulated by the English militant movement, which has quickened the suffrage agitation all over the world, and influenced more directly perhaps by the agitations in Washington and California, the Nevada Equal Franchise Society was organized in Reno in January, 1911. Mrs. H. Stanislawsky was elected president, Mrs. Grace Bridges secretary, and a joint resolution striking out the word “male” from the Constitution, and further providing that there should be no denial of the elective franchise on account of sex, was pushed through both houses of the Legislature and approved on March 18, 1911. For the first time in the history of Nevada a measure enfranchising women passed both houses, and this by the decisive vote of 17 to 2 in the Senate and 32 to 13 in the Assembly. Credit for this victory is due to the disinterested assistance of State officials and members of both houses, and to the woman suffrage committee led by Mrs. Stanislawsky and Miss Felice Cohn.

In February, 1912, the State Society was reorganized in order to prepare for a state-wide campaign of organization and education to ensure the second necessary passage of the resolution in the Legislature of 1913. Mrs. Stanislawsky had moved to California and resigned the presidency, and Miss Anne Martin was elected president, with Mrs. Grace Bridges corresponding secretary. Mrs. Clarence Mackay gave her support as honorary president. In this new administration the Nevada Equal Franchise Society became a member of the National American Woman Suffrage Association and of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance. An advisory board composed of representative men from every county in the State was gradually formed. The counties were successively organized with local women as chairmen. Meetings have been held in various parts of the State, addressed by President Stubbs, Judge Farrington,

Bishop Robinson, Rev. Charles F. Aked, of San Francisco, Mrs. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Rabbi Martin Meyer, Judge Norcross, Senator Francis G. Newlands, Hon. Key Pittman, Miss Anne Martin, Mrs. Stanislawsky, and others.

A State press service has been inaugurated. A large number of Nevada newspapers have declared themselves in favor of equal suffrage. A leaflet entitled "Women under Nevada Laws," by Miss B. M. Wilson, of Goldfield, one of the State vice-presidents and chairman of the Esmeralda County Branch, has been published by the State Society in an edition of 20,000.

A branch of the National College Equal Suffrage League, of which Dr. M. Carey Thomas, of Bryn Mawr College, is president, has been founded at the University of Nevada. It has a growing membership among the college students and alumnae.

The State Federation of Women's Clubs has endorsed equal suffrage. Several of the county delegations to the next Legislature are solid for suffrage, a safe majority of both houses has been pledged to pass the resolution. The membership of the State Society has increased twenty-fold in the last six months, the women of the State are alive to the question, and votes for women in Nevada seem absolutely assured in the immediate future.

On November 5 four new states were added to the six already enfranchised : Oregon, Arizona, Kansas and Michigan.² Nevada, bounded by California, Oregon, Idaho, Utah and Arizona, is now absolutely enclosed in suffrage territory. With the non-suffrage States, colored black, and the equal suffrage States, white, Nevada appears as a big black island surrounded by white suffrage territory. We are marooned on our own black island. The time has now come when Nevada, always generous and chivalrous in other respects, will follow the example of her eight neighbors as well as of one Middle Western and one Eastern state, and give this measure of justice and freedom to her women. Let this isolated non-suffrage blot be removed from the fair face of Western territory. Let Nevada stand shoulder to shoulder with her progressive and enlightened neighbors on the broad ground of equal suffrage, of political equality and morality, of justice to women for the good of the human race!³

² At this time of writing, Michigan, which won by a good majority, has been counted out by corrupt influences.

³ Since the above article was written the Nevada Legislature convened, and has passed the woman suffrage amendment by a vote of 49-3 in the Assembly and 19-3 in the Senate, January 30, 1913. The amendment having passed two successive Legislatures is now ready to be ratified by the voters at the next election, November, 1914. Illinois was added to the list of suffrage States for national and statutory offices by the State Legislature on June, 1913. The Territory of Alaska also enacted equal suffrage in 1913.