

SPEECH BY MISS SCOTT

(PUBLIC MEETING AT NORTH SYDNEY, APRIL 2, 1894.)

FROM THE NORTH SYDNEY.

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Scott said: We have been working nearly three years to obtain this one of simple justice for the women of New South Wales, and we can feel at length that we are gaining ground, for we see that the people of this country are (thanks to New Zealand) also beginning to look upon this question with interest and favour. We see a great change in public opinion in the attitude of various politicians and the press. But still there is a great giant prejudice to overcome in the minds of many excellent people, who fear nothing so much as any predicted change in home life and in the gentleness and charm of woman. We see, when we discuss this question, and face the objections to it, that they either proceed from prejudice or imagined self interest. It is surprising to see men, reasonable in all else, governed in this case by a sentiment, wholly devoid of reason, giving us prophecy for argument; and though they are constantly declaring that 'they never know what a woman will do,' now take to asserting most positively all the dreadful and selfish things she will do when, forsooth, she has a vote! The virtues of woman were not bestowed upon her by man, or by a government; nor, again, are these virtues enhanced by seclusion and slavery, - else the Turkish woman, carefully guarded and only allowed to show her eyes in the street, is at a greater height of civilisation than the freer and more independent woman of English race. Half the evils in the world seem to me to result from man and woman (like the intellect and heart), trying to solve problems separately, instead of working together hand in hand, head and heart. Politics have been well defined as "national housekeeping," and I think if you look round the universe, from Russia to France, from England to America, and even in our own Australia, you must confess, when you reflect on national debts, and the poor groaning under heavy taxation, prisons filled with criminals, asylums with lunatics, chiefly through gambling and drunkenness, charities (?) like benevolent asylums and infants' homes which are really a disgrace to a country! When you reflect on all these things, you will confess that the national housekeeping managed by men alone is not an unqualified success! Men are exceedingly clever at remedies, floating loans, and reconstructing, and the people gaze with admiration, forgetting that what we do need is a little more of that prevention which is better than cure, and a little less of that political spirit which is graphically expressed in the old proverb - 'Everyone for himself and the devil take the hindmost.' We want less partyism and more patriotism; and I agree with the chairman of the Government Congress in America when he declares that though 'women will bring some inexperience into political life,' yet on the other side they will bring 'an overwhelming wealth of public spirit far greater than the men of the country now possess, and that their unselfish interest in public questions will be of inestimable value to the State.' And lest you should consider this statement is merely prophetic, I would point out that in Wyoming where women vote, there was in 1890 no public debt, but \$230,000 surplus in the Treasury, a smaller per centage of illiteracy than in any State or Territory in the Union, no women criminals in the prisons, no idiots in the State (though hundreds in other States), and only three insane - all men! What have been the accounts from New Zealand? They are unanimous in declaring that women in New Zealand, as in Wyoming, voted for men of character; that the new Parliament is ahead of the last in respectability and business capacity, and yet for radical reform. These are facts, and I would ask you if the people of New South Wales in the cause of patriotism can afford to ignore such facts? But you exclaim, 'Many women are so foolish, so unreasonable. Very true, and so are many men; and 'Heaven,' as Mrs. Poyser said, 'no doubt made them to match each other!' Do you deny a vote to wise and good men, because foolish and bad men exist? In the

case of men, you would say taxation without representation is tyranny, and yet women are taxed and have neither the direct, or what is more important, the indirect influence of a vote. It is often argued that a woman can be represented by her husband, father, or brother. Passing over the fact that many women have no such relatives, I would point out to you that women differ very widely from men - even from husbands - on such questions as intemperance, gambling, and immorality; and naturally so, as they, the women, are the chief sufferers from these vices. We object to slavery, however kindly slaves are treated, because it is wrong in principle that the destinies of one man should be confided to the keeping of another; and so it is equally unjust that the rights of one sex should be granted or withheld solely at the will and pleasure of the other sex. Unjust principles give rise to unjust laws, and women suffer as the working classes suffered in times past from this absence of political power. Before the Reform Bill was passed in England, people were never weary of repeating that the working men and their interests were sufficiently guarded by noblemen and gentlemen. But the workers pointed out then, as we do now, that they would rather have a hand themselves in choosing the lawmakers, and as they were taxed they would prefer to have a voice in controlling the national expenditure; and so we would prefer to have a voice in choosing those members of parliament whose salaries we have to pay. One objection to woman suffrage that is constantly brought before us, even by members of Parliament, is, that women would be influenced by priests or their husbands to vote in accordance with their wishes. This is very probable in many cases, but I fail to see that it is an argument against us. You do not deprive men of a vote because they are influenced by canvassers or drink, or because they are influenced by the press! Then, again, is it not simple justice that a married man with a family should have more votes than a bachelor? and that his wife, in her vote, should represent the family? Another argument is, that women cannot be soldiers, therefore they should not vote; but men, however small, weak, and sickly are not disfranchised. The idea of the ignorance of women is another objection which I must say might be advanced with just as much justice in speaking of half the men in the country; and if it is an advantage to have honest men in Parliament, then I must say I think women are much better judges of the sort of man to vote for, than many men appear to be; and I think very few women would care to trust a man with a seat in Parliament whose private life had been dishonest, whose conduct towards a woman had been mean, for they would argue with truth that men incapable of behaving honorably in private affairs would be equally incapable of behaving honorably in public affairs. As for the polls not being decent places for women, women have not been insulted in Wyoming or New Zealand, or even in New South Wales at municipal elections. My experience is that the roughest man behaves like a gentleman if he is treated like one; and if back slums full of sin and sorrow, hospitals full of loathsome disease - if these places do not contaminate good and pure women, but are all the better for their very presence, I am quite certain that polling booths will be the same. 'Husband and wife will quarrel!' If so it will not be the vote that is to blame, but the arrogance of the husband who has the presumption to consider that he, rather than God, should guide the conscience of his wife. The vote is an educator of the highest sort, because it teaches the people to think; and thought of any kind raises the people above mere money-earning, eating, and sleeping animals! What if mistakes are made at first by either women or the working classes? The world, like the individual, is the richer for honest, earnest mistakes. Freedom, independence, and responsibility are the best teachers either

men or women can have. A vote is mere material, which may no longer exist should the system of government be changed, but the principle of equality in sex is like that of race or color, a principle of liberty, and is a part of that eternal right and justice for which the noblest men and women have fought and suffered either physically or mentally from all ages unto the present day. Others again say: 'This legal equality will make women masculine.' To this objection I reply: 'Do men care for masculine women?' The answer is, 'No.' Therefore, you may be sure that the very natural feeling that women have to please men, will effectually guard the majority of women from being anything that the best men would not like; and so men, with a natural instinct to be pleasing to women, are more careful in manners and language when women are present. Women, we hear, would bring such feminine notions to bear on the laws; and a very good thing. Why should masculine notions have a monopoly? 'Many women do not want to vote.' This has been disposed of in New Zealand. But if some women do not want to vote, my friends, neither did many of the slaves in America desire freedom, nor did the blacks of this country desire a vote, or clamor for it; but for the sake of a great principle it was given to them. If you owed a man one hundred pounds that he neither knew of, nor wanted perhaps, would he suffer most, or you if you did not honourably do the just straight thing? And as for the objection 'women have no time to vote,' they have plenty of time to think, and to record a vote takes less time than gossiping or shopping. If working men have time to vote, so have working women. Gentlemen, cease to abuse ministries and M.P.s. Do not deceive yourselves, but realise that if they are not satisfactory, the fault is in yourselves as you have chosen them. Be no longer slaves to a narrow party feeling, but get your women votes, and let them help you, as they have helped the men of N.Z. to choose men of honour as well as brains to represent the nation. And my fellow-women, can you not see that a vote in the national life will help you to protect and purify that family life which has ever been your special care? Can you not feel that it is your duty to help men, and to inspire them to unravel those bitter problems connected with drink, gambling, criminals, and immorality? Would you leave your little daughters entirely to their father's care, however good he might be? and are you content to leave entirely to the care of men the little girls - the women of the State, whose life is cast in the dark places, and who cry out from the bondage of sweating dens, goals, and the streets? 'Are we not women and sisters?' Remember, I beseech you remember the sphere of woman is only limited by her capacity and unselfish devotion; and as for women's rights, how little do they affect us? It is enough for us to remember that there are women's duties which cannot remain stationary, but must expand and increase with every wave of progress and civilisation, so that it is with an awful sense of responsibility we hear those words of Ruskin: 'There is no suffering, no misery, no injustice in the world but the guilt of it lies with women. Men can bear the sight of it, but you, you should not be able to bear it.' The woman's cause is the latest but most important development of the cause of freedom. None the less freedom because, instead of viewing it through the misty glamour of the past (when results only are visible) we stand face to face with it in the light of the present. 'Freedom has always had to battle with prejudice, and those who sit on a rail till they see it is for their interest to come down.' Oh, you men to whom liberty means what it meant to the heroes of old, help us all you can; for you can never be free yourselves whilst your mothers, your sisters, and your wives are slaves!

Think through
in the dark in

Check one of these
Miss Keefe