

SOME THINGS THE MASSACHUSETTS LEGISLATURE

Of 1889 and '90 did for men, who have votes, contrasted with what it did for women, who have no votes.

BOSTON, JUNE 17, 1890.

The Massachusetts Legislature has adjourned. It was remarkable for many things. It dealt with the gypsy moth, and appropriated thousands of dollars on its account. It saved the scalp of the woodchuck, and left the little beast to devour the clover in summer time and to hibernate in the winter. It left the dogs to go unmuzzled, and the sheep to shift for themselves. It measured the length of a salable lobster, and saved his carcass from being broken in two, so that the purchaser may not be cheated with two halves that do not belong together. It left the little baby trout with his five small inches, to swim till he gets to be six inches long, and then he may be fried, poor thing! It made the feathers fly while it went after the chicken thieves, even venturing into the province of the courts to fix the penalty for the thief who gets away with five dollars' worth of fowls, and for him who steals only one dollar's worth. It trifled with the rights of the courts again in trying to settle the punishment of burglars who enter by day, and of those who enter at night. It spent much time upon butter and lard and oleo, and it pursued the English sparrow, and tried to find the weight of a dozen of eggs.

But the most remarkable action of the Legislature is found in the care it took of the right of men to vote. *Hitherto, if a man changed his residence, it involved the possible loss of his right to vote at the next election. But, to save to the human male his right to vote every time, the Legislature guarded him by a law, so that no change of residence can affect his right to vote at any election.*

Several gentlemen from Lowell and Lawrence and Lynn appealed to the Legislature for protection from a class of gentlemen who have a habit of changing their residence often and of never paying rent. They have the names of a thousand such "dead-beats." The gentlemen who had houses to rent got no protection from these frequent movers. But all the same the "dead-beat" had his right to move and to vote kindly cared for.

Then came up the case of men "guilty of infamous crimes," with the question whether, as a punishment for these crimes, the right to vote should be withheld from the criminal for ten years. But the right of the human male to vote was respected, and even with infamous crimes upon him he can still go unquestioned and deposit his vote.

It was proposed that the men who need "assistance to mark their ballots," presumably because they cannot read well enough to distinguish the party names readily, should have the assistance of a member of their own party to help them mark their ballots, but this did not pass. Still, however, there was the poll-tax which a man must pay before he could vote. But the Legislature declared by a majority

vote of both branches that the paltry tax of \$2 must not stand between a man and his right to vote. All this for men, who have votes.

Now, note the different treatment this remarkable Legislature gave to women, who have no votes.

We asked that women may vote who have no need of assistance to mark their ballots, who have not been convicted of crime, and who have been in the country long enough to understand somewhat of its institutions. We did not ask for full suffrage, but only that women qualified as above stated might vote for the men who would levy taxes upon their property and have the spending of their money, and that in the cities and towns where they live they might vote on questions of common interest to men and women. But the Legislature, so tender to suffrage for men, turned its heart to stone, and the House of Representatives, by a large majority, denied to all women the smallest shred of suffrage. There was indeed "a saving remnant" who stood for equal rights for women. God bless them! But, for the others, the historian has set down their shameful action, and the recording angel will not forget it.

Then women asked that a married mother may have the same legal right to her child that its father has, so that neither parent may dispose of the custody of the child without the consent of the other. But their petition was refused.

Then they asked that when a husband or wife borrows money of the other, the obligation to pay may have the same legal validity that it would in other cases of borrowed money. But their petition was refused. Now a husband may borrow the money of his wife and never pay a cent.

They asked that a woman whose husband is dead may have more than the forty days the law now allows to a widow to stay in the house without paying rent, while she adjusts herself to her new and hard conditions, with no man to help her. But the petition was refused.

Thus this Legislature has distinguished itself. It remains to be seen whether the same men can be returned another year. Meantime we have Bunker Hill, and Concord, and Lexington, and the harbor where the tea went over. We have the memory of noble men who "pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor" for the defence of the very principle for the application of which women have sought in vain for many years. The heroes of that old time redeemed their pledges with their lives. Surely, somewhere, they must have descendants who believe in representative government, who know that taxation without representation is tyranny no less to-day in the case of women than it was in the case of George III. and the colonists a hundred years ago. Where are they?

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