

LATEST INTELLIGENCE

FROM

THE PLANET VENUS

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IT may be reckoned among those things not generally known that within a short time direct telescopic communication, by means of signals, has been established between the earth and the planet Venus, and that at certain stations regular interchange of intelligence is now carried on. The results have hitherto been kept secret, partly, it is said, owing to the disappointment of the astronomers at finding in the new country but a mirror of our own, with an hereditary constitutional monarchy, two Houses, a civilisation in about the same stage of advancement as ours, and political and social institutions generally similar. The single remarkable difference presented to their notice is one they are loth to reveal, for fear, we believe, of the family discords it might possibly excite at home, and we are the first to acquaint our readers with the curious fact that in the planet Venus, though the present sovereign happens to be a king, all political business, electoral and parliamentary, is allotted to the women. Women only have the right to vote or to sit in the House of Commons, and the Upper House is formed of the eldest daughters of

deceased Peers. Politics, therefore, are included among the usual branches of ladies' education, but except in this respect their social condition presents no unusual features.

This monopoly by women of political power is as old as their system of government, and until a few years ago no one dreamt of complaining or of questioning of its wisdom. But a pamphlet advocating the enfranchisement of males has lately been published by a clever female agitator, and caused a considerable stir. It is not pretended that a majority of the sex ask or even desire the privilege. The plea put forward is abstract justice backed by possible expediency, and, the cry once sounded, arguments are not wanting, petitions flow in, idle men have taken the matter up and find supporters among the younger women, and last night a member of the Government redeemed the pledge made to her constituents last election, to bring forward a bill for removing the electoral disabilities of men. She has no lack of supporters, some sincere, some interested. Her greatest difficulty was in persuading the House to treat the measure seriously. The notion of admitting young cornets, cricketers, and fops of the Dundreary pattern to a share in the legislation, the prospect of Parliamentary benches recruited from the racecourse, the hunting-field, and the billiard-room, was a picture that proved too much for the gravity of the Commons. A division, however, was insisted upon by the original proposer. At this juncture the leader of the Opposition, a lady as distinguished by her personal attractions as by her intelligence, moderation, common sense, and experience, arose and made the following forcible speech, which we transcribe for the benefit of all such as it may directly or indirectly, concern :

“Madam,—Before proceeding to state my opinions on this question, or my reasons for holding them, I wish to impress on you a sense of the importance of the measure just brought forward, that it may at least obtain from you the attention it deserves. I must urge you not to allow party or personal, motives to blind you to its nature and bearings. The supporters of Male Suffrage are seeking not only to introduce a startling innovation into a system of government that has hitherto worked remarkably well, but in so doing they would tamper with the foundations of society, and in a blind cry for equality and suppositious justice ignore the most elementary laws of nature. The question is not a political, it is a scientific and physiological one. About the equality of the sexes we may go on

disputing for ever, but with regard to their identity there can be no manner of doubt. No one has ever ventured to assert it. Each sex has its special sphere mission—call it what you will, originally assigned to it by nature, appropriated by custom. What now are the special and distinguishing natural characteristics of the male sex ? Assuredly muscular strength and development. With less quickness of instinct, flexibility and patience than women, men are decidedly our superiors in physical power. Look at individuals, men of all classes - mark their capability for, nay their enjoyment of, exertion and exposure. If these do not naturally fall to their lot they find artificial employment for their faculties in violent games and athletic exercises; some indeed go as far as to seek it in the distant hunting grounds and prairies of uncivilised continents. This quality of theirs has its proper outlet in the active professions. To man, therefore, war and navigation, engineering and commerce, agriculture and trade, their perils and toils, their laurels and gains; to man, in short, all those callings in which his peculiar endowment of greater physical force and endurance of physical hardships is a main and necessary element. Those with superior mental gifts will turn to such scientific pursuits as specially demand courage, exposure, and rough labour. It is most essential that their energies should not be diverted from these channels. We should then have bad soldiers, bad ships, bad machines, bad artisans. Government, on the other hand, is no game to be played at by amateurs. The least of its functions claims much honest thought and watchfulness. Either, then, the manly professions will suffer, or else—and this is the worst danger of the two—the suffrage will be carelessly exercised, and the mass of new voters, without leisure to think and judge for themselves, will be swayed by a few wire-pullers, unprincipled adventurers, who, seeking only to feather their own nests, will not hesitate to turn to account the ignorance and preoccupation of the electors.

“Now turn to the woman. Her organisation no less clearly defines her sphere. With finer natural perceptions than man, less ungovernable in her emotions, quicker and clearer in intellect, physically better fitted for sedentary life, more inclined to study and thought, everything seems to qualify her specially for legislation. For the judicious application of general rules to particular cases, peculiar delicacy of instinct is required, and in no capacity have any but women been known to approach the ideal of government—that perfect rule—all-efficient, yet unfelt.

“Take the family as a rough type of the nation. To whom, at home, is naturally allotted the government of young children ? To the mother. To whom that of the domestic household ? To the mistress. Widowers and bachelors are proverbially the slaves and victims of spoiled children and ill-trained servants. In all such home, matters the husband defers to his wife, and would as soon expect to have to instruct her in them as she to teach him fortification, boxing, or mechanics. Little time or thought, indeed, has the professional man to spare for household superintendence; how much less for matters requiring such careful study as the government of a nation. The clergyman, wearied with his day's visiting, of the sick, teaching or preaching; the doctor after his rounds; the merchant or tradesman overwhelmed with business; what they require when their daily toil is over is rest, relaxation, not to be set down to work out complex social and political problems, to study the arguments for and against the several measures to which members offer to pledge themselves, and to form a judgment on the merits of respective candidates. What time or opportunity have they for qualifying themselves to do so ? But the wives of these men, on the other hand, have lives comparatively unoccupied, and of physical and intellectual leisure enough and to spare. Here, then, is a commodity ; there a demand and a field for it, and this surplus, so to speak, of time, strength, and attention with us has been always applied to the science of government, nor do I see how a happier or more judicious arrangement could have been made.

“I will proceed now to enumerate a few of the dangers to which the enfranchisement of men would inevitably expose us. Male voters will view each political question in a narrow professional light, irrespective of its justice or general expediency. Large proprietors will stand up for the game laws, eldest sons for primogeniture. Publicans, brewers, and railway directors will exercise a baneful, blind, one-sided influence on our counsels. An impartial debate or decision will soon become a thing of the past, fairness sink into the shade, and a majority of direct pecuniary interest turn the scale in all cases.

“Again, the bulk of the national property being in the hands of the men, the openings and temptations to bribery would be enormously increased. Few women have the power, had they the will, to offer bribes sufficient to suborn a constituency, but when millionaires are admitted to the suffrage we may expect to see parliamentary

elections bought and sold, and going like other wares, to the highest bidder.

“But there is a more alarming danger still. The muscular force of the community being male, an opportunity would be afforded for an amount of intimidation it would shock us now even to contemplate. Right has ever been might in our land. Shall we reverse our motto? Shall we, Who have ever taken pride in the fact that our counsels are swayed by reason and judgment alone—a fact from which men have benefited at least as much as women— invite the fatal indefensible element of force to enter in and meddle with our elections, and let the hustings become the scene of such struggles and riots as in certain countries where, by a singular distortion of judgment, the management of political affairs is thrust entirely on the men ? Supposing that the suffrage were irrespective of sex, and supposing it to happen that the men in a wrong cause were arrayed against and outvoted by the women in a right, would they not, as they could, use force to compel the women to submit ? And here we are threatened with a relapse into barbarism from which the present constitution of our State affords so admirable a guarantee. And that something of the sort, would ensue I have little doubt. Probably the next step would be to oust women altogether from the legislature—the standard of female education would then decline, and woman would sink lower and lower both in fact and in the estimation of men. Being physically weak, she must always, among the rough and uneducated classes, be especially exposed to ill-treatment. Of this in our country, I am happy to say, there are but rare instances, nevertheless. But there are lands where men monopolise the suffrage, and where a state of things exists among the lower classes—let us hope the upper and civilised orders do not realise it, for their apathy would otherwise be monstrous— which if widely and thoroughly known would be recognised as the darkest page of modern history, something to which a parallel, must be in the worst days of legalised slavery. Penal laws have utterly failed as a remedy, and it is obvious that they must always do so. What has been our guard against this particular evil? Is it not that point in our social system which raises woman's position, both actually and in the eyes of the men of her class, by entrusting to her functions of general importance, which she is at least as well qualified by nature to fill as man, and which we take care that her education shall fit her for, as a man's, necessarily unequal, semi-professional, and engrossing, can

never do ? Thus men have an irksome, thankless, exacting, life-long labour taken off their hands, which are left free to work out their fame and fortune ; educated women their faculties turned to the best account; while among the lower orders, the artificial superiority conferred on the female sex by its privilege of the suffrage, raising the woman's status in fact and in the eyes of her husband, acts as an effectual check on domestic tyranny of the worst sort, and the nation has the advantage of being governed by that section of the community whose organisation, habits, and condition best enable them to study political science.

“That any wrong is done to men by the existing arrangement, I entirely deny. Most of them are married, and it is so seldom that a wife's political opinions differ materially from her husband's, that the vote of the former may fairly be said to represent both. The effect on the sex itself would be most undesirable. It is a fatal mistake to try to turn men into women, to shut them up indoors, and set them to study blue-books and reports in their intervals of business, to enforce on them an amount of thought, seclusion, and inaction, so manifestly uncongenial to their physical constitution, which points so plainly to the field, the deck, the workshop, as the proper theatre for their activity. The best men are those who are most earnest and laborious in their professions, and do not trouble themselves with politics. Already they have sufficient subjects to study - special studies imperatively necessary for their respective occupations. Do not let us put another weight on the shoulders of those who, from the cradle to the grave, have so much less leisure than ourselves for reflection and acquiring political knowledge, or else, let us look no more for calm and judicious elections, but to see candidates supported from the lowest motives, and members returned by a majority of intimidation, bribery, private interest, or at best by chance, all through the ill-advised enfranchisement of an enormous body of muscular indeed, but necessarily prejudiced, ignorant, and preoccupied members of society.”

The honourable member here resumed her seat amid loud cheers. On a division being taken, the motion was rejected by an overwhelming majority, and the question of Male Suffrage may be considered shelved from the present in the planet Venus.

B.T. (Bertha Jones. The text was published in 1875.Ed. note)
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