

In 1850, Oregon's first Delegate to Congress, Hon. Samuel R. Thurston, enlarging a plan proposed by Mr. Linn, of Missouri, succeeded in securing the passage of an act known as the Oregon Donation Land Law. This act was chiefly remarkable because it recognized in its provisions the right of a married woman, *in propria persona*, to an equal share with her husband in its benefits, thus making Oregon soil the first part of the United States domain on which equal rights for women found a practical footing. This Donation Land Law, though exceptional as to particulars and temporary in duration, was destined to mark the beginning of an era of momentous import to the women of the present and the future. Under the provisions of this act, a woman, if married, was entitled to such equal portion of the public domain as might, under comparatively equal restrictions, accrue to her husband.

All of the married women who were living in Oregon at the time of the passage of the act, and all others who came to Oregon within the duration of the act, as well as many who were married while yet mere children in order to come within the provisions of the act, took advantage of its benefits and became free-holders. They resided upon and cultivated their own land, as required by law, and became its possessors *de facto*, although many of them in so doing had never troubled their heads about political rights. But the Members of Congress who had assisted them to the position of free-holders builded better than they knew. They were like the Puritans, who, in planting the standard of the cross in a new country, raised also the standard of civil and political liberty, although they knew it not.

The limitations of the Donation Land Law expired in a few brief years, but the effects remained and are to be seen to-day all over Oregon and Washington, which was once known as the "whole of Oregon," among the women who were recipients of its benefits, who yet live under their own vines and fig-trees, with none to molest or make them afraid.

But there were thousands of other married women, younger than they, or who failed to reach Oregon in time to secure the benefits of the act, who found themselves, like the women of other portions of these United States and Territories of America, in the condition of perpetual minority—classed with idiots, insane persons, criminals and Chinamen—and naturally enough they began to wonder if their right to acquire property was not inalienable. And although their general up-waking was not immediate, it was gradual and thorough; and as the years advanced and they saw more and more clearly the benefits to be derived by a few women from the possession and ownership of their homes, the query arose in their minds, "Why may we possess no lands?" And then the fact dawned upon them that, although it was only the comparatively few of the sex who had been so situated that they might avail themselves of the donation act, there was no good reason why all women ought not to be recognized as *persons*, under the law, equally with men, now and always. And they began to think, to ask questions; and the questions always resolved themselves into the one final query, "Why are we without a country?" One question led to another, till they said at last: "Isn't taxation without representation called *tyranny* in the Declaration of Independence? Don't the women who own the land pay taxes? And, since governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, and we are not allowed to give or withhold consent, why are women taxed at all?"

Gradually, as the years rolled on, these thoughts grew more definite and tangible, and at last, in the year 1871, more than twenty years after the beneficent foresight of women's friends in Congress had set the ball in motion, the first organized attempt was made to secure those rights to women which men had for a hundred years enjoyed, and which they had declared to be inalienable when applied to themselves.

As the sequel has thus far proven, the hearts of the men of the great Pacific Northwest were right toward women, even in the beginning. No sooner had we begun to agitate the question of equal rights than men responded to our plea; and the result was, first, the establishing, in 1871, and its maintenance ever since, of a weekly journal, the *New Northwest*, devoted to the promulgation of equal political and financial rights between the sexes; and secondly, to the respectful bombardment of biennial legislatures with the pleas, plans and purposes of women, who made the paper their standard-bearer, and who had learned to recognize the ballot as the basis of all rights under any government claiming to be "of the people and by the people."

Favorable legislation followed every attempt made by women to "secure those rights for which governments are instituted among men," but the final victory seemed each year afar off. Men appeared quite willing at all times to grant us favors. They were chivalrous, and, in a certain indefinable way, valiant and magnanimous, but they were slow to learn that woman was as complete in her individuality, her *selfhood*, as themselves.

But the agitation went regularly forward, and one by one the relics of the old common law were supplanted by new enactments, until women saw their civil rights acknowledged, and their property rights better defended every year. And at last men decided that their wives and mothers should be classed no longer with idiots, insane persons, criminals and Chinamen. So they proposed, in 1880, to amend the State Constitution by submitting to the next succeeding session of the Legislature a resolution which says, simply and grandly, "The elective franchise shall not hereafter be prohibited in this State on account of sex."

This proposition, which was acceded to by a large majority in both branches of the Legislature in 1880, and ratified in 1882 by an overwhelming vote, now awaits the final decision of the voters of the State at the approaching June election. It is this fact that gives us our prominence and makes Oregon the objective point of this Association's consideration now and in the immediate future. The way before us is plain and our duty is clear. The old statutory laws that enforced invidious distinctions between the property rights of men and women are nearly all dead and buried, and our women are now in the exact condition of the Colonists when the Declaration of Independence awaited ratification by the British crown. We have a hard, decisive, bloodless battle to fight; and those most interested—the women themselves—are armed with no ballots or other sinews of war with which to fight it. But we have right on our side, and we await the issue with confidence.

Washington Territory, which has from the beginning of the agitation of the great question that convenes us shared equally with Oregon in all that has been done to enfranchise one-half of the people, no longer figures among existing powers as a suppliant. The ban of disfranchisement has fallen from the shoulders of her women, representatives of whom are among us to-day, clothed with the equal political power which came to their sons unasked as soon as they had reached them to the age of 21 years.

In struggling to secure the final recognition of political rights to the women of Washington, I found it necessary to canvass the Territory over and over for upward of twelve years, holding meetings everywhere, traveling by stage, rail, steamer, and often afoot among the people, holding meetings in cities, precincts and villages, speaking sometimes in churches, sometimes in school-houses, sometimes in court-houses and public halls, and when, as occasionally happened, all these were closed against me because of existing prejudice against the cause, addressing the public in bar-rooms and offices of hotels, meeting discouragements often, but encountering a goodly degree of kindly assistance in all parts of the country, and in every case circulating the *New Northwest* and "writing up" the different localities in editorial letters, that the paper and its contents would be sought for and read and commented upon long after I had gone to other fields. To one who has not traversed these vast regions thus hurriedly alluded to, no brief outline can convey an idea of their magnitude, nor can such a person imagine the hardships connected with the work. But the cause grew and prospered, and each succeeding session of the Legislature showed marked progress among the people's representatives, until at last the work was finished by the assembly of 1883; and the immortal act that enfranchised the women of the State that is to bear the name of Washington, and thus make her the "mother of her country," reached its climax when Governor Newell signed the suffrage bill amid the mingling hallelujahs of booming guns and ringing bells. In Oregon the work has kept more than even pace with Washington, though, by virtue of her State government, she has a longer road to travel, and we can only reach the goal of our ambition by a more circuitous route. The same long, laborious, patient canvass has been made here as there, and the same obstacles have been met and overcome in carrying on the work. Distributing my own labors abroad equally on both sides of the Columbia River, I have traveled each year many thousands of miles, and spoken in each geographical division an average of seventy times per year, during a period of twelve and a half years, ~~devoting, making, at a low estimate, 1750 public appearances, or nearly five years of steady speaking.~~

Immediately after my return to Oregon (about April 1st), the campaign will begin in earnest. We must hold meetings in every precinct, and literally snow the country over with campaign documents. The canvass will be most expensive. The distances are great between points, and we need a vast sum to defray traveling expenses. We need speakers, we need documents, but, above all, we need money. Will you help us?

We are more than gratified at the success attendant upon our work thus far. Leading politicians of all parties are in perfect accord with our movement, and are working with and for us with the intent to win. The movement stands alone upon its own merit. The question with us is not one of expediency, but of right. We do not ask any man to give up his political or partisan bias, his religious or non-religious views, or his temperance or anti-temperance ideas. All we ask is that when he casts his vote next June he will vote "Yes" upon the pending Woman Suffrage Amendment. You are respectfully asked to join with us in this great campaign, to concentrate your efforts upon Oregon. Our neighbor women across the Columbia are watching us from their vantage ground with mingled feelings of hope for us and exultation among themselves. We believe that our fathers, husbands, brothers and sons are quite as chivalrous and progressive as their own; and we believe they will prove that our faith in them is well founded when the ballots are counted after election, and that we shall find ourselves invited to stand with them upon the broad platform of freedom, equality and justice, now jointly occupied by themselves and the men and women of Washington Territory.

The Territory of Idaho has also received considerable of my attention, and there is a strong and constantly growing sentiment there in favor of equal rights for women. It is among the probabilities that when next her Legislature meets she will wheel into line with all her people free.

Help us to win a victory in Oregon, and our success will lead at last to your triumph on this side of our common country.