

ML MS 38/37

item 4

### WOMANHOOD SUFFRAGE

LECTURE BY MISS ROSE SCOTT.

A lecture on "Why Women Need a Vote" was delivered by Miss Rose Scott in the School of Arts Hall, Pitt-street, last night. Mrs. B. Palmer (president) presided. There was a large audience, the majority of those present being ladies.

Miss Scott, who was received with applause, said the first thing to consider was what was a vote, and what did it signify. Briefly, it meant representation, having the power to voice or represent their wishes in the choice of men who were elected to meet together and arrange all those State affairs which partially affected women. Representation was of far more importance than the vote itself, because even if a man was ill and could not legislate he still remained one of the represented class, if that class was enfranchised. The word "franchise" meant liberty, freedom, so that this question was actually one of freedom. To be unenfranchised, therefore, was to be unfree. "A free nation was a nation in which the people governed themselves, as opposed to a nation in which the people were governed by others." In New South Wales men were free, but women were not, for they were wholly governed by men, and by submitting to be unfree women allowed men to regulate and arrange all those laws which related to children. It was doubtful whether many women had any conception as to what those laws were, or else they would for the sake of the world's children work for their own enfranchisement. Evil laws undoubtedly existed, and every day there were poor voiceless women and little children who suffered under them, and suffered terribly. There was no one in the world whose name shone forth as a social reformer who did not believe in the enfranchisement of women, for they all considered that it was at the bedrock of all reform. Why should they wonder at the low tone that so often prevailed with regard to public affairs when women were trained to believe that there were no rights or privileges for them? How could political affairs become lofty and noble when private greed and private monopoly in freedom were exalted and public rights ignored? There were many objections urged against giving women a vote, but why should absurdities be marshalled out as reasons why women should not vote. They were told glibly that men could represent women as to the Parliamentary vote. Such a responsibility was unworkable. The members of the male sex had the monopoly of the voting power. They had everything to do with the laws affecting taxation, divorce, marriage, and the management of little children, to say nothing of the laws affecting criminal women and girls. The representation of a vote was not only a means of power, interest, and education, but it was a means of protection. Who needed this protection most, the strong man or the weak woman? They had only to glance at statistics to see that there were thousands and thousands of women in New South Wales alone who were compelled to earn their living. Would not these women welcome protection from oppressive masters? Girls were paid wages so miserable that they could hardly keep body and soul together, and yet their employers were men, well-clothed, and not ashamed to ask the ill-paid, half-starved girls to work overtime without extra pay. The great reason therefore for which women desired the franchise was that they might ameliorate the condition of these workers, that they might protect the home and change the conditions of life so that every mother might be able to stay at home and make it most truly her sphere of work and rest. Any extension of the franchise to women had, too, been followed by greater legal protection of the enfranchised class. It meant legal protection for poor women and children, the appointment of more women inspectors to help and protect women workers, the payment to women of the same wages as men for the same work—(applause)—the appointment of police matrons, the better treatment of women in gaols and hospitals, registry offices, &c. It meant that they would have a voice in the State Educational Act, and it would allow women to have equal ownership with their husbands over their children. How different was the law in New South Wales at present in regard to the control of children. The franchise gave power to do justice to a suffering world, and if granted to women would make the sluggish and muddy stream of politics, especially in regard to laws affecting women, flow freely for the good of all. She therefore appealed to those present to work for the consummation of the franchise to women.

Mrs. James Cowan, of Western Australia, made a few remarks, after which a vote of thanks to Miss Scott, proposed by Miss Golding, and seconded by

SIR,—I have before me five parts of the article that has appeared in your paper against Womanhood Suffrage. I wish I had had the whole of it, but perhaps you will allow me to say a few words upon the five parts which were kindly sent to me from Balmain. The lordly manner in which your contributor takes as proved, all that he asserts, is both sad and amusing. Having disposed of one aspect of the question to his own satisfaction, he sails on to another, fancying that his little vessel has crushed for ever the waves over which he sails. He tells us that the Athenian women rose up *en masse* against a law made by Athenian men, and had the law annulled! If then, as he allows, the Athenian women had the sense to see that a law was injurious, and had the strength of mind to battle against it, can there be any reason why Australian women should not do the same? May we not be as good judges of the laws which affect women at the present time? The Athenian men in those old days seem to have had a considerable amount of common sense, seeing that they allowed the women to protest, and gave in to the law being altered. In our present system of civilization, a protest or petition from women a quarter of a mile long, signed by 200,000 women, is rejected as valueless by men, because women *have no votes*. What would the Athenian women have done in this case! Your contributor asserts that women are unfitted, as far as present education goes, to carry out the duties attendant on her enfranchisement, and asserts that only the rich amongst women have "time and money at their disposal for the pursuit of education." This argument applies equally to men, and therefore the natural inference drawn by your contributor is that the vote should only be given to men of riches and education. At the Public-schools an excellent education is equally available to both boys and girls, who need no riches to take advantage of it. I have also very good authority for saying that the girls take even more advantage than the boys of the opportunities offered them in this way. How many male electors "pursue political study" and yet have a vote! Women will not need political study to vote for a good honest man. If men thought more of the morals and less of the political party of the men they send into Parliament, it would be better for our country. Women suffragists do not wish woman to leave off being "a companion and help" to man, for they desire rather that she should be his companion and helpmeet in all things. Dozens of women can never be wives or mothers, because there are more women than men in the world, and no woman should consent to be a wife for the mere reason of being one. She is first of all a HUMAN BEING, and as that has a right to choose her own sphere just as much as a man has a right to choose his. Would men like women to choose *their* sphere for them, or say, "you men must not be soldiers or sailors, &c., because then you cannot properly attend to your God-given duties as husbands and fathers." Men and women have duties to themselves which are above and beyond those earthly relationships of father, mother, husband or wife. Let me tell your contributor that the better housekeeper and

ing and immorality. The family to be kept free from the germs of disease, though the poor mother scrub and wash her children twice a day. It is the gutter in the street that should be cleansed. We women have this out now, and we have "time and money" to spare for this also. "The prophet of doom," as Mr. H. G. Wells calls Mr. Huxley, says that Mr. Huxley is not infallible, no man who undertakes to teach us where her duty lies. She is a better judge of that than he can ever be. When Peter excited himself over the prophecy of John Christ said, "What is the will of the Lord thy God? I say unto thee, follow thou Me."—Your truly,  
R-S.

The extracts above referred to, which are too lengthy for publication, form No. 1 of the Envelope series of Leaflets of the Victorian W.C.T.U. and Alliance.—