EQUAL RIGHTS FOR WOMEN

EMPLOYMENT OF GIRLS.

DEPUTATION TO THE PUBLIC SERVICE BOARD.

Yesterday a deputation from the Woman Suffrage League waited upon the Public Service Board, and requested that equal opportunities, equal pay, and equal punishment should be made the rule for women employees in the public service, as compared with male employees.

Miss Edith Scott urged that the openings for women in the civil service should be increased, and more opportunity afforded for the employment of girls who had passed the required examination. She pointed out that the examination held in June, 1899, for postal assistants, out of 46 successful candidates, 23 were girls, while six other girls had obtained more than the minimum number of marks. Out of these 29 a large number still awaited employment. At the examination in December, 1899, for junior clerks, four girls passed and six others obtained the minimum number of marks. Yet only three out of the four successful girls had received appointments. With regard to the question of female employment, the inspection in the Census Department had been interrogated by the League, and had stated that the male employment in their department was hard and obilging. The gentleman in charge of the department was at the Census Office and stated that he found the men worked better when associated with women, and, generally speaking, that pattern was so far a success. The Government Statistician had also stated that two of the female junior clerks were superior to two male clerks, and that the company was equal to the average male-clerk. She urged the board to give women greater opportunity for employment in the public service.

Mrs. Ferrig asked that equal punishment for misdemeanors be given to women, that women be dealt out to no more than men, and that they be considered that at present "an offence" would be tolerated in a man which would cause a woman's dismissal.

The chairman (Mr. Doherty), asked Mrs. Ferrig to quote an instance.

Mrs. Ferrig again made general statements on the subject, and being repeatedly urged by the chairman to give a specific instance, she could only refer to a case in a department outside the control of the Public Service Board.

Mr. Wilson said that the question of the employment of female clerks had been under consideration in the public service, but as he pointed out that in no instance a female in the service had been charged with drunkenness, and let off with a strong caution, not repeating the fact that it was not her first offence.

Mr. Wilson urged Mrs. Ferrig should now mention specific cases to support her accusation that the board had given one.

Mrs. Ferrig again repeated the case outside the service.

Mrs. Martel urged the claims of public school teachers. The lady teachers, she said, had not paid the same salary for the same results as was the case with the male teachers. The girl schoolchildren had to pass the same examination as boys, and, whereas, girls passed higher than the boys, the system was such that the women who prepared for the examination received less pay than the male teachers. Very nearly as many girls as boys attended the public schools. There would be, in her opinion, much competition on the same. In the case of women going into competition with men, it was often they had to support aged parents.

The chairman, said, said that the question had been fully dealt with by the board in its reports of 1896 and 1899. In the latter report (which showed really the answer in the deputation), it had been stated that the board was endeavoring as soon as possible to carry out the intention of Parliament relating to the employment of women. The board regretted that the matter had led to so much discussion, but it was sure that the candidates who had passed the examination, bowing to the wishes of proper authority, would in the offices. Years have been entertained that the extension of the system will mean a loss of work for men and, possibly, lowering their salaries. The board say the apprehension is groundless.

No doubt the employment of women in such places as are suitable to them will have the effect of curtailing to some extent the employment of men, but this will produce a beneficial result to the State, because an equal number of men will be compelled to seek positions which women cannot occupy, and, therefore, will be available to engage in occupations tending to develop the resources of the State. The Postal Department continued the chairman, had given several women employment owing to the increase of business, and will continue to do so in the future.