

EDITORIAL

THE “MOTHER’S RIGHT” BEFORE THE MAYOR.

By DANIEL DE LEON

NO matter, of the many ticklish ones that Mayor Gaynor has had to grapple with, bristles with longer and sharper pricks than that which now lies before him—the “Equal Pay” bill, so-called, for public school teachers, just passed by the Legislature.

While it is true that the title of the bill—“Equal Pay”—is a misnomer; while it is true that many a woman school teacher, who strained for “equal pay,” objects to the bill because it is untrue to its name; finally, while it is true that much of the opposition that comes from male teachers hinges on the circumstance that the bill begins by lowering the salaries of some of these;—while all this is true, and all of it came to the surface at the hearing before the Mayor on Monday the 16th instant, nevertheless two notes are distinctly caught in the discussion. They are the note of Woman for better treatment, translated into higher pay; and the note of Man against this endeavor and in favor of keeping Woman focused to her present status, due to a realization on the part of the men that, true to the warning of Laboulaye, the uplift of Woman inevitably leads to the downfall of Man’s supremacy.

Looking at the “Equal Pay” bill from this angle of the question, what the Mayor is actually to pass upon is nothing other and nothing less than a phase of the now forward-pushing Mother-Right of old.

The “New Woman” is the name that several years ago was given to the type of women who were casting off tradition, and stepped upon fields thitherto held to be men’s own. The watchers of the phenomenon were keen enough to perceive that it meant a new departure. Shallow in sociology and economics, they could, however, not trace the root of the phenomenon to its source. It is the same phenomenon that the man teachers are now grappling with.

The phenomenon being now so much riper its objectionable features to the men

are all the more pronounced. When women enter the labor market they lower wages as a consequence of their raising the supply. In the instance of the schools, however, as illustrated by the “Equal Pay” bill, the activity of Woman is having the effect of lowering the wages of Man in order to meet the demand for equality. Thus a curious tangle of contradictions presents itself. Fairness, justice—two slogans on the lips of the women teachers—certainly demand higher pay for themselves. Yet fairness and justice would militate against the lowering of the salaries of the already underpaid man teachers. What are the women to do? Reject a raise of their own salaries because made at the expense of the men’s salaries? That would be to expect of them the impossible. Accept the raise, that would seem unjust and unfair. And yet, considering that it is male officials who leave to the women teachers no alternative but such unfairness and injustice, they push along that line. It is such a kink the Mayor has before him.

At the Mayor’s hearing, Dr. Berg, speaking in opposition to the bill, appealed to the Mayor to veto it, and thus put an end to the “unholy agitation” that the women teachers have set on foot. Well did Miss Grace Strachan meet the appeal with the statement that, veto or no veto, the agitation would go on unperturbed. Indeed it will—just because it is not an isolated affair, but a wave of a world-wide movement, one of the manifestations of which is the restoration in society of the Mother Right which the introduction of Class Rule overthrew, thereby degrading womanhood.

A learned Mayor, such as New York glories in having, may possibly know all about the Mother Right, its history, its fate, and what it meant. If this learned Mayor’s learning be extensive enough to silence his own class promptings, then the thoughts that must be trotting through his head can not choose but cause him grief—

Progress demands better salaries for woman teachers;
The “Equal Pay” bill raises their salaries; but at the expense of the men;
To sign the bill is just to the women, unjust to the men;
To veto the bill is unjust to the women, just to the men.

Across such incidental tangle lies the path of Progress, which the Genius of the Age directs the Mayor to tread by signing the bill.

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