

New York Sunday Mercury
April 7, 1867

Female Suffrage

Ed. T. T.:--The women of Missouri are bringing a tremendous pressure to bear in an endeavor to secure to themselves the right to vote and hold office. Their petitions to the legislature are scattered abroad, and are filled with signers. Thirty-nine members of the Missouri Legislature have declared in favor of the movement. This thing looks ominous. Through an able spiritual medium I have been permitted to see a Missouri Legislature of five years hence in session. Here is a report of the proceedings:

The P. R. R. Appropriation Bill being the special order for the day, and the hour for its discussion having arrived:

Miss Belcher, of St. Louis, said—Madam Speaker, I call for the special order for today. Madam Speaker.—The clerk will read.

Clerk.—An act supplementary to an Act entitled An Act amendatory of an Act entitled An Act to appropriate Five millions of dollars in aid of the Pacific Railroad, etc., etc.

Miss Belcher.—Madam Speaker, it is with the keenest pain that I observe the diminishing esteem in which gored dresses are held. It is with pain which these lips are indeed powerless to express. The gored-dress of two years ago, Madam, with its long, graceful sweep—

Mr. Jones, of St. Joseph.—Madam Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The lady is not confining herself to the question before the house. What in the nation has these cursed gored dresses and stuff got to do with the great Pacific—

Madam Speaker (amid piping female voices all over the house, shrieking angrily)—Sit down, Sir! Take your seat, Sir, and don't you presume to interrupt again! Go on, Miss Belcher.

Miss Belcher—I was remarking, Madam, when the unprincipled bald-headed outlaw from St. Joseph interrupted me, that it pained me to see the charming and attractive gored dresses we all were once so fond of, going out of fashion, And what, I ask, are we to have in place of it? What is offered to recompense us for its loss? Why, nothing, Madam, but the wretched, slimpsey, new-fangled street-dress, hoopless, shapeless, cut bias, hem-stitched, with the selvedge edge turned down; and all so lank, so short, so cadaverous, and so disgraceful! Excuse these tears. Who can look without emotion upon such a garment? Who can look unmoved upon a dress which exposes feet at every step which may be of dimensions which shrink from inspection? Who can consent to countenance a dress which—

Mr. Slawson, of St. Genevieve—Madam Speaker, this is absurd. What will such proceedings as these read like in the newspapers? We take up the discussion of a measure of vast consequence—a measure of tremendous financial importance—and a member of the body, totally ignoring the question before the House, launches out into a tirade about womanly apparel!—a matter trivial enough at any time, God knows, but utterly insignificant in presence of so grave a matter as the behests of the Great Pacific Rail—

Madam Speaker.—Consider yourself under arrest, Sir! Sit down, and dare to speak again at your peril! The honorable lady from St. Louis will proceed.

Miss Belcher—Madam Speaker, I will dismiss the particular section of my subject upon which I was speaking when interrupted by the degraded ruffian from St. Genevieve, and pass to the gist of the matter. I propose, Madame, to prohibit, under heavy penalties, the wearing of the new street-dress, and to restore the discarded gored dress by legislative enactment, and I beg leave to introduce a bill to that end, and without previous notice, if the courtesy of this honorable body will permit it.

Mr. Walker, of Marion—Madam Speaker, this is an outrage! it is damnable! The Pacific Railroad—

Madam Speaker—Silence! Plant yourself, Sir! Leave is granted to introduce the Bill. If no objection is made, it will be referred to the Standing Committee on Public Improvements. Reports of Committees are now in order.

Mrs. Baker, of Ralls—Madam Speaker, the Select Committee of Five, to whom was referred An Act Amendatory of an act Establishing the Metes and Bounds of School Lands, and to which was added a clause Establishing the Metes and Bounds of Water Privileges, have been unable to agree. The younger members of the committee contend that the added clause is of sufficient latitude to permit of legislation concerning ladies' waterfalls, and they have reported upon that clause alone to the exclusion of all other matters contemplated in the bill. There is no majority report, Madam, and no minority report.

Mr. Bridgewater, of Benton—There are five women on the committee, ain't there?

Mrs. Baker—Yes.

Mr. Bilgewater—Each of 'em made a report by herself, hasn't she?

Mrs. Baker—Yes, Sir.

Mr. Bilgewater—Why, certainly. Five women's bound to have five opinions. It's like 'em.

[With the last word the gentleman from Benton darted out at the window, and eleven inkstands followed him.]

The several reports were received and tabled, after considerable discussion. Third reading and final passage of bills being next in order, an Act for Amending the Common School System was taken up, but it was found to be so interlarded with surreptitious clauses for remodeling and establishing fashions for ladies' bonnets, that neither head nor tail could be made of it, and it had to be referred back to the Committee of the Whole again. An Act to Provide Arms for the State Militia was discovered to be so hampered with clauses for the protection of Sewing Societies and Tea Drinkings, that it had to go back to the file also. Every bill on the third reading list was found to be similarly mutilated, until they got down to an Act to Compel Married Gentlemen to be at Home by Nine of the Clock, every evening; an Act to Abolish the Use of Tobacco in any form; and an Act to Abolish the Use of Intoxicating Liquors. These had not been meddled with, and were at once put to vote, and passed over the heads of the male members, who made a gallant fight, but were overcome by heartless and tyrannical numbers.

Mr. Green, of Cape Girardeau, then rose in his place and said—"I now shake the dust of this House from my feet, and take my eternal leave of it. I never will enter its doors again, to be snubbed and harried by a pack of padded, scraggy, dried-up, snuff-dipping, toothless, old-maids, who—"

He never got any further. A howl went up that shook the tiding to its foundation, and in the midst of struggling forms, fiery eyes, distorted countenances, and dismembered waterfalls, I

saw the daring legislator yield and fall; and when at last he reappeared, and fled toward the door, his shirt-front was in ribbons, his cravat knot under his ear, his face scratched red and white like the national flag, and hardly hair enough left on his head to make a toothbrush.

I shudder now. Is it possible that this revelation of the spirits is a prophecy?

(Source: Twainquotes.org, <http://www.twainquotes.com/mercury/FemaleSuffrage.html>)