

GROUNDNS FOR SEPARATION

When Women Peeped At Parliament



to the House of Commons at all. One of the earliest English references is in Grey's "Debates." During a debate on June 1, 1675, says this precursor of Hansard, some women were in the gallery, peeping over the gentlemen's shoulders. The Speaker, spying them, called out, "What borough do those ladies serve for?" to which William Coventry replied, "They serve for the Speaker's chamber!" Sir Thomas Littleton said, "The Speaker might mistake them for gentlemen dressed like ladies." Said the Speaker, "I am sure I saw petticoats."

Just an Old Eastern Custom

When the Commons sat in the old House, there was no special accommodation for women. A resolution authorising their admission to the strangers' gallery was passed, but they were shut off from the rest of the House by a lattice-work, or grille.

Another writer on Parliament, Michael MacDonagh, said that though women were not admitted to the House, they had access to a loft between the ceiling and the roof, and through a hole in the centre of the ceiling for ventilation,

above the principal chandelier, a dozen might gaze with much inconvenience and discomfort at the scene below, and as many more, while seeing nothing, could hear the speeches.

A Floundering Gallant

In July, 1869, according to G. H. Jennings, an amusing discussion on the ladies' gallery led to a motion that, in the opinion of the House, the grating in front of the ladies' gallery should be removed. The Speaker said that the gallery was not such a place as ladies ought to occupy. There was no escape from the vitiated atmosphere, and the ladies were obliged to be confined—(great laughter)—were kept for hours in that confined space. In this age of civilisation, it was absurd to have ladies placed behind a grating.

Another member took the women's part also. But, he said, it would be a cruel kindness to take away the barrier. What the ladies desired was two hours' rational amusement. Still another read a letter from a lady, pointing out the advantage of the grille. One was that it

enabled a lady to leave when a bore was speaking, even though that bore happened to be the friend who had obtained a seat for her.

Wholesale Evacuation

In the stilted style of the day, the London Chronicle of February 2, 1778, told its readers that the House was densely crowded in anticipation of a debate on the state of the nation. A vast multitude assembled in the lobby and environs of the House of Commons, but not being able to gain admission by entreaty or request, forced their way through the gallery in spite of the door-keepers. The House considered the intrusion in a heinous light, and a motion was made clearing the gallery.

A partial clearing only took place, the paper said. The gentlemen were obliged to withdraw; the ladies, through complaisance, were suffered to remain. One argument used was that if the motion for clearing the House was a supposed propriety to keep the state of the nation from our enemies, there was no reason

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TRADITION, and nothing more, would seem to be the reason why, until the other day, men and women were not allowed to sit together in the public galleries of the New Zealand House of Representatives. Now Mr. A. will be able to sit with Mrs. A. and, though strict silence is still imposed on visitors, he will be able to whisper to her details about procedure, and assume an air of wisdom about what is happening on the floor of the House.

Britain was a long time making up its mind whether women should be admitted

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