

M.P. AND MOTHER OF SIX

Women and the Home

I SAT in the Lady Members' Sitting Room of the House of Representatives staring fascinatedly at the heater. It consisted of four outside cylinders of glass painted orange and emitting light, but no heat, the whole being encased in a heavy bronze frame the size of a firescreen. A legislative, and almost ecclesiastical, carpet of crimson pattern in electric blue and emerald covered the floor. Nothing was changed since my last visit to the room with Mrs. Catherine Stewart, M.P., except for the addition of a second desk.

I looked at it closely. The usual stock of note paper and envelopes bearing the crest of the House of Representatives. The usual forms for notices of motion and notices of question. And a large pile of opened correspondence.

There were voices outside. The door opened, and Mrs. M. M. Dreaver, M.P., the new Member for Waitemata, came into the room, preceded by her son and daughter-in-law and a very shy three-year-old grand-daughter in blue.

"You must be feeling very proud of grandmother," I said to the three-year-old.

Her only reply was to nestle closer into her father's shoulder.

"I don't think she's quite old enough to know what it's all about," said her mother, "or perhaps she thinks grandmother should be proud of her."

"It's Been Very Exciting"

Mrs. Dreaver turned round from the mantelpiece where she was finding a vase for the bouquet of red anemones which had just been presented to her by a women's branch of the Labour Party.

"I'm sorry if I'm a little late, but you know how difficult it is to get away from things on time." She came and sat near the settee.

"I suppose you've been very busy?"

"Yes." She waved a hand towards the desk. "I've used up quite a lot of the official stationery already, answering letters and telegrams I've received from all over New Zealand. The day after the election I had two cables of congratulation from Mr. Fraser in England. It's been very exciting. And after two weeks in the House, I naturally still get a lot of satisfaction out of using paper with the crest of the House on it."

"And out of things like eating at Bellamy's, I suppose?"

"Yes. And out of visiting the billiards-room."

I looked surprised.

"Oh, yes, I'm a very good billiards player. And until a few years ago I was a very good hockey player. And I'm still a very keen swimmer."

"Do they have any special ceremony when a new Member appears in the House?"

"The Swearing-In Ceremony"

"There is the usual swearing-in ceremony, similar to that of taking the oath as city councillor. It's a very simple ceremony, but very significant. I went in marshalled between the two Whips,



MRS. M. M. DREAVER, M.P.
... Billiards, swimming, hockey, politics

and took the oath of allegiance. Then I signed my name in the book kept by the Clerk of the House. I realised then that I had taken my place as a member of a very illustrious body."

"The next event of importance, I suppose, was your first speech. Were you nervous?"

"No, not all all. I had had so much experience in speaking before bodies of men on city councils and other public

bodies that I didn't feel even slightly apprehensive. But there was one rather disconcerting moment just at first. I had the notes for my speech written out, and just before I began, I found I had mislaid the first page. I had got as far as 'Mr. Speaker' before I located it again. It wouldn't really have mattered, however. I knew my subject backwards, and could easily have spoken extempore."

Learning To Speak

"When did you first conceive the idea of going into Parliament?"

"Ever since I first joined the Labour Party almost 30 years ago. In fact my life could be re-titled 'Thirty Years From Soap-box to House of Representatives.' During these years, I worked beside Mr. Savage. He taught me and prepared me for what I am doing to-day."

"How did you learn to speak with such confidence?"

"I think my training started when I was a girl of 18, and went in for the Dunedin Competitions. I used to sing and recite, and this gave me confidence on a public platform as well as enabling me to speak clearly and fluently. Then, later on, I started to sit on various public bodies, and I gained some knowledge of public affairs, as well as speaking experience."

"Do you think that men are in any way prejudiced against women taking a leading part in public life?"

"No, not at all. Certainly not as far as the Labour Party is concerned. It has always been more than anxious to put up women for Parliament, but the trouble is that the women themselves are too diffident or perhaps too lacking in energy. Of course it's no good beginning a political career by contesting a seat in a General Election. You've got to go through a long apprenticeship of service first before you can hope to be nominated. The best way is to begin by standing for a school committee, and then for hospital boards and city councils. You must prove by many years of service that you are fit to be entrusted with the responsibilities of a Member of Parliament."

Her Special Interests

"What political questions are you specially interested in?"

"My chief object as a Member of Parliament will be to promote measures affecting the welfare of women and children. You see, I'm the mother of six children myself, to say nothing of three grand-children. And I'm going to do all I can to help children, particularly crippled children, or ones who can't fend for themselves."

"Apart from that, my chief concern is the care of the sick, especially the mentally sick. And I'm going to see to it that those of our boys who come home mentally or physically disabled are adequately cared for."



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