

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN.

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS.

(Continued.)

WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT.

While wishful to avoid any encroachment on our Secretary's report, I cannot refrain from mentioning the present position and prospects of women's eligibility for Parliament in this Dominion. You will remember that when, more than a quarter of a century ago, we were enfranchised, special care was taken to prevent the electors from choosing any woman to represent them in Parliament. At the moment this seemed to be of little importance, for the prohibition against women being members of Parliament was so illogical and unfair that it appeared certain that in a short time it must be removed. Yet the years have passed while women electors that were young became elderly, and many that were middle-aged have grown old, and the frequent efforts for justice that have been made by earnest women and chivalrous men have been met by indifference and a scarcely-veiled hostility. It would not be right to blame Parliament altogether for the continuance of this injustice. Under our faulty system of Party Government, Parliament, which should be all-powerful has really little choice of action. Every member is supposed to belong to, and obey the instructions of, one party or another. And while Governments may come and go, no strong party has yet included justice to women in its programme. Yet, as I have said, since the war there has been a stirring of the dry bones. Systems of Government are on their trial, and the idea of justice may yet become a living force. During the last session of our Parliament a proposal to make women electors eligible for election was favourably received. The proposal was lost on the plea of unconstitutional procedure. Mr Massey declared that while he accepted Sir Francis Bell's dictum on the question of procedure, he was not opposed to the reform, and would himself bring the question before the House at its next session, and give members an opportunity of voting upon it. Sir Joseph Ward said that he "felt that women should be admitted to Parliament," while Sir Francis Bell, replying to a deputation of

women who interviewed him, said that he "needed no deputation to persuade him that what it asked for was just." He further said, "It is an accurate and absolute fact that if the Lower House had passed the amendment, it would have passed the Legislative Council without question or objection."

It would therefore seem that the accomplishment of this long sought for reform is assured.

I am glad to note that Mr Massey, in ratification of his promise, has already given notice in the House to ask for leave to introduce the Women's Parliamentary Rights Extension Bill.

It may be asked by some of the unthinking, "Why this desire to make women eligible for Parliament?" This question may be answered by another, "Why should the electors be denied the right to select as their representative the person they wish to represent them?" Or, "If a woman be the Sovereign of our mighty Empire, why should a woman elector be prohibited from being the servant of a constituency, if the constituency so desire?" Such a prohibition is not only an interference with the liberty of women citizens, but an interference with the men citizens also, and cannot be defended on reasonable grounds. Further, it is my belief that the one-sided laws which operate against wo-

men and the welfare of the family will not be repealed until we have women representatives in Parliament. It may be interesting here to quote from an address given by Miss Mary MacArthur, a candidate for Parliament, to the electors of Stourbridge, England. "It takes a man and a woman," she said, "to make an ideal home, and I believe that neither can build the ideal world without the help of the other. In the new Parliament, where laws affecting every household in the land will be framed, the point of view of the mother, as well as that of the father, should find expression. If I am returned to the House of Commons I shall try to voice in a special sense the aspirations of the women workers of this land. . . . I shall also feel entitled to speak for the woman whose work never ends, the woman in the home who faces and solves every day a multitude of problems, the woman who has been too often neglected or forgotten by politicians, the mother of the children upon whom the future pride and strength of the nation depends."

With the wider opportunities for service that seem to be opening for women, there should be a continuous effort to expand their outlook, and to deepen their knowledge of many of the questions which call for legislative action.

BALLOT PAPER.

This Election we have three issues on the Ballot Paper, and our motto now is

"Strike out the TWO Top Lines"

Here is how a good Prohibition Ballot Paper should look when it is put into the Ballot Box:—

~~1. I VOTE FOR NATIONAL CONTINUANCE~~ 

~~2. I VOTE FOR STATE PURCHASE AND CONTROL~~ 

3. I VOTE FOR NATIONAL PROHIBITION