

A STATEMENT ON THE

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suffrage to the women of Liberia. This recommendation, however, had to go through the protracted process of law. It took its origin in the House of Representatives and was House's Original No. 1 of the fourth session of the fortieth legislature entitled "A Declaratory Act on the amendment of the Constitution." Said act was approved by President Tuban December 11, 1945, and was adopted at the call election held on the 7th day of May, 1946. The ballot boxes had to remain sealed until the Legislature was convened in October, 1946 for checking of ballots and declaring the Constitution amended, granting suffrage to the women of Liberia at the age of twenty-one years and owning real estate (property) on the same equal basis as men. The women of Liberia had the right to vote on May 6, 1957, the women voted for the first time at the Quadrennial Election. This, however, was restricted suffrage as constitutional inhibitions debarred them from holding elective positions.

In January, 1951 the women requested the removal of all such inhibitions. The national legislature upon the recommendation of the president passed another "Declaratory Act" for the amendment of the Constitution, removing all inhibitions. Said act received executive approval which was adopted at the general election of May 1, 1951. This was the first general election in which the women of Liberia voted with the privilege of casting their vote removing all inhibitions, thereby making them first class citizens.

At the extraordinary sessions of the legislature August, 1951, the final act in this drama was performed when the ballots had been counted by the legislature and a "Declaratory Act" passed declaring the constitution amended, removing all inhibitions and restrictions. Now the women of Liberia are enjoying equal political rights and unrestricted suffrage. For the political emancipation of the Liberian women their gratitude, praise, and appreciation flow out to the wise statesmanship of President William V. S. Tubman and the present administration.

The jury statute was revised by legislature enactment entitled "Act to Amend Sections 357, 358, and 359 of the Revised Statute of Liberia, with reference to the qualification of jurors of the Republic of Liberia" was passed and approved January 12, 1949. This act gave the women full right to serve on jury (both grand and petty) and as failiffs of courts, which rights they are now enjoying.

This credit goes to the Liberian Women's Social and Political Movement for its activities in this direction.

According to the now existing law, a married woman has no choice of nationality. She takes the nationality of her

husband. She cannot obtain a passport to travel in foreign parts except with the full consent of her husband. She cannot sue or be sued in civil actions directly. All such actions must be directed by or through her husband unless she is declared Feme-Sole, and such cases must be appertaining to her business. She has the right to enter action for divorce and obtain same. She has the right to sue for alimony and alimony pendete-lite.

She is not the custodian of her children in case of separation and/or divorce. The father is the legal custodian of the child except if the mother can prove the father's inability or unfitness to be trusted with the child's career. She is directly responsible for all her criminal acts. Women have full recognition before the law.

The Liberian women have the right to own property (real estate in fee simple and to dispose of same at their own will without interference by the husband. The husband has no title right to his wife's real estate (property) during her life time nor after death unless she bequeaths same by will to him. Married women are entitled to one third of their husband's real estate. They have the right of free speech and free ballot as men.

Religiously the Liberian women have freedom and the right to worship according to the dictates of their own consciences. They are very active in church work and are holding prominent positions although some religious faiths debar her from ascending the pulpit.

Economically the Liberian women on the whole still find it difficult with a few exceptions. This is due primarily to the lack of factories, industries, and the limited avenues of livelihood. When they are qualified there is no discrimination in wages and hours of work because of their sex. Today Liberian women are holding and filling high positions of trust and responsibility in Government such as Undersecretary of Public Instruction, Assistant Secretary of War, Secretary of the Liberian Senate, Steno-Typist of House of Representatives, Office Manager of Executive Mansion, Assistant Secretary to the President of Liberia, Steno-Typist of Executive Mansion, Chief of the Bureau of Archives, Statement Department, Clerks of the Supreme Court, Vice-Consuls, Secretaries and Clerks in the Foreign Service, Chief Clerk of Department of Public Works and Utilities, Hostesses and Steno-Typists in all departments of Government as well as serving in the Police Force, and as Mayor of a city, Common Council Women, Paramount and Clan Chiefs. They serve on Delegations to International Conferences. Several women are engaging in private business enterprises. Some women are operating their own farms. Educationally the Liberian women can boast of the Dean of the University of Liberia, Professors and Tutors of the University of Liberia, of one Law-

yer, one Dentist, one well-trained and qualified Laboratory Technician, one qualified Agriculturist who has recently graduated from Hampton Institute, Virginia, U. S. A., with degree of Bachelor of Science. The Administrative Assistant of the College of West Africa, Superintendents of Nurses of Hospitals and many trained nurses are women. In the teaching profession the women of Liberia have always filled the position as teachers for more than 95 years with credit and are still active in this field. As office workers they are taking their place alongside the men with much satisfaction. In the home they are ideal mothers and wives. The bulwark of the home, the dynamo to their husbands and as a torch light of learning to the less fortunate. They are kind and congenial hostesses.

The women of Liberia have measured up to their former limited opportunities. Now that the opportunities are unlimited and all hinderances removed, it is most pleasing and encouraging to see the rapid strides being made in this direction. They are now qualified themselves on all lines and in various professions and trades at home and abroad.

In 1952, a woman was appointed consul to Treetown, Sirra Leone.

Socially the Liberian women are social beings and equally civil-minded and to these ends they have grouped themselves in organizations for their improvement of a better life and a better world in which to live. Nationally the Liberian woman is first a citizen in thought and then a woman as an individual. This virtue dates back to the Colonial days. She is aware of the great responsibility of raising the standard of her unlettered and uncivilized sisters that they may be able to appreciate and enjoy all the rights and privileges which by law and nature are theirs. There is still a long way to go and much yet to be done. However, there is a wide awakening of women working towards the maximum growth and total development of their sex. Considering the depths from which she has arisen there is great satisfaction, thanks and praise to Almighty God, for the progress thus far. With steadfast hope and trust in the Father of Nations, the Women of Liberia will climb the ladder round by round, lifting as she climbs until the summit is reached.

Hold fast to the Bible as the sheet-anchor of your liberties; write its precepts in your hearts, and practice them in your lives. To the influence of this book we are indebted for all the progress made in true civilization, and to this we must look as our guide to the future. "Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people. —U. S. Grant.

The whole hope of human progress is suspended on the ever-growing influence of the Bible. —William H. Seward.