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OPINIONS

OF

Leaders of Religious Thought

ON

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE.

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PREFACE.

*The following expressions of opinion have either been kindly furnished in reply to a request from the Central and Manchester Women's Suffrage Committees, or have been taken by permission from essays or addresses already published by their several authors.*

*The Committees trust that these passages will tend to remove a fear still to be found in some quarters that the Women's Suffrage movement is not consonant with the religious aspect of women's work and duty.*

*March, 1895.*

THE BISHOP OF LONDON.

"I shall be glad to see women in all cases holding the franchise on the same terms as men."

F. LUNDIN.

THE BISHOP OF SOUTHWELL.

"I am a cordial supporter of proposals to give the Parliamentary franchise to women householders who would be entitled to have the Municipal and Local Government Franchises."

GEORGE SOUTHWELL.

THE BISHOP OF EDINBURGH.

(THE RT. REV. JOHN DOWDEN, D.D.)

“The sound reasons in favour of extending the Parliamentary franchise to qualified women householders seem, in my opinion, enormously to outweigh all that can be alleged to the contrary.”

JOHN DOWDEN.

THE REV. J. PERCIVAL, LL.D.

*(Bishop Designate of Hereford).*

“As I have given my support to the movement in favour of Women’s Suffrage for I am afraid to say how many years, it is a pleasure to me to have an opportunity of wishing God-speed to you in your efforts on behalf of it.”

J. PERCIVAL.

THE DEAN OF DURHAM.

“I am strongly, as you know, in favour of Women’s Suffrage, not on political grounds in the least, but on grounds (1) of justice, (2) of social gain, (3) of the benefit to be attained by a large addition to the Vote-power of persons not tied to party. Of these three reasons the middle one is strongest. For all good legislation in the future will have to deal with questions of civic and social good, and will be as closely connected with them as the Christian faith is; and we know that the women’s vote will be right on all these subjects. I think, too, that the women’s vote will help to educate the men voters, and will be a far more reasonable vote than that of the average. The outcry that we are taking women ‘out of their sphere’ is all selfishness. The men have not used their privilege any too well, and are afraid of a better example.”

G. W. KITCHIN.

THE VERY REV. J. CAMERON LEES, D.D., LL.D.

*(Dean of the Chapel Royal of Scotland and of the  
Order of the Thistle).*

“I am entirely in favour of granting the Suffrage to women. There is no reason known to me why they should be excluded from sharing in the Government of the country. Further, I am persuaded that their possession of the same political privileges with men will exercise an influence on public questions of the most beneficial kind, especially on certain questions in which women are naturally and even supremely interested. My best wishes are with the movement for their political emancipation.”

J. CAMERON LEES.

THE CHIEF RABBI.

“I am in favour of removing the restrictions at present imposed on women in respect to the Parliamentary Franchise. I see no reason why the Suffrage should be withheld from spinsters and widows possessed of the qualifications prescribed by statute.”

H. ADLER.



THE REV. GEORGE BUICK, D.D.

*(Vice-President Irish Archaeological Society).*

“I heartily sympathize in the efforts which are being made to have the right of women to exercise the franchise recognised and legalised, and wish you and your associates in the good work speedy and complete success.”

GEORGE R. BUICK.

REV. NEWMAN HALL, LL.B., D.D.

“I consider that the influence of women will, as a whole, be more likely than that of men to promote Temperance, Purity, Peace and Religion—objects far more important than any mere Party Interests: and that the owner or occupier of any property should be equally entitled to a Municipal or Parliamentary vote, whether man or woman.”

NEWMAN HALL.

THE REV. JOHN MARSHALL LANG, D.D. (GLASGOW).

“I have sympathy with the movement *so far*. But I am apprehensive as to the extent to which we may be carried by it. I don't wish to see women in the House of Commons. I would give women who are themselves Rate-payers votes: not married women. I would have their co-operation in Social Reform, be they married or unmarried. If any Referendum on the Church in question were made I would have them with the right to say *Yes* or *No*. They are more vitally interested than even men in all that concerns Religious Life: for the Home is their Kingdom.”

JOHN MARSHALL LANG.

THE REV. THOMAS M. LINDSAY, D.D.

*(Professor of Divinity and Church History, Free Church  
College, Glasgow.)*

“It may be that I have been exceptionally favoured in my surroundings, for I cannot understand how any one who has had mother, sister, wife and daughter can for a moment imagine that women are not able to give as intelligent opinions on political questions as the average educated man. Viewing the matter religiously, it has always appeared to me that to refuse the franchise to women is a survival of theoretical paganism and that it tends to perpetuate a good deal of the practical paganism which lingers in legislation and in social life. The most urgent practical reason for the extension of the franchise to women is given in the fact that Governments are more and more concerning themselves with labour legislation: that laws which regulate such a complicated problem as labour presents are sure to do more harm than good unless legislators are in touch with and thoroughly informed by those whose work is to be regulated; and that so long as working women are not in a position to use their votes to make their wishes respected by those who frame the law, the hard battle of life becomes harder and more hopeless to many thousands of oppressed toilers.”

THOMAS M. LINDSAY.

THE REV. R. J. LYND, D.D.

*(Ex-moderator of the Irish Presbyterian Church).*

“The movement on behalf of Women’s Suffrage is on the lines of modern salutary advance. The influence of women’s vote in moral, social and educational questions would prove a healthful and, in the highest sense, a conservative element in legislation. The present position of woman—the result of improved education—demonstrates her capacity for exercising as broad and intelligent a judgment on public questions as those at present entitled to the franchise; indeed she already does exercise the franchise in several departments,—and in all of them with much benefit to the public service.”

R. J. LYND.

THE REV. ALEXANDER MACKENNAL, D.D.

(BOWDON, CHESHIRE).

“I am in favour of extending the Parliamentary vote to women on the same conditions as to men for the following reasons :—

“1. In a democratic community like ours, the larger the number of persons who can be brought to interest themselves responsibly in legislation and administration, the better both for the community and the individuals.

“2. There is nothing to exclude women from the operation of this general principle; but every reason for including them. The intelligence of the average woman fits her equally with the average man for understanding the questions submitted to public vote. There are certain questions in which the judgment of men will probably remain decisive; but there are also certain questions in which the judgment of women would be of predominant value. Women have a special function to fulfil as well as a general function, in exercising the franchise.

“3. My experience as pastor of churches in which women deliberate, vote and act responsibly, as do the men, has shewn me how futile is the fear that they are constitutionally unfit for public service, or unable to learn from experience. My observation of their work on School Boards, Boards of Guardians, etc., has confirmed my belief that their counsel and co-operation are of high value.”

ALEXANDER MACKENNAL.

REV. W. TODD MARTIN, D.D.  
*(Moderator of the Irish Presbyterian Church.)*

“I cannot, as Moderator of the Irish General Assembly, offer an opinion on Women’s Suffrage, for the Church has not given any deliverance on the question ; but personally I do not see any sufficient grounds for withholding from women householders and tax-payers the right of voting at Parliamentary Elections.”

W. TODD MARTIN.

REV. JAMES MARTINEAU, D.D.

“This doctrine (Manhood and Womanhood Suffrage) took too wide a sweep for me, as an English Constitutionalist, who recognises no abstract civic rights, but only such as are earned by some sacrifices made or duties done. I find, however, that in its practical aims, your Society keeps well within this limit, and while protesting against sex-exclusion, would confer the Suffrage on such person only, woman or man, as, in point of age, nationality and capacity, held the citizen's qualification, and whether a householder, chargeable lodger, or responsible head of a family, shared the burdens and was subject to the service of the State. This I heartily approve, and have signed more than one petition to obtain. Out of the large mass of social experience whence alone wise legislation can proceed, no part can be spared that has anything to say. And, until the special contribution which is gathered around and stored within the life of women is welcomed to its place we may expect many a needless acquiescence in remediable wrongs and the continuance of a low standard of National Ethics.”

JAMES MARTINEAU.



REV. CHARLES MORELL, D.D. (DUNGANNON).

*(Irish Presbyterian Church.)*

When the North of Ireland Women's Suffrage Committee was being formed, more than twenty years ago, Dr. Morell was asked to join it. In agreeing to do so, he wrote:—

“That he had always observed, in the use made by women of the ecclesiastical franchise which they possess in the Presbyterian Church, their influence was a calming and a moderating one: and he believed it would be the same in the State as in the Church.” When asked now if his views remained unchanged in this respect, he replied, “Yes, I hold the same opinion still.”

REV. J. G. MURPHY, D.D., LL.D.

*(Professor of Hebrew, Presbyterian College, Belfast).*

“Property and the payment of taxes thereon are the qualifications in our country for the right of suffrage. We have not been able to prevent women from having property, and we do not exempt them from the payment of taxes on their own account. Equity seems to require that, so far as these go, the right of suffrage should also go. And the one half of our kind would be at least as safe voters as the other.”

J. G. MURPHY.

THE REV. S. A. BARNETT, M.A.

*(Canon of Bristol. Warden of Toynbee Hall.)*

“I am in favour of the removal of all legal restrictions on the occupations and voting powers of women. They should have the same liberty as men to follow any calling and to vote at any election. Their present position of subordination develops the more brutal and selfish instincts of men and at the same time provokes women to do acts and make claims which are unwomanly.”

SAML. A. BARNETT.

THE REV. J. LLEWELYN DAVIES, M.A.

*(Vicar of Kirkby Lonsdale).*

“With regard to the governing of the Country, the manifest tendency of affairs is towards a state of things in which women will share alike with men. It has been a strange anomaly indeed, that a constitution which places a woman on the throne, should forbid a woman to vote for a Member of Parliament. . . . So far as we can draw any inference at all from the action of our Lord, as recorded in the Gospels, we should reasonably conclude that he encouraged a certain freedom and independence in the conduct of women, such as would excite criticism in the present day. And this conclusion becomes far more significant when we recall the conditions of Oriental life with regard to the relations of the sexes, and the disorganised state of Jewish Society in that age. Whilst women were coming into prominence, and acting for themselves, and leaving their homes, as followers of Jesus, no hint is given that they would have been more in their places under the domestic roof, or that they ought to have left the active support of One Who was a centre of surging political agitation to their husbands and brothers.”

J. LLEWELYN DAVIES.

THE REV. W. MOORE EDE, M.A.

*(Rector of Gateshead on Tyne ; Hon. Canon of Durham)*

“The extension of the Suffrage to women seems to me a logical consequence of Christian principle. In the Christian Society there is no superior sex, the equality of each member is recognized, the individuality of each person is sacred. St. Paul asserted this when he wrote ‘in Baptism there is neither male nor female.’ The rights of each are equal, therefore women are entitled to express their convictions and assert their individuality by voting if they choose to do so. The exclusion of women from the franchise is a relic of that false idea of the position of woman which merged her identity in that of her male protector, and regarded her as half the slave and half the plaything of man, having no rights apart from him. This false idea Christian principle has been slowly and steadily destroying for nineteen centuries, and man as well as woman has gained by the change, and will gain by the further extension of the principle to the Franchise.”

W. MOORE EDE.

HON. AND REV. ARTHUR T. LYTTELTON, M.A.

*(Vicar of Eccles, Late Master of Selwyn College, Cambridge)*

“I am very strongly of opinion that the exclusion of women from a direct share in public affairs is an injury to the political life of the nation, and that their admission to the Suffrage, while it would strengthen and widen their influence in their own home and family lives, would raise the tone of politics and make legislation more adequate to the needs of the nation.”

ARTHUR T. LYTTELTON.

THE REV. BASIL WILBERFORCE, M.A.

*(Canon of Westminster).*

“Yes, of course I am in favour of granting the Suffrage to women. The degrading superstition of woman’s inferiority to man dies hard, but it is moribund. It virtually received its death blow when the promised ‘seed of the woman,’ the archetypal specimen of the human race, the Word in embodiment, was entrusted to a woman’s care. In recent times, whenever she has come squarely into competition with man, woman has proved herself at least his equal in art, science, literature, diplomacy. In a nation which has been ruled over wisely and well for half a century by a woman, the political disability of women is a paradox and an absurdity. When the Parliamentary franchise is extended to women, I confidently anticipate legislative reforms which will facilitate the conversion of much national ‘Old Adam’ into ‘New Man’ through the liberated activity of ‘New Woman.’”

BASIL WILBERFORCE.

VEN. J. M. WILSON, M.A.

*(Vicar of Rochdale and Archdeacon of Manchester.)*

“There exists at this moment in England a class of educated women such as never existed in equal numbers before. There are women to-day who are doing some of the finest intellectual, moral, humanitarian, and social work, work which is in the highest sense political. Women have to-day vindicated the claim of their sex to the recognition of individuality and of political equality, to an extent that was not possible in any previous age. To those who have had the privilege of knowing women of this sort it seems nothing short of a monstrous folly to continue to inflict on women any political disability whatever.”



THE REV. URIJAH R. THOMAS

*(President of the Congregational Union of England and  
Wales for 1895).*

“While for twenty-five years I have had clear conviction as to the rectitude of Women’s Suffrage, that conviction deepens in view of the fact that the problems which Parliament has to face to-day are Church problems, and other Social problems in which women have at least as profound an interest as men and therefore have an equal right to take a Constitutional part in their settlement.”

URIJAH R. THOMAS.

REV. RICHARD A. ARMSTRONG (LIVERPOOL).

"I am persuaded that no single cause has so disastrously affected the moral condition of society as the exclusion of women from all share in the public policy of the nation. I do not now speak of the higher tone which I believe that they would give to the discussion and solution of those social problems which are fast becoming the main political problems of our time. I speak of the estimate in which, through their political nonentity, women are held by themselves and by men. I am convinced that the knowledge that a woman is not a citizen of the State, that she is supposed incapable of an intelligent and useful opinion concerning, and is denied an effective influence upon, the great public questions which constitute the subject-matter of politics, cheapens her in her own estimate and in that of the men with whom she associates. It is the remnant of the old and base conception of woman as simply existing as the plaything, the servant, the subject minister of man. It is this that too often deprives her of the self-respect which is her defence against all that degrades her. It is this that fills the young man with a persuasion of his natural superiority in judgment and in action. Even as the working man has arisen into a higher individuality since the State has recognised him as a constituent member, and is now capable of a self-restraint and a dignity unknown to him before, so the vast mass of women will, through their recognition as equal partners with men in the ordering of the nation, be raised above the frivolity which characterises too many of them, and compel from men a respect and consideration of a higher order than the unreal and sentimental chivalry or gallantry which passes as good manners in so many circles. I believe that the moral and social bearings of this question immeasurably surpass in importance the mere considerations of expediency; but I am also persuaded that the day when we shall do woman the simple justice of recognising that she, too, has a stake in our common country will see the dawn of an era, not only of more beneficent legislation, but also of a happier social life, a more equal companionship between the sexes, and a higher and sweeter morality than we have ever known."

RICHARD A. ARMSTRONG.

THE REV. JOHN PAGE HOPPS.

“I am an advocate of Women’s Suffrage because I am an old-fashioned Liberal, and I have always felt that every reason which Liberals urged for extending the franchise to unenfranchised men applied with equal force to unenfranchised women. ‘Taxation and representation go together,’ ‘They who have to obey the laws ought to have a hand in making the laws,’ ‘Class legislation is akin to tyranny,’ ‘The sense of responsibility can only come with the possession of political power.’ How familiar all the old cries are to us! But every one is, in the campaign for Women’s Suffrage, as good as ever. It is simply a question of right, justice and common fairness. Surely the proposal to abolish the custom or the law which insults and wrongs womanhood, by making it anywhere a disqualification for the Suffrage, ought to be considered on its merits, and altogether apart from anybody’s feelings or personal wishes—especially men’s. For in truth, that some men do not like it, but, on the contrary, chafe at it and resent it, may only shew that they are afflicted with a spirit of masterfulness, and need the chastening discipline of seeing women thinking and acting for themselves.”

J. PAGE HOPPS.

THE REV. HUGH PRICE HUGHES.

“ It seems to me that in a Democratic age like this, the burden of proof lies upon those who would ostracise an entire sex, rather than upon those who are anxious to abolish all purely artificial and superfluous sex distinctions. The only serious argument I have ever heard against Women’s Suffrage is that women cannot fight, which seems to me to be a very powerful argument against war, not against women. In a civilized community like ours, where physical might is no longer legal right, it is eminently desirable in the general interests that women should participate in affairs as actively as possible. The immense majority of human beings on this Island are either women or children, and as modern legislation so directly affects women and children it is absurd to exclude the direct legislative influence of women. The tendency of the time is social rather than political, and moral even more than social. Now in all great social and moral issues the opinion of women is invaluable. Indeed, in spite of artificial prohibitions, women always have exerted an immense influence on politics and they take an active part in political contests today. That cannot be prevented and it is evident they will interfere more and more. Is it not highly desirable that when they do interfere they should be weighted with the direct responsibility of a personal vote ? ”

H. PRICE HUGHES.





