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ENFRANCHISEMENT

OF

W O M E N

BY

MRS. STUART MILL

Reprinted from the 'WESTMINSTER REVIEW' for July, 1851.

LONDON

TRÜBNER AND CO., 60, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1868.

Price One Penny.

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ENFRANCHISEMENT

OF

WOMEN.

Most of our readers will probably learn from these pages for the first time, that there has arisen in the United States, and in the most civilized and enlightened portion of them, an organized agitation on a new question—new, not to thinkers, nor to any one by whom the principles of free and popular government are felt as well as acknowledged, but new, and even unheard of, as a subject for public meetings and practical political action. This question is the enfranchisement of women; their admission, in law and in fact, to equality in all rights, political, civil, and social, with the male citizens of the community.

It will add to the surprise with which many will receive this intelligence, that the agitation which has commenced is not a pleading by male writers and orators *for* women, those who are professedly to be benefited remaining either indifferent or ostensibly hostile: it is a political movement, practical in its objects, carried on in a form which denotes an intention to persevere. And it is a movement not merely *for* women, but *by* them. Its first public manifestation appears to have been a Convention of Women, held in the State of Ohio, in the spring of 1850. Of this meeting we have seen no report. On the 23rd and 24th of October last, a succession of public meetings was held at Worcester, in Massachusetts, under the name of a "Women's Rights Convention," of which the president was a woman, and nearly all the chief speakers women; numerous reinforced, however, by men, among whom were some of the most distinguished leaders in the kindred cause of negro emancipation.

A general and four special committees were nominated, for the purpose of carrying on the undertaking until the next annual meeting.

According to the report in the 'New York Tribune,' above a thousand persons were present throughout, and "if a larger place could have been had, many thousands more would have attended." The place was described as "crowded from the beginning with attentive and interested listeners." In regard to the quality of the speaking, the proceedings bear an advantageous comparison with those of any popular movement with which we are acquainted, either in this country or in America. Very rarely in the oratory of public meetings is the part of verbiage and declamation so small, that of calm good sense and reason so considerable. The result of the Convention was in every respect encouraging to those by whom it was summoned: and it is probably destined to inaugurate one of the most important of the movements towards political and social reform, which are the best characteristic of the present age.

That the promoters of this new agitation take their stand on principles, and do not fear to declare these in their widest extent, without time-serving or compromise, will be seen from the resolutions adopted by the Convention, part of which we transcribe:—

"*Resolved*—That every human being, of full age, and resident for a proper length of time on the soil of the nation, who is required to obey the law, is entitled to a voice in its enactment; that every such person, whose property or labour is taxed for the support of the government, is entitled to a direct share in such government; therefore,

"*Resolved*—That women are entitled to the right of suffrage, and to be considered eligible to office, . . . and that every party which claims to represent the humanity, the civilization, and the progress of the age, is bound to inscribe on its banners, equality before the law, without distinction of sex or colour.

"*Resolved*—That civil and political rights acknowledge no sex, and therefore the word 'male' should be struck from every State Constitution.

"*Resolved*—That, since the prospect of honourable and useful employment in after life is the best stimulus to the use of educational advantages, and since the best education is that we give ourselves, in the struggles, employments, and discipline of life; therefore it is impossible that women should make full use of the instruction already accorded to them, or that their career should do justice to their faculties, until the avenues to the various civil and professional employments are thrown open to them.

"*Resolved*—That every effort to educate women, without according to them their rights, and arousing their conscience by the weight of their responsibilities, is futile, and a waste of labour.

"*Resolved*—That the laws of property, as affecting married persons, demand a thorough revisal, so that all rights be equal between them; that the wife have, during life, an equal control over the property gained by their mutual toil and sacrifices, and be heir to her husband precisely to that extent that he is heir to her, and entitled at her death to dispose by will of the same share of the joint property as he is."

The following is a brief summary of the principal demands:—

"1. *Education* in primary and high schools, universities, medical, legal, and theological institutions.

"2. *Partnership* in the labours and gains, risks and remunerations of productive industry.

"3. *A coequal share* in the formation and administration of laws—municipal, State, and national—through legislative assemblies, courts, and executive offices."

It would be difficult to put so much true, just, and reasonable meaning into a style so little calculated to recommend it as the style of some of the resolutions. But whatever objection may be made to some of the expressions, none, in our opinion, can be made to the demands themselves. As a question of justice, the case seems to us too clear for dispute. As one of expediency, the more thoroughly it is examined the stronger it will appear.

That women have as good a claim as men have, in point of personal right, to the suffrage, or to a place in the jury-box, it would be difficult for any one to deny. It cannot certainly be denied by the United States of America, as a people or as a community. Their democratic institutions rest avowedly on the inherent right of every one to a voice in the government. Their Declaration of Independence, framed by the men who are still their great constitutional authorities—that document which has been from the first, and is now, the acknowledged basis of their polity, commences with this express statement:—

"We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

We do not imagine that any American democrat will evade the force of these expressions by the dishonest or ignorant subterfuge, that "men," in this memorable document, does not stand for human beings, but for one sex only; that "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" are "inalienable rights" of only one moiety of the human species; and that "the governed," whose consent is affirmed to be the only source of just power, are meant for that half of mankind only, who, in relation to the other, have hitherto assumed the character of *governors*. The contradiction between principle and practice cannot be explained away. A like dereliction of the fundamental maxims of their political creed has been committed by the Americans in the flagrant instance of the negroes; of this they are learning to recognize the turpitude. After a struggle which, by many of its incidents, deserves the name of heroic, the abolitionists are now so strong in numbers and in influence that they hold the balance of parties in the United States. It was fitting that the men whose names will remain associated with the extirpation, from the democratic soil of America, of the aristocracy of colour, should be among the originators, for America and for the rest of the world, of the first collective protest against the aristocracy of sex; a distinction

as accidental as that of colour, and fully as irrelevant to all questions of government.

Not only to the democracy of America, the claim of women to civil and political equality makes an irresistible appeal, but also to those radicals and chartists in the British Islands, and democrats on the Continent, who claim what is called universal suffrage as an inherent right, unjustly and oppressively withheld from them. For with what truth or rationality could the suffrage be termed universal, while half the human species remain excluded from it? To declare that a voice in the government is the right of all, and demand it only for a part—the part, namely, to which the claimant himself belongs—is to renounce even the appearance of principle. The chartist who denies the suffrage to women, is a chartist only because he is not a lord; he is one of those levellers who would level only down to themselves.

Even those who do not look upon a voice in the government as a matter of personal right, nor profess principles which require that it should be extended to all, have usually traditional maxims of political justice with which it is impossible to reconcile the exclusion of all women from the common rights of citizenship. It is an axiom of English freedom that taxation and representation should be co-extensive. Even under the laws which give the wife's property to the husband, there are many unmarried women who pay taxes. It is one of the fundamental doctrines of the British constitution, that all persons should be tried by their peers; yet women, whenever tried, are tried by male judges and a male jury. To foreigners the law accords the privilege of claiming that half the jury should be composed of themselves; not so to women. Apart from maxims of detail, which represent local and national rather than universal ideas, it is an acknowledged dictate of justice to make no degrading distinctions without necessity. In all things the presumption ought to be on the side of equality. A reason must be given why anything should be permitted to one person and interdicted to another. But when that which is interdicted includes nearly everything which those to whom it is permitted most prize, and to be deprived of which they feel to be most insulting; when not only political liberty but personal freedom of action is the prerogative of a caste; when even in the exercise of industry, almost all employments which task the higher faculties in an important field, which lead to distinction, riches, or even pecuniary independence, are fenced round as the exclusive domain of the predominant section, scarcely any doors being left open to the dependent class, except such as all who can enter elsewhere disdainfully pass by,—the miserable expediencies which are advanced as excuses for so grossly partial a dispensation, would not be sufficient, even if they were real, to render it other than a flagrant injustice. While, far from being expedient, we are firmly convinced that the division of mankind into two castes, one born to rule over the other, is in this case, as in all cases, an unqualified mischief; a source of perversion and demoralization, both to the favoured class and to those at whose expense they are favoured; producing none of the good which it is the custom to ascribe to it,

and forming a bar, almost insuperable while it lasts, to any really vital improvement, either in the character or in the social condition of the human race.

These propositions it is now our purpose to maintain. But before entering on them, we would endeavour to dispel the preliminary objections which, in the minds of persons to whom the subject is new, are apt to prevent a real and conscientious examination of it. The chief of these obstacles is that most formidable one, custom. Women never have had equal rights with men. The claim in their behalf, of the common rights of mankind, is looked upon as barred by universal practice. This strongest of prejudices, the prejudice against what is new and unknown, has, indeed, in an age of changes like the present, lost much of its force; if it had not, there would be little hope of prevailing against it. Over three-fourths of the habitable world, even at this day, the answer, "It has always been so," closes all discussion. But it is the boast of modern Europeans, and of their American kindred, that they know and do many things which their forefathers neither knew nor did; and it is perhaps the most unquestionable point of superiority in the present above former ages, that habit is not now the tyrant it formerly was over opinions and modes of action, and that the worship of custom is a declining idolatry. An uncustomary thought, on a subject which touches the greater interests of life, still startles when first presented; but if it can be kept before the mind until the impression of strangeness wears off, it obtains a hearing, and as rational a consideration as the intellect of the hearer is accustomed to bestow on any other subject.

In the present case, the prejudice of custom is doubtless on the unjust side. Great thinkers, indeed, at different times, from Plato to Condorcet, besides some of the most eminent names of the present age, have made emphatic protests in favour of the equality of women. And there have been voluntary societies, religious or secular, of which the Society of Friends is the most known, by whom that principle was recognized. But there has been no political community or nation in which, by law and usage, women have not been in a state of political and civil inferiority. In the ancient world the same fact was alleged, with equal truth, in behalf of slavery. It might have been alleged in favour of the mitigated form of slavery, serfdom, all through the middle ages. It was urged against freedom of industry, freedom of conscience, freedom of the press; none of these liberties were thought compatible with a well-ordered State, until they had proved their possibility by actually existing as facts. That an institution or a practice is customary is no presumption of its goodness, when any other sufficient cause can be assigned for its existence. There is no difficulty in understanding why the subjection of women has been a custom. No other explanation is needed than physical force.

That those who were physically weaker should have been made legally inferior, is quite conformable to the mode in which the world has been governed. Until very lately, the rule of physical strength was the general law of human affairs. Throughout history, the na-

tions, races, classes, which found themselves the strongest, either in muscles, in riches, or in military discipline, have conquered and held in subjection the rest. If, even in the most improved nations, the law of the sword is at last discountenanced as unworthy, it is only since the calumniated eighteenth century. Wars of conquest have only ceased since democratic revolutions began. The world is very young, and has but just begun to cast off injustice. It is only now getting rid of negro slavery. It is only now getting rid of monarchical despotism. It is only now getting rid of hereditary feudal nobility. It is only now getting rid of disabilities on the ground of religion. It is only beginning to treat men as citizens, except the rich and a favoured portion of the middle class. Can we wonder that it has not yet done as much for women? As society was constituted until the last few generations, inequality was its very basis; association grounded on equal rights scarcely existed; to be equals was to be enemies; two persons could hardly co-operate in anything, or meet in any amicable relation, without the law's appointing that one of them should be the superior of the other. Mankind have outgrown this state, and all things now tend to substitute, as the general principle of human relations, a just equality, instead of the dominion of the strongest. But of all relations, that between men and women being the nearest and most intimate, and connected with the greatest number of strong emotions, was sure to be the last to throw off the old rule and receive the new: for in proportion to the strength of a feeling, is the tenacity with which it clings to the forms and circumstances with which it has even accidentally become associated.

When a prejudice, which has any hold on the feelings, finds itself reduced to the unpleasant necessity of assigning reasons, it thinks it has done enough when it has re-asserted the very point in dispute, in phrases which appeal to the pre-existing feeling. Thus, many persons think they have sufficiently justified the restrictions on women's field of action, when they have said that the pursuits from which women are excluded are *unfeminine*, and that the *proper sphere* of women is not politics or publicity, but private and domestic life.

We deny the right of any portion of the species to decide for another portion, or any individual for another individual, what is and what is not their "proper sphere." The proper sphere for all human beings is the largest and highest which they are able to attain to. What this is, cannot be ascertained without complete liberty of choice. The speakers at the Convention in America have therefore done wisely and right, in refusing to entertain the question of the peculiar aptitudes either of women or of men, or the limits within which this or that occupation may be supposed to be more adapted to the one or to the other. They justly maintain, that these questions can only be satisfactorily answered by perfect freedom. Let every occupation be open to all, without favour or discouragement to any, and employments will fall into the hands of those men or women who are found by experience to be most capable of worthily exercising them. There need be no fear that women will take

out of the hands of men any occupation which men perform better than they. Each individual will prove his or her capacities, in the only way in which capacities can be proved—by trial; and the world will have the benefit of the best faculties of all its inhabitants. But to interfere beforehand by an arbitrary limit, and declare that whatever be the genius, talent, energy, or force of mind of an individual of a certain sex or class, those faculties shall not be exerted, or shall be exerted only in some few of the many modes in which others are permitted to use theirs, is not only an injustice to the individual, and a detriment to society, which loses what it can ill spare, but is also the most effectual mode of providing that, in the sex or class so fettered, the qualities which are not permitted to be exercised shall not exist.

We shall follow the very proper example of the Convention, in not entering into the question of the alleged differences in physical or mental qualities between the sexes; not because we have nothing to say, but because we have too much; to discuss this one point tolerably would need all the space we have to bestow on the entire subject.* But if those who assert that the "proper sphere" for women is the domestic, mean by this that they have not shown themselves qualified for any other, the assertion evinces great ignorance of life and of history. Women have shown fitness for the highest social functions, exactly in proportion as they have been admitted to them. By a curious anomaly, though ineligible to even the lowest offices of State, they are in some countries admitted to the highest of all, the regal; and if there is any one function for which they have shown a decided vocation, it is that of reigning. Not to go back to ancient history, we look in vain for abler or firmer rulers than Elizabeth; than Isabella of Castile; than Maria Theresa; than Catherine of Russia; than Blanche, mother of Louis IX. of France; than Jeanne d'Albret, mother of Henri Quatre. There are few kings on record who contended with more difficult circumstances, or overcame them more triumphantly, than most of these. Even in semi-barbarous Asia, princesses who have never been seen by men, other than those of their own family, or ever spoken with them unless from behind a curtain, have as regents, during the minority of

* An excellent passage on this part of the subject, from one of Sydney Smith's contributions to the 'Edinburgh Review,' we must not refrain from quoting:—"A great deal has been said of the original difference of capacity between men and women, as if women were more quick and men more judicious—as if women were more remarkable for delicacy of association, and men for stronger powers of attention. All this, we confess, appears to us very fanciful. That there is a difference in the understandings of the men and the women we every day meet with, everybody, we suppose, must perceive; but there is none surely which may not be accounted for by the difference of circumstances in which they have been placed, without referring to any conjectural difference of original conformation of mind. As long as boys and girls run about in the dirt, and trundle hoops together, they are both precisely alike. If you catch up one-half of these creatures, and train them to a particular set of actions and opinions, and the other half to a perfectly opposite set, of course their understandings will differ, as one or the other sort of occupations has called this or that talent into action. There is surely no occasion to go into any deeper or more abstruse reasoning, in order to explain so very simple a phenomenon."—*Sydney Smith's Works*, vol. i. p. 200.

their sons, exhibited many of the most brilliant examples of just and vigorous administration. In the middle ages, when the distance between the upper and lower ranks was greater than even between women and men, and the women of the privileged class, however subject to tyranny from the men of the same class, were at a less distance below them than any one else, and often in their absence represented them in their functions of authority—numbers of heroic châtelaines, like Jeanne de Montfort, or the great Countess of Derby as late even as the time of Charles I., distinguished themselves not only by their political but their military capacity. In the centuries immediately before and after the Reformation, ladies of royal houses, as diplomatists, as governors of provinces, or as the confidential advisers of kings, equalled the first statesmen of their time: and the treaty of Cambray, which gave peace to Europe, was negotiated in conferences where no other person was present, by the aunt of the Emperor Charles the Fifth, and the mother of Francis the First.

Concerning the fitness, then, of women for politics, there can be no question: but the dispute is more likely to turn upon the fitness of politics for women. When the reasons alleged for excluding women from active life in all its higher departments, are stripped of their garb of declamatory phrases, and reduced to the simple expression of a meaning, they seem to be mainly three: the incompatibility of active life with maternity, and with the cares of a household; secondly, its alleged hardening effect on the character; and thirdly, the inexpediency of making an addition to the already excessive pressure of competition in every kind of professional or lucrative employment.

The first, the maternity argument, is usually laid most stress upon: although (it needs hardly be said) this reason, if it be one, can apply only to mothers. It is neither necessary nor just to make imperative on women that they should be either mothers or nothing; or that if they had been mothers once, they shall be nothing else during the whole remainder of their lives. Neither women nor men need any law to exclude them from an occupation, if they have undertaken another which is incompatible with it. No one proposes to exclude the male sex from Parliament because a man may be a soldier or sailor in active service, or a merchant whose business requires all his time and energies. Nine-tenths of the occupations of men exclude them *de facto* from public life, as effectually as if they were excluded by law; but that is no reason for making laws to exclude even the nine-tenths, much less the remaining tenth. The reason of the case is the same for women as for men. There is no need to make provision by law that a woman shall not carry on the active details of a household, or of the education of children, and at the same time practise a profession or be elected to parliament. Where incompatibility is real, it will take care of itself: but there is gross injustice in making the incompatibility a pretence for the exclusion of those in whose case it does not exist. And these, if they were free to choose, would be a very large proportion. The maternity argument deserts its supporters in the case of single women, a large and increasing class of the population; a fact which, it is not irrelevant to remark, by tending to diminish the excessive competition of num-

bers, is calculated to assist greatly the prosperity of all. There is no inherent reason or necessity that all women should voluntarily choose to devote their lives to one animal function and its consequences. Numbers of women are wives and mothers only because there is no other career open to them, no other occupation for their feelings or their activities. Every improvement in their education, and enlargement of their faculties—everything which renders them more qualified for any other mode of life, increases the number of those to whom it is an injury and an oppression to be denied the choice. To say that women must be excluded from active life because maternity disqualifies them for it, is in fact to say, that every other career should be forbidden them in order that maternity may be their only resource.

But secondly, it is urged, that to give the same freedom of occupation to women as to men, would be an injurious addition to the crowd of competitors, by whom the avenues to almost all kinds of employment are choked up, and its remuneration depressed. This argument, it is to be observed, does not reach the political question. It gives no excuse for withholding from women the rights of citizenship. The suffrage, the jury-box, admission to the legislature and to office, it does not touch. It bears only on the industrial branch of the subject. Allowing it, then, in an economical point of view, its full force; assuming that to lay open to women the employments now monopolized by men, would tend, like the breaking down of other monopolies, to lower the rate of remuneration in those employments,—let us consider what is the amount of this evil consequence, and what the compensation for it. The worst ever asserted, much worse than is at all likely to be realized, is that if women competed with men, a man and a woman could not together earn more than is now earned by the man alone. Let us make this supposition, the most unfavourable supposition possible: the joint income of the two would be the same as before, while the woman would be raised from the position of a servant to that of a partner. Even if every woman, as matters now stand, had a claim on some man for support, how infinitely preferable is it that part of the income should be of the woman's earning, even if the aggregate sum were but little increased by it, rather than that she should be compelled to stand aside in order that men may be the sole earners, and the sole dispensers of what is earned! Even under the present laws respecting the property of women,* a woman who contributes materially to the support of the family, cannot be treated in the same contemptuously tyrannical manner as one who, however she may toil as a domestic drudge, is a dependant on the man for subsistence. As for the depression of wages by increase of competition, remedies will be found for it in time. Palliatives might be applied immediately; for in-

* The truly horrible effects of the present state of the law among the lowest of the working population, is exhibited in those cases of hideous maltreatment of their wives by working men, with which every newspaper, every police report, teems. Wretches unfit to have the smallest authority over any living thing, have a helpless woman for their household slave. These excesses could not exist, if women both earned, and had the right to possess, a part of the income of the family.

stance, a more rigid exclusion of children from industrial employment, during the years in which they ought to be working only to strengthen their bodies and minds for after-life. Children are *necessarily* dependent, and under the power of others; and their labour, being not for themselves but for the gain of their parents, is a proper subject for legislative regulation. With respect to the future, we neither believe that improvident multiplication, and the consequent excessive difficulty of gaining a subsistence, will eternally continue, nor that the division of mankind into capitalists and hired labourers, and the regulation of the reward of labourers mainly by demand and supply, will be for ever, or even much longer, the rule of the world. But so long as competition is the general law of human life, it is tyranny to shut out one-half of the competitors. All who have attained the age of self-government, have an equal claim to be permitted to sell whatever kind of useful labour they are capable of, for the price which it will bring.

The third objection to the admission of women to political or professional life, its alleged hardening tendency, belongs to an age now past, and is scarcely to be comprehended by people of the present time. There are still, however, persons who say that the world and its avocations render men selfish and unfeeling; that the struggles, rivalries and collisions of business and of politics make them harsh and unamiable; that if half the species must unavoidably be given up to these things, it is the more necessary that the other half should be kept free from them; that to preserve women from the bad influences of the world, is the only chance of preventing men from being wholly given up to them.

There would have been plausibility in this argument when the world was still in the age of violence, when life was full of physical conflict, and every man had to redress his injuries or those of others, by the sword or by the strength of his arm. Women, like priests, by being exempted from such responsibilities, and from some part of the accompanying dangers, may have been enabled to exercise a beneficial influence. But in the present condition of human life, we do not know where those hardening influences are to be found, to which men are subject and from which women are at present exempt. Individuals nowadays are seldom called upon to fight hand to hand, even with peaceful weapons; personal enmities and rivalries count for little in worldly transactions; the general pressure of circumstances, not the adverse will of individuals, is the obstacle men now have to make head against. That pressure, when excessive, breaks the spirit, and cramps and sours the feelings, but not less of women than of men, since they suffer certainly not less from its evils. There are still quarrels and dislikes, but the sources of them are changed. The feudal chief once found his bitterest enemy in his powerful neighbour, the minister or courtier in his rival for place: but opposition of interest in active life, as a cause of personal animosity, is out of date; the enmities of the present day arise not from great things but small, from what people say of one another, more than from what they do; and if there are hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, they are to be found among women fully as much as

among men. In the present state of civilization, the notion of guarding women from the hardening influences of the world, could only be realized by secluding them from society altogether. The common duties of common life, as at present constituted, are incompatible with any other softness in women than weakness. Surely weak minds in weak bodies must ere long cease to be even supposed to be either attractive or amiable.

But, in truth, none of these arguments and considerations touch the foundations of the subject. The real question is, whether it is right and expedient that one-half of the human race should pass through life in a state of forced subordination to the other half. If the best state of human society is that of being divided into two parts, one consisting of persons with a will and a substantive existence, the other of humble companions to these persons, attached, each of them to one, for the purpose of bringing up *his* children, and making *his* home pleasant to him; if this is the place assigned to women, it is but kindness to educate them for this; to make them believe that the greatest good fortune which can befall them, is to be chosen by some man for this purpose; and that every other career which the world deems happy or honourable, is closed to them by the law, not of social institutions, but of nature and destiny.

When, however, we ask why the existence of one-half the species should be merely ancillary to that of the other—why each woman should be a mere appendage to a man, allowed to have no interests of her own, that there may be nothing to compete in her mind with his interests and his pleasure,—the only reason which can be given is, that men like it. It is agreeable to them that men should live for their own sake, women for the sake of men: and the qualities and conduct in subjects which are agreeable to rulers, they succeed for a long time in making the subjects themselves consider as their appropriate virtues. Helvetius has met with much obloquy for asserting, that persons usually mean by virtues the qualities which are useful or convenient to themselves. How truly this is said of mankind in general, and how wonderfully the ideas of virtue set afloat by the powerful, are caught and imbibed by those under their dominion, is exemplified by the manner in which the world were once persuaded that the supreme virtue of subjects was loyalty to kings, and are still persuaded that the paramount virtue of womanhood is loyalty to man. Under a nominal recognition of a moral code common to both, in practice self-will and self-assertion form the type of what are designated as manly virtues, while abnegation of self, patience, resignation, and submission to power, unless when resistance is commanded by other interests than their own, have been stamped by general consent as pre-eminently the duties and graces required of women,—the meaning being merely, that power makes itself the centre of moral obligation, and that a man likes to have his own will, but does not like that his domestic companion should have a will different from his.

We are far from pretending that in modern and civilized times, no reciprocity of obligation is acknowledged on the part of the stronger. Such an assertion would be very wide of the truth. But even the

reciprocity, which has disarmed tyranny at least in the higher and middle classes, of its most revolting features, yet when combined with the original evil of the dependent condition of women, has introduced in its turn serious evils.

In the beginning, and amongst tribes which are still in a primitive condition, women were and are the slaves of men for purposes of toil. All the hard bodily labour devolves on them. The Australian savage is idle, while women painfully dig up the roots on which he lives. An American Indian, when he has killed a deer, leaves it, and sends a woman to carry it home. In a state somewhat more advanced, as in Asia, women were and are the slaves of men for the purposes of sensuality. In Europe there early succeeded a third and milder dominion, secured not by blows, nor by locks and bars, but by sedulous inculcation on the mind; feelings also of kindness, and ideas of duty, such as a superior owes to inferiors under his protection, become more and more involved in the relation. But it did not for many ages become a relation of companionship, even between unequals; the lives of the two persons were apart. The wife was part of the furniture of home, of the resting-place to which the man returned from business or pleasure. His occupations were, as they still are, among men; his pleasures and excitements also were, for the most part, among men—among his equals. He was a patriarch and a despot within four walls, and irresponsible power had its effect, greater or less according to his disposition, in rendering him domineering, exacting, self-worshipping, when not capriciously or brutally tyrannical. But if the moral part of his nature suffered, it was not necessarily so, in the same degree, with the intellectual or the active portion. He might have as much vigour of mind and energy of character as his nature enabled him, and as the circumstances of his times allowed. He might write the 'Paradise Lost,' or win the battle of Marengo. This was the condition of the Greeks and Romans, and of the moderns until a recent date. Their relations with their domestic subordinates occupied a mere corner, though a cherished one, of their lives. Their education as men, the formation of their character and faculties, depended mainly on a different class of influences.

It is otherwise now. The progress of improvement has imposed on all possessors of power, and of domestic power among the rest, an increased and increasing sense of correlative obligation. No man now thinks that his wife has no claim upon his actions, but such as he may accord to her. All men of any conscience believe that their duty to their wives is one of the most binding of their obligations. Nor is it supposed to consist solely in protection, which, in the present state of civilization, women have almost ceased to need: it involves care for their happiness and consideration of their wishes, with a not unfrequent sacrifice of their own to them. The power of husbands has reached the stage which the power of kings had arrived at, when opinion did not yet question the rightfulness of arbitrary power, but in theory, and to a certain extent in practice, condemned the selfish use of it. This improvement in the moral sentiments of mankind, and increased sense of the consideration due by every man

to those who had no one but himself to look to, has tended to make home more and more the centre of interest, and domestic circumstances and society a larger and larger part of life, and of its pursuits and pleasures. The tendency has been strengthened by the changes of tastes and manners which have so remarkably distinguished the last two or three generations. In days not far distant, men found their excitement and filled up their time in violent bodily exercises, noisy merriment, and intemperance. They have now, in all but the very poorest classes, lost their inclination for these things, and for the coarser pleasures generally; they have now scarcely any tastes but those which they have in common with women, and, for the first time in the world, men and women are really companions. A most beneficial change, if the companionship were between equals; but being between unequals, it produces, what good observers have noticed, though without perceiving its cause, a progressive deterioration among men in what had hitherto been considered the masculine excellences. Those who are so careful that women should not become men, do not see that men are becoming what they have decided that women should be—are falling into the feebleness which they have so long cultivated in their companions. Those who are associated in their lives, tend to become assimilated in character. In the present closeness of association between the sexes, men cannot retain manliness unless women acquire it.

There is hardly any situation more unfavourable to the maintenance of elevation of character or force of intellect, than to live in the society, and seek by preference the sympathy of inferiors in mental endowments. Why is it that we constantly see in life so much of intellectual and moral promise followed by such inadequate performance, but because the aspirant has compared himself only with those below himself, and has not sought improvement or stimulus from measuring himself with his equals or superiors? In the present state of social life, this is becoming the general condition of men. They care less and less for any sympathies, and are less and less under any personal influences, but those of the domestic roof. Not to be misunderstood, it is necessary that we should distinctly disclaim the belief, that women are even now inferior in intellect to men. There are women who are the equals in intellect of any men who ever lived: and comparing ordinary women with ordinary men, the varied though petty details which compose the occupation of most women, call forth probably as much of mental ability as the uniform routine of the pursuits which are the habitual occupation of a large majority of men. It is from nothing in the faculties themselves, but from the petty subjects and interests on which alone they are exercised, that the companionship of women, such as their present circumstances make them, so often exercises a dissolvent influence on high faculties and aspirations in men. If one of the two has no knowledge and no care about the great ideas and purposes which dignify life, or about any of its practical concerns save personal interests and personal vanities, her conscious, and still more her unconscious influence, will, except in rare cases, reduce to a secondary place in his mind, if not entirely extinguish, those interests which she cannot or does not share.

Our argument here brings us into collision with what may be termed the moderate reformers of the education of women; a sort of persons who cross the path of improvement on all great questions; those who would maintain the old bad principles, mitigating their consequences. These say that women should be, not slaves nor servants, but companions; and educated for that office: (they do not say that men should be educated to be the companions of women). But since uncultivated women are not suitable companions for cultivated men, and a man who feels interest in things above and beyond the family circle wishes that his companion should sympathize with him in that interest,—they therefore say, let women improve their understanding and taste, acquire general knowledge, cultivate poetry, art, even coquet with science, and some stretch their liberality so far as to say, inform themselves on politics; not as pursuits, but sufficiently to feel an interest in the subjects, and to be capable of holding a conversation on them with the husband, or at least of understanding and imbibing his wisdom. Very agreeable to him, no doubt, but unfortunately the reverse of improving. It is from having intellectual communion only with those to whom they can lay down the law, that so few men continue to advance in wisdom beyond the first stages. The most eminent men cease to improve, if they associate only with disciples. When they have overtopped those who immediately surround them, if they wish for further growth, they must seek for others of their own stature to consort with. The mental companionship which is improving, is communion between active minds, not mere contact between an active mind and a passive. This inestimable advantage is even now enjoyed, when a strong-minded man and a strong-minded woman are, by a rare chance, united: and would be had far oftener, if education took the same pains to form strong-minded women which it takes to prevent them from being formed. But this supposes other than mere *dilettante* instruction, given as an elegant amusement or agreeable accomplishment, not as a power to be used. Mental cultivation adapted for show and not for use, which makes pigmies of men, is the only kind given or proposed to be given to women by the present reformers of their education. What makes intelligent beings is the power of thought: the stimuli which call forth that power are the interest and dignity of thought itself, and a field for its practical application. Both motives are cut off from those who are told from infancy that thought, and all its greater applications, are other people's business, while theirs is to make themselves agreeable to other people. High mental powers in women will be but an exceptional accident, until every career is open to them, and until they, as well as men, are educated for themselves and for the world—not one sex for the other.

In what we have said on the effect of the inferior position of women, combined with the present constitution of married life, we have thus far had in view only the most favourable cases, those in which there is some real approach to that union and blending of characters and of lives, which the theory of the relation contemplates as its ideal standard. But if we look to the great majority of cases,

the effect of women's legal inferiority on the character both of women and of men must be painted in far darker colours. We do not speak here of the grosser brutalities, nor of the man's power to seize on the woman's earnings, or compel her to live with him against her will. We do not address ourselves to any one who requires to have it proved that these things should be remedied. We suppose average cases, in which there is neither complete union nor complete disunion of feelings and of character; and we affirm that in such cases the influence of the dependence on the woman's side, is demoralizing to the character of both.

The common opinion is, that whatever may be the case with the intellectual, the moral influence of women over men is almost always salutary. It is, we are often told, the great counteractive of selfishness. However the case may be as to personal influence, the influence of the position tends eminently to promote selfishness. The most insignificant of men, the man who can obtain influence or consideration nowhere else, finds one place where he is chief and head. There is one person, often greatly his superior in understanding, who is obliged to consult him, and whom he is not obliged to consult. He is judge, magistrate, ruler, over their joint concerns; arbiter of all differences between them. The justice or conscience to which her appeal must be made, is his justice and conscience: it is his to hold the balance and adjust the scales between his own claims or wishes and those of another. His is now the only tribunal, in civilized life, in which the same person is judge and party. A generous mind, such a situation, makes the balance incline against its own side, and gives the other not less, but more, than a fair equality; and thus the weaker side may be enabled to turn the very fact of dependence into an instrument of power, and, in default of justice, take an ungenerous advantage of generosity,—rendering the unjust power, to those who make an unselfish use of it, a torment and a burthen. But how is it when average men are invested with this power, without reciprocity and without responsibility? Give such a man the idea that he is first in law and in opinion—that to will is his part, and hers to submit; it is absurd to suppose that this idea merely glides over his mind, without sinking into it, or having any effect on his feelings and practice. The propensity to make himself the first object of consideration, and others at most the second, is not so rare as to be wanting where everything seems purposely arranged for permitting its indulgence. If there is any self-will in the man, he becomes either the conscious or unconscious despot of his household. The wife, indeed, often succeeds in gaining her objects, but it is by some of the many various forms of indirectness and management.

Thus the position is corrupting equally to both; in the one it produces the vices of power, in the other those of artifice. Women, in their present physical and moral state, having stronger impulses, would naturally be franker and more direct than men; yet all the old saws and traditions represent them as artful and dissembling. Why? Because their only way to their objects is by indirect paths. In all countries where women have strong wishes and active minds, this consequence is inevitable: and if it is less conspicuous in Eng-

land than in some other places, it is because Englishwomen, saving occasional exceptions, have ceased to have either strong wishes or active minds.

We are not now speaking of cases in which there is anything deserving the name of strong affection on both sides. That, where it exists, is too powerful a principle not to modify greatly the bad influences of the situation; it seldom, however, destroys them entirely. Much oftener the bad influences are too strong for the affection, and destroy it. The highest order of durable and happy attachments would be a hundred times more frequent than they are, if the affection which the two sexes sought from one another were that genuine friendship, which only exists between equals in privileges as in faculties. But with regard to what is commonly called affection in married life—the habitual and almost mechanical feeling of kindness, and pleasure in each other's society, which generally grows up between persons who constantly live together, unless there is actual dislike—there is nothing in this to contradict or qualify the mischievous influence of the unequal relation. Such feelings often exist between a sultan and his favourites, between a master and his servants; they are merely examples of the pliability of human nature, which accommodates itself in some degree even to the worst circumstances, and the commonest natures always the most easily.

With respect to the influence personally exercised by women over men, it, no doubt, renders them less harsh and brutal; in ruder times, it was often the only softening influence to which they were accessible. But the assertion, that the wife's influence renders the man less selfish, contains, as things now are, fully as much error as truth. Selfishness towards the wife herself, and towards those in whom she is interested, the children, though favoured by their dependence, the wife's influence, no doubt, tends to counteract. But the general effect on him of her character, so long as her interests are concentrated in the family, tends but to substitute for individual selfishness a family selfishness, wearing an amiable guise, and putting on the mask of duty. How rarely is the wife's influence on the side of public virtue: how rarely does it do otherwise than discourage any effort of principle by which the private interests or worldly vanities of the family can be expected to suffer! Public spirit, sense of duty towards the public good, is of all virtues, as women are now educated and situated, the most rarely to be found among them; they have seldom even, what in men is often a partial substitute for public spirit, a sense of personal honour connected with any public duty. Many a man, whom no money or personal flattery would have bought, has bartered his political opinions against titles or invitations to his wife; and a still greater number are made mere hunters after the puerile vanities of society, because their wives value them. As for opinions, in Catholic countries the wife's influence is another name for that of the priest; he gives her, in the hopes and emotions connected with a future life, a consolation for the sufferings and disappointments which are her ordinary lot in this. Elsewhere, her weight is thrown into the scale either of the most commonplace or of the most outwardly prosperous opinions; either those by which

censure will be escaped, or by which worldly advancement is likeliest to be procured. In England, the wife's influence is usually on the illiberal and anti-popular side: this is generally the gaining side for personal interest and vanity; and what to her is the democracy or liberalism in which she has no part—which leaves her the Pariah it found her? The man himself, when he marries, usually declines into Conservatism, begins to sympathize with the holders of power more than with its victims, and thinks it his part to be on the side of authority. As to mental progress, except those vulgarer attainments by which vanity or ambition are promoted, there is generally an end to them in a man who marries a woman mentally his inferior; unless, indeed, he is unhappy in marriage, or becomes indifferent. From a man of twenty-five or thirty, after he is married, an experienced observer seldom expects any further progress in mind or feelings. It is rare that the progress already made is maintained. Any spark of the *mens diviniore* which might otherwise have spread and become a flame, seldom survives for any length of time unextinguished. For a mind which learns to be satisfied with what it already is—which does not incessantly look forward to a degree of improvement not yet reached—becomes relaxed, self-indulgent, and loses the spring and the tension which maintain it even at the point already attained. And there is no fact in human nature to which experience bears more invariable testimony than to this—that all social or sympathetic influences which do not raise up, pull down; if they do not tend to stimulate and exalt the mind, they tend to vulgarize it.

For the interest, therefore, not only of women but of men, and of human improvement in the widest sense, the emancipation of women, which the modern world often boasts of having effected, and for which credit is sometimes given to civilization, and sometimes to Christianity, cannot stop where it is. If it were either necessary or just that one portion of mankind should remain mentally and spiritually only half developed, the development of the other portion ought to have been made, as far as possible, independent of their influence. Instead of this, they have become the most intimate, and it may now be said, the only intimate associates of those to whom yet they are sedulously kept inferior; and have been raised just high enough to drag the others down to themselves.

We have left behind a host of vulgar objections, either as not worthy of an answer, or as answered by the general course of our remarks. A few words, however, must be said on one plea, which in England is made much use of for giving an unselfish air to the upholding of selfish privileges, and which, with unobserving, unreflecting people, passes for much more than it is worth. Women, it is said, do not desire—do not seek, what is called their emancipation. On the contrary, they generally disown such claims when made in their behalf, and fall with *acharnement* upon any one of themselves who identifies herself with their common cause.

Supposing the fact to be true in the fullest extent ever asserted, if it proves that European women ought to remain as they are, it proves exactly the same with respect to Asiatic women; for they too, instead of murmuring at their seclusion, and at the restraint imposed

upon them, pride themselves on it, and are astonished at the effrontery of women who receive visits from male acquaintances, and are seen in the streets unveiled. Habits of submission make men as well as women servile-minded. The vast population of Asia do not desire or value, probably would not accept, political liberty, nor the savages of the forest, civilization; which does not prove that either of those things is undesirable for them, or that they will not, at some future time, enjoy it. Custom hardens human beings to any kind of degradation, by deadening the part of their nature which would resist it. And the case of women is, in this respect, even a peculiar one, for no other inferior caste that we have heard of, have been taught to regard their degradation as their honour. The argument, however, implies a secret consciousness that the alleged preference of women for their dependent state is merely apparent, and arises from their being allowed no choice; for if the preference be natural, there can be no necessity for enforcing it by law. To make laws compelling people to follow their inclination, has not hitherto been thought necessary by any legislator. The plea that women do not desire any change, is the same that has been urged, times out of mind, against the proposal of abolishing any social evil,—“There is no complaint;” which is generally not true, and when true, only so because there is not that hope of success, without which complaint seldom makes itself audible to unwilling ears. How does the objector know that women do not desire equality and freedom? He never knew a woman who did not, or would not, desire it for herself individually. It would be very simple to suppose, that if they do desire it they will say so. Their position is like that of the tenants or labourers who vote against their own political interests to please their landlords or employers; with the unique addition, that submission is inculcated on them from childhood, as the peculiar attraction and grace of their character. They are taught to think, that to repel actively even an admitted injustice done to themselves, is somewhat unfeminine, and had better be left to some male friend or protector. To be accused of rebelling against anything which admits of being called an ordinance of society, they are taught to regard as an imputation of a serious offence, to say the least, against the proprieties of their sex. It requires unusual moral courage as well as disinterestedness in a woman, to express opinions favourable to women’s enfranchisement, until, at least, there is some prospect of obtaining it. The comfort of her individual life, and her social consideration, usually depend on the goodwill of those who hold the undue power; and to possessors of power any complaint, however bitter, of the misuse of it, is a less flagrant act of insubordination than to protest against the power itself. The professions of women in this matter remind us of the State offenders of old, who, on the point of execution, used to protest their love and devotion to the sovereign by whose unjust mandate they suffered. Griselda herself might be matched from the speeches put by Shakespeare into the mouths of male victims of kingly caprice and tyranny: the Duke of Buckingham, for example, in ‘Henry the Eighth,’ and even Wolsey. The literary class of women, especially in England, are ostentatious in disclaiming the

desire for equality or citizenship, and proclaiming their complete satisfaction with the place which society assigns to them,—exercising in this, as in many other respects, a most noxious influence over the feelings and opinions of men, who unsuspectingly accept the servilities of toadyism as concessions to the force of truth, not considering that it is the personal interest of these women to profess whatever opinions they expect will be agreeable to men. It is not among men of talent, sprung from the people, and patronized and flattered by the aristocracy, that we look for the leaders of a democratic movement. Successful literary women are just as unlikely to prefer the cause of women to their own social consideration. They depend on men’s opinion for their literary as well as for their feminine successes; and such is their bad opinion of men, that they believe there is not more than one in ten thousand who does not dislike and fear strength, sincerity, or high spirit in a woman. They are therefore anxious to earn pardon and toleration for whatever of these qualities their writings may exhibit on other subjects, by a studied display of submission on this, that they may give no occasion for vulgar men to say (what nothing will prevent vulgar men from saying), that learning makes women unfeminine, and that literary ladies are likely to be bad wives.

But enough of this; especially as the fact which affords the occasion for this paper, makes it impossible any longer to assert the universal acquiescence of women (saving individual exceptions) in their dependent condition. In the United States at least, there are women, seemingly numerous, and now organized for action on the public mind, who demand equality in the fullest acceptation of the word, and demand it by a straightforward appeal to men’s sense of justice, not plead for it with a timid deprecation of their displeasure.

Like other popular movements, however, this may be seriously retarded by the blunders of its adherents. Tried by the ordinary standard of public meetings, the speeches at the Convention are remarkable for the preponderance of the rational over the declamatory element; but there are some exceptions; and things to which it is impossible to attach any rational meaning, have found their way into the resolutions. Thus, the resolution which sets forth the claims made in behalf of women, after claiming equality in education, in industrial pursuits, and in political rights, enumerates as a fourth head of demand something under the name of “social and spiritual union,” and “a medium of expressing the highest moral and spiritual views of justice,” with other similar verbiage, serving only to mar the simplicity and rationality of the other demands. What is wanted for women is equal rights, equal admission to all social privileges; not a position apart, a sort of sentimental priesthood. To this, the only just and rational principle, both the resolutions and the speeches, for the most part, adhere. They contain so little which is akin to the nonsensical paragraph in question, that we suspect it not to be the work of the same hands as most of the other resolutions. The strength of the cause lies in the support of those who are influenced by reason and principle; and to attempt to recommend it by sentimentalities, absurd in reason and inconsistent with the principle on

which the movement is founded, is to place a good cause on a level with a bad one.

There are indications that the example of America will be followed on this side of the Atlantic; and the first step has been taken in that part of England where every serious movement in the direction of political progress has its commencement—the manufacturing districts of the North. On the 13th of February, 1851, a petition of women, agreed to by a public meeting at Sheffield, and claiming the elective franchise, was presented to the House of Lords by the Earl of Carlisle.

THE END.

EXTRACTS

FROM

MR MILL'S SUBJECTION OF WOMEN.

WITH PERMISSION OF MESSRS LONGMAN & CO.

PUBLISHED FOR THE
London National Society for Women's Suffrage,
BY
MESSRS TRÜBNER & CO.,
6 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON, E.C.

THE object of this work, from which the following extracts are made, is to shew that the legal subordination of one sex to the other is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other.

EXTRACTS

FROM

MR MILL'S SUBJECTION OF WOMEN.

The generality of a practice is in some cases a strong presumption that it is, or at all events once was, conducive to laudable ends. This is the case, when the practice was first adopted, or afterwards kept up, as a means to such ends, and was grounded on experience of the mode in which they could be most effectually attained. If the authority of men over women, when first established, had been the result of a conscientious comparison between different modes of constituting the government of society; if, after trying various other modes of social organization—the government of women over men, equality between the two, and such mixed and divided modes of government as might be invented—it had been decided, on the testimony of experience, that the mode in which women are wholly under the rule of men, having no share at all in public concerns, and each in private being under the legal obligation of obedience to the man with whom she has associated her destiny, was the arrangement most conducive to the happiness and well being of both; its general adoption might then be fairly thought to be some evidence that, at the time when it was adopted, it was the best: though even then the considerations which recommended it may, like so many other primeval social facts of the greatest importance, have subsequently, in the course of ages, ceased to exist. But the state of the case is in every respect the reverse of this. In the first place, the opinion in favour of the present system, which entirely subordinates the weaker sex to the stronger, rests upon theory only; for there never has been trial made of any other; so that experience, in the

sense in which it is vulgarly opposed to theory, cannot be pretended to have pronounced any verdict. And in the second place, the adoption of this system of inequality never was the result of deliberation, or forethought, or any social ideas, or any notion whatever of what conduced to the benefit of humanity or the good order of society. It arose simply from the fact that from the very earliest twilight of human society, every woman (owing to the value attached to her by men, combined with her inferiority in muscular strength) was found in a state of bondage to some man. Laws and systems of polity always begin by recognising the relations they find already existing between individuals. They convert what was a mere physical fact into a legal right, give it the sanction of society, and principally aim at the substitution of public and organized means of asserting and protecting these rights, instead of the irregular and lawless conflict of physical strength. Those who had already been compelled to obedience became in this manner legally bound to it. Slavery, from being a mere affair of force between the master and the slave, became regularized and a matter of compact among the masters, who, binding themselves to one another for common protection, guaranteed by their collective strength the private possessions of each, including his slaves. In early times, the great majority of the male sex were slaves, as well as the whole of the female. And many ages elapsed, some of them ages of high cultivation, before any thinker was bold enough to question the rightfulness, and the absolute social necessity, either of the one slavery or of the other. By degrees such thinkers did arise: and (the general progress of society assisting) the slavery of the male sex has, in all the countries of Christian Europe at least (though, in one of them, only within the last few years) been at length abolished, and that of the female sex has been gradually changed into a milder form of dependence. But this dependence, as it exists at present, is not an original institution, taking a fresh start from considerations of justice and social expediency—it is the primitive state of slavery lasting on, through successive mitigations and modifications occasioned by the same causes which have softened the general manners, and brought all human relations more under the control of justice and the influence of humanity. It has not lost the taint of its brutal origin. No presumption in its favour, therefore, can be drawn from the fact of its existence. The only such presumption which it could be supposed to have, must be grounded on its having lasted till now, when so many other things which came down from the same odious source have been done away with. And this, indeed, is what makes it strange to

ordinary ears, to hear it asserted that the inequality of rights between men and women has no other source than the law of the strongest.

That this statement should have the effect of a paradox, is in some respects creditable to the progress of civilization, and the improvement of the moral sentiments of mankind. We now live—that is to say, one or two of the most advanced nations of the world now live—in a state in which the law of the strongest seems to be entirely abandoned as the regulating principle of the world's affairs: nobody professes it, and, as regards most of the relations between human beings, nobody is permitted to practise it. When any one succeeds in doing so, it is under cover of some pretext which gives him the semblance of having some general social interest on his side. This being the ostensible state of things, people flatter themselves that the rule of mere force is ended; that the law of the strongest cannot be the reason of existence of anything which has remained in full operation down to the present time. However any of our present institutions may have begun, it can only, they think, have been preserved to this period of advanced civilization by a well-grounded feeling of its adaptation to human nature, and conduciveness to the general good. They do not understand the great vitality and durability of institutions which place right on the side of might; how intensely they are clung to; how the good as well as the bad propensities and sentiments of those who have power in their hands, become identified with retaining it; how slowly these bad institutions give way, one at a time, the weakest first, beginning with those which are least interwoven with the daily habits of life; and how very rarely those who have obtained legal power because they first had physical, have ever lost their hold of it until the physical power had passed over to the other side. Such shifting of the physical force not having taken place in the case of women; this fact, combined with all the peculiar and characteristic features of the particular case, made it certain from the first that this branch of the system of right founded on might, though softened in its most atrocious features at an earlier period than several of the others, would be the very last to disappear. It was inevitable that this one case of a social relation grounded on force, would survive through generations of institutions grounded on equal justice, an almost solitary exception to the general character of their laws and customs; but which, so long as it does not proclaim its own origin, and as discussion has not brought out its true character, is not felt to jar with modern civilization, any more than domestic slavery among

the Greeks jarred with their notion of themselves as a free people.

It will be said, the rule of men over women differs from all others in not being a rule of force : it is accepted voluntarily ; women make no complaint, and are consenting parties to it. In the first place, a great number of women do not accept it. Ever since there have been women able to make their sentiments known by their writings (the only mode of publicity which society permits to them), an increasing number of them have recorded protests against their present social condition : and recently many thousands of them, headed by the most eminent women known to the public, have petitioned Parliament for their admission to the Parliamentary Suffrage. The claim of women to be educated as solidly, and in the same branches of knowledge, as men, is urged with growing intensity, and with a great prospect of success ; while the demand for their admission into professions and occupations hitherto closed against them, becomes every year more urgent. Though there are not in this country, as there are in the United States, periodical Conventions and an organized party to agitate for the Rights of Women, there is a numerous and active Society organized and managed by women, for the more limited object of obtaining the political franchise. Nor is it only in our own country and in America that women are beginning to protest, more or less collectively, against the disabilities under which they labour. France, and Italy, and Switzerland, and Russia now afford examples of the same thing. How many more women there are who silently cherish similar aspirations, no one can possibly know ; but there are abundant tokens how many *would* cherish them, were they not so strenuously taught to repress them as contrary to the proprieties of their sex. It must be remembered, also, that no enslaved class ever asked for complete liberty at once.

The course of history, and the tendencies of progressive human society, afford not only no presumption in favour of this system of inequality of rights, but a strong one against it. So far as the whole course of human improvement up to this time, the whole stream of modern tendencies, warrants any inference on the subject, it is, that this relic of the past is discordant with the future, and must necessarily disappear.

For, what is the peculiar character of the modern world—the difference which chiefly distinguishes modern institutions, modern social ideas, modern life itself, from those of times long past ? It is, that human beings are no longer born to their place in life, and chained down by an inexorable bond to the place they are born to, but are free to employ their faculties, and such favourable chances

as offer, to achieve the lot which may appear to them most desirable. Human society of old was constituted on a very different principle. All were born to a fixed social position, and were mostly kept in it by law, or interdicted from any means by which they could emerge from it. As some men are born white and others black, so some were born slaves and others freemen and citizens ; some were born patricians, others plebeians ; some were born feudal nobles, others commoners and *roturiers*. A slave or serf could never make himself free, nor, except by the will of his master, become so.

At present, in the more improved countries, the disabilities of women are the only case, save one, in which laws and institutions take persons at their birth, and ordain that they shall never in all their lives be allowed to compete for certain things. The one exception is that of royalty. Persons still are born to the throne ; no one, not of the reigning family, can ever occupy it, and no one even of that family can, by any means but the course of hereditary succession, attain it. All other dignities and social advantages are open to the whole male sex : many indeed are only attainable by wealth, but wealth may be striven for by any one, and is actually obtained by many men of the very humblest origin. The difficulties to the majority, are indeed insuperable without the aid of fortunate accidents ; but no male human being is under any legal ban : neither law nor opinion superadd artificial obstacles to the natural ones. Royalty is excepted : but in this case every one feels it to be an exception—an anomaly in the modern world, in marked opposition to its customs and principles, and to be justified only by extraordinary special expediences, which, though individuals and nations differ in estimating their weight, unquestionably do in fact exist. But in this exceptional case, in which a high social function is, for important reasons, bestowed on birth instead of being put up to competition, all free nations contrive to adhere in substance to the principle from which they nominally derogate ; for they circumscribe this high function by conditions avowedly intended to prevent the person to whom it ostensibly belongs from really performing it ; while the person by whom it is performed, the responsible minister, does obtain the post by a competition from which no full-grown citizen of the male sex is legally excluded. The disabilities, therefore, to which women are subject from the mere fact of their birth, are the solitary examples of the kind in modern legislation. In no instance except this, which comprehends half the human race, are the higher social functions closed against any one by a fatality of birth which no exertions, and no change of circumstances, can overcome ; for even religious

disabilities (besides that in England and in Europe they have practically almost ceased to exist) do not close any career to the disqualified person in case of conversion.

The social subordination of women thus stands out an isolated fact in modern social institutions; a solitary breach of what has become their fundamental law; a single relic of an old world of thought and practice exploded in everything else, but retained in the one thing of most universal interest; as if a gigantic dolmen, or a vast temple of Jupiter Olympius, occupied the site of St. Paul's and received daily worship, while the surrounding Christian churches were only resorted to on fasts and festivals. This entire discrepancy between one social fact and all those which accompany it, and the radical opposition between its nature and the progressive movement which is the boast of the modern world, and which has successively swept away everything else of an analogous character, surely affords, to a conscientious observer of human tendencies, serious matter for reflection. It raises a *primâ facie* presumption on the unfavourable side, far outweighing any which custom and usage could in such circumstances create on the favourable; and should at least suffice to make this, like the choice between republicanism and royalty, a balanced question.

The least that can be demanded is, that the question should not be considered as prejudged by existing fact and existing opinion, but open to discussion on its merits, as a question of justice and expediency: the decision on this, as on any of the other social arrangements of mankind, depending on what an enlightened estimate of tendencies and consequences may show to be most advantageous to humanity in general, without distinction of sex. And the discussion must be a real discussion, descending to foundations, and not resting satisfied with vague and general assertions. It will not do, for instance, to assert in general terms, that the experience of mankind has pronounced in favour of the existing system. Experience cannot possibly have decided between two courses, so long as there has only been experience of one. If it be said that the doctrine of the equality of the sexes rests only on theory, it must be remembered that the contrary doctrine also has only theory to rest upon. All that is proved in its favour by direct experience, is that mankind have been able to exist under it, and to attain the degree of improvement and prosperity which we now see; but whether that prosperity has been attained sooner, or is now greater, than it would have been under the other system, experience does not say. On the other hand, experience does say, that every step in improvement has been so invariably accompanied by a step made in raising the social posi-

tion of women, that historians and philosophers have been led to adopt their elevation or debasement as on the whole the surest test and most correct measure of the civilization of a people or an age. Through all the progressive period of human history, the condition of women has been approaching nearer to equality with men. This does not of itself prove that the assimilation must go on to complete equality; but it assuredly affords some presumption that such is the case.

Neither does it avail anything to say that the *nature* of the two sexes adapts them to their present functions and position, and renders these appropriate to them. Standing on the ground of common sense and the constitution of the human mind, I deny that any one knows, or can know, the nature of the two sexes, as long as they have only been seen in their present relation to one another. If men had ever been found in society without women, or women without men, or if there had been a society of men and women in which the women were not under the control of the men, something might have been positively known about the mental and moral differences which may be inherent in the nature of each. What is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing—the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others. It may be asserted without scruple, that no other class of dependents have had their character so entirely distorted from its natural proportions by their relation with their masters; for, if conquered and slave races have been, in some respects, more forcibly repressed, whatever in them has not been crushed down by an iron heel has generally been let alone, and if left with any liberty of development, it has developed itself according to its own laws; but in the case of women, a hot-house and stove cultivation has always been carried on of some of the capabilities of their nature, for the benefit and pleasure of their masters. Then, because certain products of the general vital force sprout luxuriantly and reach a great development in this heated atmosphere and under this active nurture and watering, while other shoots from the same root, which are left outside in the wintry air, with ice purposely heaped all round them, have a stunted growth, and some are burnt off with fire and disappear; men, with that inability to recognise their own work which distinguishes the unanalytic mind, indolently believe that the tree grows of itself in the way they have made it grow, and that it would die if one half of it were not kept in a vapour bath and the other half in the snow.

One thing we may be certain of—that what is contrary to women's nature to do, they never will be made to do by simply

giving their nature free play. The anxiety of mankind to interfere in behalf of nature, for fear lest nature should not succeed in effecting its purpose, is an altogether unnecessary solicitude. What women by nature cannot do, it is quite superfluous to forbid them from doing. What they can do, but not so well as the men who are their competitors, competition suffices to exclude them from ; since nobody asks for protective duties and bounties in favour of women ; it is only asked that the present bounties and protective duties in favour of men should be recalled. If women have a greater natural inclination for some things than for others, there is no need of laws or social inculcation to make the majority of them do the former in preference to the latter. Whatever women's services are most wanted for, the free play of competition will hold out the strongest inducements to them to undertake. And, as the words imply, they are most wanted for the things for which they are most fit ; by the apportionment of which to them, the collective faculties of the two sexes can be applied on the whole with the greatest sum of valuable result.

It will perhaps be sufficient if I confine myself, in the details of my argument, to functions of a public nature : since, if I am successful as to those, it probably will be readily granted that women should be admissible to all other occupations to which it is at all material whether they are admitted or not. And here let me begin by marking out one function, broadly distinguished from all others, their right to which is entirely independent of any question which can be raised concerning their faculties. I mean the suffrage, both parliamentary and municipal. The right to share in the choice of those who are to exercise a public trust, is altogether a distinct thing from that of competing for the trust itself. If no one could vote for a member of parliament who was not fit to be a candidate, the government would be a narrow oligarchy indeed. To have a voice in choosing those by whom one is to be governed, is a means of self-protection due to every one, though he were to remain for ever excluded from the function of governing : and that women are considered fit to have such a choice, may be presumed from the fact, that the law already gives it to women in the most important of all cases to themselves : for the choice of the man who is to govern a woman to the end of life, is always supposed to be voluntarily made by herself. In the case of election to public trusts, it is the business of constitutional law to surround the right of suffrage with all needful securities and limitations ; but whatever securities are sufficient in the case of the male sex, no others need be required in the case of women. Under whatever conditions, and within whatever limits, men are

admitted to the suffrage, there is not a shadow of justification for not admitting women under the same. The majority of the women of any class are not likely to differ in political opinion from the majority of the men of the same class, unless the question be one in which the interests of women, as such, are in some way involved ; and if they are so, women require the suffrage, as their guarantee of just and equal consideration. This ought to be obvious even to those who coincide in no other of the doctrines for which I contend. Even if every woman were a wife, and if every wife ought to be a slave, all the more would these slaves stand in need of legal protection : and we know what legal protection the slaves have, where the laws are made by their masters.

The concessions of the privileged to the unprivileged are so seldom brought about by any better motive than the power of the unprivileged to extort them, that any arguments against the prerogative of sex are likely to be little attended to by the generality, as long as they are able to say to themselves that women do not complain of it. That fact certainly enables men to retain the unjust privilege some time longer ; but does not render it less unjust. Exactly the same thing may be said of the women in the harem of an Oriental : they do not complain of not being allowed the freedom of European women. They think our women insufferably bold and unfeminine. How rarely it is that even men complain of the general order of society ; and how much rarer still would such complaint be, if they did not know of any different order existing anywhere else. Women do not complain of the general lot of women ; or rather they do, for plaintive elegies on it are very common in the writings of women, and were still more so as long as the lamentations could not be suspected of having any practical object. Their complaints are like the complaints which men make of the general unsatisfactoriness of human life ; they are not meant to imply blame, or to plead for any change. But though women do not complain of the power of husbands, each complains of her own husband, or of the husbands of her friends. It is the same in all other cases of servitude, at least in the commencement of the emancipatory movement. The serfs did not at first complain of the power of their lords, but only of their tyranny. The Commons began by claiming a few municipal privileges ; they next asked an exemption for themselves from being taxed without their own consent ; but they would at that time have thought it a great presumption to claim any share in the king's sovereign authority. The case of women is now the only case in which to rebel against established rules is still looked upon with the same eyes as was formerly a

subject's claim to the right of rebelling against his king. A woman who joins in any movement which her husband disapproves, makes herself a martyr, without even being able to be an apostle, for the husband can legally put a stop to her apostleship. Women cannot be expected to devote themselves to the emancipation of women, until men in considerable number are prepared to join with them in the undertaking.

He who would rightly appreciate the worth of personal independence as an element of happiness, should consider the value he himself puts upon it as an ingredient of his own. There is no subject on which there is a greater habitual difference of judgment between a man judging for himself, and the same man judging for other people. When he hears others complaining that they are not allowed freedom of action—that their own will has not sufficient influence in the regulation of their affairs—his inclination is, to ask, what are their grievances? what positive damage they sustain? and in what respect they consider their affairs to be mismanaged? and if they fail to make out, in answer to these questions, what appears to him a sufficient case, he turns a deaf ear, and regards their complaint as the fanciful querulousness of people whom nothing reasonable will satisfy. But he has a quite different standard of judgment when he is deciding for himself. Then the most unexceptionable administration of his interests by a tutor set over him, does not satisfy his feelings: his personal exclusion from the deciding authority appears itself the greatest grievance of all, rendering it superfluous even to enter into the question of mismanagement. It is the same with nations. What citizen of a free country would listen to any offers of good and skilful administration, in return for the abdication of freedom? Even if he could believe that good and skilful administration can exist among a people ruled by a will not their own, would not the consciousness of working out their own destiny under their own moral responsibility be a compensation to his feelings for great rudeness and imperfection in the details of public affairs? Let him rest assured that whatever he feels on this point, women feel in a fully equal degree. Whatever has been said or written, from the time of Herodotus to the present, of the ennobling influence of free government—the nerve and spring which it gives to all the faculties, the larger and higher objects which it presents to the intellect and feelings, the more unselfish public spirit, and calmer and broader views of duty, that it engenders, and the generally loftier platform on which it elevates the individual as a moral, spiritual, and social being—is every particle as true of women as of men. Are these

things no important part of individual happiness? Let any man call to mind what he himself felt on emerging from boyhood—from the tutelage and control of even loved and affectionate elders—and entering upon the responsibilities of manhood. Was it not like the physical effect of taking off a heavy weight, or releasing him from obstructive, even if not otherwise painful, bonds? Did he not feel twice as much alive, twice as much a human being, as before? And does he imagine that women have none of these feelings? But it is a striking fact, that the satisfactions and mortifications of personal pride, though all in all to most men when the case is their own, have less allowance made for them in the case of other people, and are less listened to as a ground or a justification of conduct, than any other natural human feelings; perhaps because men compliment them in their own case with the names of so many other qualities, that they are seldom conscious how mighty an influence these feelings exercise in their own lives. No less large and powerful is their part, we may assure ourselves, in the lives and feelings of women. Women are schooled into suppressing them in their most natural and most healthy direction, but the internal principle remains, in a different outward form. An active and energetic mind, if denied liberty, will seek for power: refused the command of itself, it will assert its personality by attempting to control others. To allow to any human beings no existence of their own but what depends on others, is giving far too high a premium on bending others to their purposes. Where liberty cannot be hoped for, and power can, power becomes the grand object of human desire; those to whom others will not leave the undisturbed management of their own affairs, will compensate themselves, if they can, by meddling for their own purposes with the affairs of others. Hence also women's passion for personal beauty, and dress and display; and all the evils that flow from it, in the way of mischievous luxury and social immorality. The love of power and the love of liberty are in eternal antagonism. Where there is least liberty, the passion for power is the most ardent and unscrupulous. The desire of power over others can only cease to be a depraving agency among mankind, when each of them individually is able to do without it: which can only be where respect for liberty in the personal concerns of each is an established principle.

But it is not only through the sentiment of personal dignity, that the free direction of and disposal of their own faculties is a source of individual happiness, and to be fettered and restricted in it, a source of unhappiness, to human beings, and not least to women. There is nothing, after disease, indigence, and guilt, so

fatal to the pleasureable enjoyment of life as the want of a worthy outlet for the active faculties. Women who have the cares of a family, and while they have the cares of a family, have this outlet, and it generally suffices for them: but what of the greatly increasing number of women, who have had no opportunity of exercising the vocation which they are mocked by telling them is their proper one? What of the women whose children have been lost to them by death or distance, or have grown up, married, and formed homes of their own? There are abundant examples of men who, after a life engrossed by business, retire with a competency to the enjoyment, as they hope, of rest, but to whom, as they are unable to acquire new interests and excitements that can replace the old, the change to a life of inactivity brings ennui, melancholy, and premature death. Yet no one thinks of the parallel case of so many worthy and devoted women, who, having paid what they are told is their debt to society—having brought up a family blamelessly to manhood and womanhood—having kept a house as long as they had a house needing to be kept—are deserted by the sole occupation for which they have fitted themselves; and remain with undiminished activity but with no employment for it, unless perhaps a daughter or daughter-in-law is willing to abdicate in their favour the discharge of the same functions in her younger household. Surely a hard lot for the old age of those who have worthily discharged, as long as it was given to them to discharge, what the world accounts their only social duty. Of such women, and of those others to whom this duty has not been committed at all—many of whom pine through life with the consciousness of thwarted vocations, and activities which are suffered to expand—the only resources, speaking generally, are religion and charity. But their religion, though it may be one of feeling, and of ceremonial observance, cannot be a religion of action, unless in the form of charity. For charity many of them are by nature admirably fitted; but to practise it usefully, or even without doing mischief, requires the education, the manifold preparation, the knowledge and the thinking powers, of a skilful administrator. There are few of the administrative functions of government for which a person would not be fit, who is fit to bestow charity usefully. In this as in other cases (pre-eminently in that of the education of children), the duties permitted to women cannot be performed properly, without their being trained for duties which, to the great loss of society, are not permitted to them. And here let me notice the singular way in which the question of women's disabilities is frequently presented to view, by those who find it easier to draw a ludicrous picture of what they do not like, than to

answer the arguments for it. When it is suggested that women's executive capacities and prudent counsels might sometimes be found valuable in affairs of state, these lovers of fun hold up to the ridicule of the world, as sitting in parliament or in the cabinet, girls in their teens, or young wives of two or three and twenty, transported bodily, exactly as they are, from the drawing-room to the House of Commons. They forget that males are not usually selected at this early age for a seat in Parliament, or for responsible political functions. Common sense would tell them that if such trusts were confided to women, it would be to such as having no special vocation for married life, or preferring another employment of their faculties (as many women even now prefer to marriage some of the few honourable occupations within their reach), have spent the best years of their youth in attempting to qualify themselves for the pursuits in which they desire to engage; or still more frequently perhaps, widows or wives of forty or fifty, by whom the knowledge of life and faculty of government which they have acquired in their families, could by the aid of appropriate studies be made available on a less contracted scale. There is no country of Europe in which the ablest men have not frequently experienced, and keenly appreciated, the value of the advice and help of clever and experienced women of the world, in the attainment both of private and of public objects; and there are important matters of public administration to which few men are equally competent with such women; among others, the detailed control of expenditure. But what we are now discussing is not the need which society has of the services of women in public business, but the dull and hopeless life to which it so often condemns them, by forbidding them to exercise the practical abilities which many of them are conscious of, in any wider field than one which to some of them never was, and to others is no longer, open. If there is anything vitally important to the happiness of human beings, it is that they should relish their habitual pursuit. This requisite of an enjoyable life is very imperfectly granted, or altogether denied, to a large part of mankind; and by its absence many a life is a failure, which is provided, in appearance, with every requisite of success. But if circumstances which society is not yet skilful enough to overcome, render such failures often for the present inevitable, society need not itself inflict them. The injudiciousness of parents, a youth's own inexperience, or the absence of external opportunities for the congenial vocation, and their presence for an uncongenial, condemn numbers of men to pass their lives in doing one thing reluctantly and ill, when there are other things which they could have done well and happily.

But on women this sentence is imposed by actual law, and by customs equivalent to law. What, in unenlightened societies, colour, race, religion, or in the case of a conquered country, nationality, are to some men, sex is to all women; a peremptory exclusion from almost all honourable occupations, but either such as cannot be fulfilled by others, or such as those others do not think worthy of their acceptance. Sufferings arising from causes of this nature usually meet with so little sympathy, that few persons are aware of the great amount of unhappiness even now produced by the feeling of a wasted life. The case will be even more frequent, as increased cultivation creates a greater and greater disproportion between the ideas and faculties of women, and the scope which society allows to their activity.

When we consider the positive evil caused to the disqualified half of the human race by their disqualification—first in the loss of the most inspiriting and elevating kind of personal enjoyment, and next in the weariness, disappointment, and profound dissatisfaction with life, which are so often the substitute for it; one feels that among all the lessons which men require for carrying on the struggle against the inevitable imperfections of their lot on earth, there is no lesson which they more need, than not to add to the evils which nature inflicts, by their jealous and prejudiced restrictions on one another. Their vain fears only substitute other and worse evils for those which they are idly apprehensive of: while every restraint on the freedom of conduct of any of their human fellow creatures, (otherwise than by making them responsible for any evil actually caused by it), dries up *pro tanto* the principal fountain of human happiness, and leaves the species less rich, to an inappreciable degree, in all that makes life valuable to the individual human being.

REASONS

FOR THE

ENFRANCHISEMENT OF WOMEN.

BY

MRS. BODICHON.

READ AT THE MEETING OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE
PROMOTION OF SOCIAL SCIENCE, AT MANCHESTER, OCT. 6, 1866.

1, ADAM STREET, ADELPHI, LONDON, W.C.

(CHAMBERS OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION).

1866.

Price One Penny.

REASONS FOR THE ENFRANCHISEMENT OF WOMEN.

That a respectable, orderly, independent body in the state should have no voice, and no influence recognized by the law, in the election of the representatives of the people, while they are otherwise acknowledged as responsible citizens, are eligible for many public offices, and required to pay all taxes, is an anomaly which seems to require some explanation, and the reasons alleged in its defence are curious and interesting to examine. It is not however my present purpose to controvert the various objections which have been brought forward against the extension of the suffrage to women. Passing over what may be called the negative side of the question, I propose to take it up at a more advanced stage, and assuming that the measure is unobjectionable, I shall endeavour to show that it is positively desirable.

Mr. Anthony Trollope, speaking in reference to the restrictions on voting in some departments of the Civil Service, says:—"A clerk in the Custom-house, over whom no political ascendancy from his official superior could by any chance be used, is debarred from voting. I once urged upon a Cabinet minister that this was a stigma on the service,—and though he was a Whig, he laughed at me. He could not conceive that men would care about voting. But men do care;—and those who do not, ought to be made to care." The case is very similar as regards women. Many people, besides Cabinet ministers, are unable to conceive that women can care about voting. That some women do care has been proved

by the Petition presented to Parliament last session. I shall try to show why some care,—and why those who do not ought to be made to care.

There are now a very considerable number of open-minded unprejudiced people, who see no particular reason why women should not have votes, if they want them, but, they ask, what would be the good of it? What is there that women want which male legislators are not willing to give? And here let me say at the outset, that the advocates of this measure are very far from accusing men of deliberate unfairness to women. It is not as a means of extorting justice from unwilling legislators that the franchise, is claimed for women. In so far as the claim is made with any special reference to class interests at all, it is simply on the general ground that under a representative government, any class which is not represented is likely to be neglected. Proverbially, what is out of sight is out of mind, and the theory that women, as such, are bound to keep out of sight, finds its most emphatic expression in the denial of the right to vote. The direct results are probably less injurious than those which are indirect, but that a want of due consideration for the interests of women is apparent in our legislation, could very easily be shown. To give evidence in detail would be a long and an invidious task. I will mention one instance only, that of the educational endowments all over the country. Very few people would now maintain that the education of boys is more important to the State than that of girls. But as a matter of fact, girls have but a very small share in educational endowments. Many of the old foundations have been

reformed by Parliament, but the desirableness of providing with equal care for girls and boys, has very seldom been recognised. In the administration of charities generally, the same tendency prevails to postpone the claims of women to those of men.

Among instances of hardship traceable directly to exclusion from the franchise and to no other cause, may be mentioned the unwillingness of landlords to accept women as tenants. Two large farmers in Suffolk inform me that this is not an uncommon case. They mention one estate on which seven widows have been ejected, who, if they had had votes, would have been continued as tenants. The following letter is from the unmarried sister of these gentlemen, herself a farmer in the same county:—

“It is not perhaps sufficiently considered how large a proportion of women occupy and cultivate farms entirely on their own account, nor how sensibly a share in the suffrage would affect their interests. In strictly agricultural counties, like those of Norfolk and Suffolk, it is a thing of daily occurrence for leases to be granted or renewed to the widows, daughters, or sisters of farmers, and many tenant-farmers are unwilling to hire of landlords who, as the phrase is, ‘turn out the women.’ In these districts the agricultural class is richer than almost any other, and the female portion of it receive as a rule, a much better education than the daughters of clergymen and the poorer professional men. In fact they receive the best within reach. I think you would find very few farmers who do not consider their wives or daughters quite as capable of voting as themselves, and would not show their faith in their business capacities by making them executrices and administrators of their property. Land proprietors, as a rule however, like, and with reason, to have their estates represented in Parliament,—and here I come to the chief point I would urge upon your attention. Instances daily occur of the widow of a deserving tenant being ejected from her farm with a large young family unprovided for, simply because she cannot vote. Farming is a healthful, easy, and natural profession for women who have been brought up in agricultural counties, and have thus been learning it from childhood. Moreover, for holders of capital, it is a tolerably lucrative one. I know many and many a single woman living upon the narrow income

derived from a fair property invested in the funds, who would gladly hire land instead, and thus obtain a higher interest for her money. It seems to me not a little hard, that a woman possessing capital should be deprived of the privileges other capitalists enjoy, but it seems harder still that she should be robbed of her livelihood, simply because an anomalous custom has shut her out from such a privilege.

“Take for instance the following cases which have come under my own notice, which show the working of the law both ways:—The other day a widow was left with a large family, in a farm her husband had occupied for years. The landowner was one of those gentlemen who highly estimate parliamentary influence; his unfortunate tenant was only saved from want by a generous public subscription. People might say,—if she had sufficient capital to carry on a farm, how was it that she was in need of assistance? But such a question shows an utter misconception of the subject. Any one at all acquainted with farming will understand how ruinous is a sudden ejection, admitting as it does no opportunity of preparing for high valuation; and any one acquainted with general business will understand what an advantage it is for capital to be used. A sum quite adequate for carrying on a moderate sized farm would bring in a miserable income, if ‘safely’ invested.

“Take another case. My next door neighbour, a respectable widow lady, has gained a competent living for herself and daughter, on a farm she has occupied since the death of her husband, twenty years ago. Had she been ejected then, she must have eked out a miserable income by keeping a third-rate school, or thrown herself upon friends. As it is, she has maintained a respectable and independent position, and has of course, employed her capital to the utmost advantage. It seems a little hard that this lady, who in every way performs the duties of an employer, should have no vote, whilst the keeper of a low beerhouse close by, who demoralises labouring men, and is hardly able to write his name, exercises the right from which she is denied.

“In conclusion, I beg to say that I have been a farmer for some years, that I know few parishes in which women are not owners or occupiers of land, and that every practical farmer with whom I have discussed the subject of the extension of the franchise to women, has recognised the justice of such a claim. They certainly see no reason why we should be entrusted with property, and not entrusted with the influence pertaining to it. The only wonder is that the attention of the public has not been drawn to this matter before.

“M. B. EDWARDS.”

The case, as stated by Miss Edwards in behalf of

farmers, is scarcely less strong as regards all women, who, as heads of a business or a household, fulfil the duties of a man in the same position. Their task is often a hard one, and everything which helps to sustain their self-respect, and to give them consideration and importance in the eyes of others, is likely to lessen their difficulties, and make them happier and stronger for the battle of life. The very fact that, though householders and taxpayers, they have not equal privileges with male householders and taxpayers, is in itself a *deconsideration*, which seems to me invidious and useless. It casts a kind of slur on the value of their opinions, and I may remark in passing, that what is treated as of no value is apt to grow valueless. Citizenship is an honour, and not to have the full rights of a citizen is a want of honour. Inconspicuously it may be, but by a subtle and sure process, those, who without their own consent and without sufficient reason, are debarred from full participation in the rights and duties of a citizen, lose more or less of social consideration and esteem.

These arguments, founded on considerations of justice and mercy to a large and important class, might, in a civilized country and in the absence of strong reasons to the contrary, be deemed amply sufficient to justify the measure proposed. There remain to be considered those aspects of the question which affect the general community. And among all the reasons for giving women votes, the one which appears to me the strongest, is that of the influence it might be expected to have in increasing public spirit. Patriotism, a healthy, lively, intelligent interest in everything which concerns the nation to

which we belong, and an unselfish devotedness to the public service,—these are the qualities which make a people great and happy; these are the virtues which ought to be most sedulously cultivated in all classes of the community. And I know no better means at this present time, of counteracting the tendency to prefer narrow private ends to the public good, than this of giving to all women, duly qualified, a direct and conscious participation in political affairs. Give some women votes, and it will tend to make all women think seriously of the concerns of the nation at large, and their interest having once been fairly roused, they will take pains, by reading and by consultation with persons better informed than themselves, to form sound opinions. As it is, women of the middle class occupy themselves but little with anything beyond their own family circle. They do not consider it any concern of theirs, if poor men and women are ill-nursed in workhouse infirmaries, and poor children ill-taught in workhouse schools. If the roads are bad, the drains neglected, the water poisoned, they think it is all very wrong, but it does not occur to them that it is their duty to get it put right. These farmer-women and business-women have honest sensible minds and much practical experience, but they do not bring their good sense to bear upon public affairs, because they think it is men's business, not theirs, to look after such things. It is this belief—so narrowing and deadening in its influence—that the exercise of the franchise would tend to dissipate. The mere fact of being called upon to enforce an opinion by a vote, would have an immediate effect in awakening a healthy sense of responsibility. There

is no reason why these women should not take an active interest in all the social questions—education, public health, prison discipline, the poor laws, and the rest—which occupy Parliament, and they would be much more likely to do so, if they felt that they had importance in the eyes of Members of Parliament, and could claim a hearing for their opinions.

Besides these women of business, there are ladies of property, whose more active participation in public affairs would be beneficial both to themselves and the community generally. The want of stimulus to energetic action is much felt by women of the higher classes. It is agreed that they ought not to be idle, but what they ought to do is not so clear. Reading, music and drawing, needlework, and charity, are their usual employments. Reading, without a purpose, does not come to much. Music and drawing, and needlework, are most commonly regarded chiefly as amusements intended to fill up time. We have left, as the serious duty of independent and unmarried women, the care of the poor in all its branches, including visiting the sick and the aged and ministering to their wants, looking after the schools, and in every possible way giving help wherever help is needed. Now education, the relief of the destitute, and the health of the people, are among the most important and difficult matters which occupy the minds of statesmen, and if it is admitted that women of leisure and culture are bound to contribute their part towards the solution of these great questions, it is evident that every means of making their co-operation enlightened and vigorous should be sought for. They have special opportunities of observing the operation of many of the

laws. They know, for example, for they see before their eyes, the practical working of the law of settlement—of the laws relating to the dwellings of the poor—and many others, and the experience which peculiarly qualifies them to form a judgment on these matters, ought not to be thrown away. We all know that we have already a goodly body of rich, influential working-women, whose opinions on the social and political questions of the day are well worth listening to. In almost every parish, there are, happily for England, such women. Now everything should be done to give these valuable members of the community a solid social standing. If they are wanted, and there can be no doubt that they are, in all departments of social work, their position in the work should be as dignified and honourable as it is possible to make it. Rich unmarried women have many opportunities of benefitting the community, which are not within reach of a married woman, absorbed by the care of her husband and children. Everything, I say again, should be done to encourage this most important and increasing class, to take their place in the army of workers for the common good, and all the forces we can bring to bear for this end are of incalculable value. For by bringing women into hearty co-operation with men, we gain the benefit not only of their work, but of their intelligent sympathy. Public spirit is like fire: a feeble spark of it may be fanned into a flame, or it may very easily be put out. And the result of teaching women that they have nothing to do with politics, is that their influence goes towards extinguishing the unselfish interest—never too strong—which men are disposed to take in public affairs.

Let each member of the House of Commons consider, in a spirit of true scientific inquiry, all the properly qualified women of his acquaintance, and he will see no reason why the single ladies and the widows among his own family and friends should not form as sensible opinions on the merits of candidates as the voters who returned him to Parliament. When we find among the disfranchised such names as those of Mrs. Somerville, Harriet Martineau, Miss Burdett Coutts, Florence Nightingale, Mary Carpenter, Louisa Twining, Miss Marsh, and many others scarcely inferior to these in intellectual and moral worth, we cannot but desire, for the elevation and dignity of the parliamentary system, to add them to the number of electors.

It need scarcely be pointed out that the measure has nothing of a party character. We have precedents under two very different governments, those of Austria and Sweden, for something very similar to what is now proposed. With regard to voting in Austria, Major Noel, who has resided many years in Germany, writes as follows:—"In all the so-called 'crown and hereditary lands' of the Austrian empire, the principle has been established by the Imperial Patent of 1864, of the representation of classes and interests in the respective Diets. One class represented is that of the large landed proprietors. In this class all females, whether of noble or citizen blood, if they possess the property qualification, have votes just the same as males. Women in their corporate character, as *stiftsdamen* or nuns, have the franchise too, if their revenues are derived from land. As regards the representation of citizens

proper (townspeople), I know that in some of the electoral districts, widows carrying on business, or spinsters possessing houses and paying the necessary taxes, vote likewise. But when I made more particular inquiries on this head last January, Count Thun wrote me that the law as regards the female franchise, with the exception of the class of large landed proprietors, was very vague and undecided. It was the intention of the Government, however, to introduce laws for the acceptance of the various Diets, whereby independent women should have votes like males in everyone of the represented classes. Whether such laws have been introduced and carried, I know not. I must mention however, that in the Hungarian Constitution of 1848, when so many democratic changes were introduced, there is an express clause *excluding* women of any class of society from the franchise."

In Sweden the Reform bill passed in December, 1865, gave the election of members of the Upper Chamber to municipal and county bodies, called *Stads-full-mäktige*, and *Landstingsmän*. In the election of these bodies, women take part. In order to be an elector, a woman must be unmarried or a widow, and must have attained her majority (twenty-five years), and be possessed of more than 400 riksdalers riksmünt (about £22.) per annum.*

In England, the extension proposed would interfere with no vested interests. It would involve no

* Article 15 of the Italian Electoral law, provides, "That the taxation paid by a widow, or by a wife separated from her husband, shall give a vote to whichever of her children or relations of the first or second degree of propinquity she may select. In the same way, a father, who pays direct imports in several electoral districts, shall be able to delegate his vote in the one which he does not inhabit himself, to either of his sons he may select. These delegations of power can be cancelled at will."

change in the principles on which our Government is based, but would rather make our Constitution more consistent with itself. Conservatives have a right to claim it as a Conservative measure. Liberals are bound to ask for it as a necessary part of radical reform. There is no reason for identifying it with any class or party in the State, and it is, in fact, impossible to predict what influence it might have on party politics. The question is simply of a special legal disability, which must, sooner or later, be removed.

It was said by Lord Derby, in his speech on entering upon the office of Prime Minister last Session, in reference to Reform—that “there were theoretical anomalies in our present system which it was desirable, if possible, to correct; that there were classes of persons excluded from the franchise who had a fair claim and title, upon the ground of their fitness to exercise the privilege of electors; and that there was a very large class whom the particular qualifications of the Act of 1832 excluded.” I venture to submit, that the exclusion of female freeholders and householders from the franchise is an anomaly which it is very desirable, and not impossible, to correct; that there is no class of persons having a fairer claim and title upon the ground of their fitness to exercise the privileges of electors; and that whatever may be deemed expedient with regard to other classes, this class, at any rate, should not be excluded by the particular qualifications of the Reform Act of the future.

BARBARA LEIGH SMITH BODICHON.

OBJECTIONS

TO THE

ENFRANCHISEMENT OF WOMEN

CONSIDERED.

BY MRS. BODICHON.

2, WARRINGTON CRESCENT, LONDON, W.

1866.

Price One Penny.

OBJECTIONS TO THE ENFRANCHISEMENT OF WOMEN CONSIDERED.

The following Petition was presented to Parliament on June 7th, 1866:—

“*The humble Petition of the undersigned, sheweth,—*

“That it having been expressly laid down by high authorities that the possession of property in this country carries with it the right to vote in the election of representatives in Parliament, it is an evident anomaly that some holders of property are allowed to use this right, while others, forming no less a constituent part of the nation, and equally qualified by law to hold property, are not able to exercise this privilege.

“That the participation of women in the government is consistent with the principles of the British Constitution, inasmuch as women in these islands have always been held capable of sovereignty, and women are eligible for various public offices.

“Your petitioners therefore humbly pray your honourable House to consider the expediency of providing for the representation of all householders, without distinction of sex, who possess such property or rental qualification as your Honourable House may determine.”

This petition was signed by 1499 women, including many whose names alone are sufficient to entitle them to a respectful hearing. It has given rise to discussion in many households, and articles have appeared in newspapers and magazines, some containing arguments for the prayer of the petition and some against it. As I think the onus of proof lies with those who say women ought not to vote, I will proceed to consider the arguments I have met with on that side of the question.

Among these, the first and commonest is,—Women do not want votes. Certainly that is a capital reason why women should not have votes thrust upon them, and no one proposes compulsory registration. There are many men who do not care to use their votes, and there is no law compelling them either to register themselves or to vote. The statement, however, that women do not wish to vote, is a mere

assertion, and may be met by a counter-assertion. Some women do want votes, which the petitions signed and now in course of signature, go very largely to prove. Some women manifestly do, others, let it be admitted, do not. It is impossible to say positively which side has the majority, unless we could poll all the women in question; or, in other words, without resorting to the very measure which is under discussion. Make registration possible, and we shall see how many care to avail themselves of the privilege.

But, it is said, women have other duties. The function of women is different to that of men, and their function is not politics. It is very true that women have other duties—many and various. But so have men. No citizen lives for his citizen duties only. He is a professional man, a tradesman, a family man, a club man, a thousand things as well as a voter. Of course these occupations sometimes interfere with a man's duties as a citizen, and when he cannot vote, he cannot. So with women; when they cannot vote, they cannot.

The proposition we are discussing, practically concerns only single women and widows who have 40s. freeholds, or other county qualifications, and for boroughs, all those who occupy, as owners or tenants, houses of the value of £10. a year. Among these there are surely a great number whose time is not fully occupied, not even so much as that of men. Their duties in sick rooms and in caring for children, leave them a sufficient margin of leisure for reading newspapers, and studying the *pros* and *cons* of political and social questions. No one can mean seriously to affirm that widows and unmarried women would find the mere act of voting once in several years arduous. One day, say once in three years, might surely be spared from domestic duties. If it is urged that it is not the time spent in voting that is in question, but the thought and the attention which are necessary for forming political opinions, I reply that women of the class we are speaking of,

have as a rule, more time for thought than men, their duties being of a less engrossing character, and that they do, as a fact, bestow a considerable amount of thought and attention on the questions which occupy the Legislature. Social matters occupy every day a larger space in the deliberations of Parliament, and on many of these questions women are led to think and to judge in the fulfilment of those duties which, as a matter of course, devolve upon them in the ordinary business of English life. And however important the duties of home may be, we must bear in mind that a woman's duties do not end there. She is a daughter, a sister, the mistress of a household; she ought to be in the broadest sense of the word, a neighbour, both to her equals and to the poor. These are her obvious and undeniable duties, and within the limits of her admitted functions, I should think it desirable to add to them—duties to her parish and to the State. A woman who is valuable in all the relations of life, a woman of a large nature, will be more perfect in her domestic capacity, and not less.

If we contemplate women in the past, and in different countries, we find them acting in addition to their domestic part, all sorts of different rôles. What was their rôle among the Jews and the Romans? What was it in the early Christian churches? What is it amongst the Quakers? What is it in the colliery districts,—at the courts of Victoria, and the Tuileries? We can conjure up thousands of pictures of women, performing different functions under varying conditions. They have done and do, all sorts of work in all sorts of ways. Is there anything in the past history of the world, which justifies the assertion that they must and will do certain things in the future, and will not and cannot do certain other things? I do not think there is.

But to return to my argument, and supposing that there were enough data in the past to enable us to predict that women will never take sufficient interest in politics to induce even widows and single

women to wish to vote once in several years, should we be justified in realising our own prediction, and forbidding by law what we declare to be contrary to nature? If anyone believes, as the result of observation and experience, that it is not a womanly function to vote, I respect such belief, and answer—only the future can prove. But what I do not respect, is the strange want of toleration which says—"you shall not do this or that." We do not want to compel women to anything; we only wish to see them free to exercise or not, according as they themselves find suitable, political and other functions.

The argument that "women are ignorant of politics," would have great force if it could be shown that the mass of the existing voters are thoroughly well informed on political subjects, or even much better informed than the persons to whom it is proposed to give votes. Granted that women are ignorant of politics, so are many male ten-pound householders. Their ideas are not always clear on political questions, and would probably be even more confused if they had not votes. No mass of human beings will or can undertake the task of forming opinions on matters over which they have no control, and on which they have no practical decision to make. It would by most persons be considered waste of time. When women have votes, they will read with closer attention than heretofore the daily histories of our times, and will converse with each other and with their fathers and brothers about social and political questions. They will become interested in a wider circle of ideas, and where they now think and feel somewhat vaguely, they will form definite and decided opinions.

Among the women who are disqualified for voting by the legal disability of sex, there is a large number of the educated class. We shall know the exact number of women possessing the household and property qualifications, when the return ordered by Parliament has been made. In the meantime, the following calculation is suggestive. In the *London*

Court Guide, which of course includes no houses below the value of £10. a year, the number of householders whose names begin with A is 1149. Of these, 205, that is more than one-sixth, are women, all of whom are either unmarried or widows.

The fear entertained by some persons that family dissension would result from encouraging women to form political opinions, might be urged with equal force against their having any opinions on any subject at all. Differences on religious subjects are still more apt to rouse the passions and create disunion than political differences. As for opinions causing disunion, let it be remembered that what is a possible cause of disunion is also a possible cause of deeply founded union. The more rational women become, the more real union there will be in families, for nothing separates so much as unreasonableness and frivolity. It will be said, perhaps, that contrary opinions may be held by the different members of a family without bringing on quarrels, so long as they are kept to the region of theory, and no attempt is made to carry them out publicly in action. But religious differences must be shown publicly. A woman who takes upon her to change her religion—say to go over from Protestantism to Romanism—proclaims her difference from her family in a public and often a very distressing manner. But no one has yet proposed to make it illegal for a woman to change her religion. After all—is it essential that brothers and sisters and cousins shall all vote on the same side? For let me mention once again, we are not discussing the expediency of giving votes to wives.

An assertion often made, that women would lose the good influence which they now exert indirectly on public affairs if they had votes, seems to require proof. First of all, it is necessary to prove that women have this indirect influence,—then that it is good,—then that the indirect good influence would be lost if they had direct influence,—then that the indirect influence which they would lose is better

than the direct influence they would gain. From my own observation I should say, that the women who have gained by their wisdom and earnestness a good indirect influence, would not lose that influence if they had votes. And I see no necessary connexion between goodness and indirectness. On the contrary, I believe that the great thing women want is to be more direct and straightforward, in thought, word and deed. I think the educational advantage of citizenship to women would be so great, that I feel inclined to run the risk of sacrificing the subtle indirect influence, to a wholesome feeling of responsibility, which would, I think, make women give their opinions less rashly and more conscientiously than at present on political subjects.

A gentleman who thinks much about details, affirms that “polling-booths are not fit places for women.” If this is so, one can only say that the sooner they are made fit the better. That in a state which professes to be civilised, a solemn public duty can only be discharged in the midst of drunkenness and riot, is scandalous and not to be endured. It is no doubt true, that in many places polling is now carried on in a turbulent and disorderly manner. Where that is unhappily the case, women clearly must stay away. Englishwomen can surely be trusted not to force their way to the polling-booth when it would be manifestly unfit. But it does not follow that because in some disreputable places, some women would be illegally, but with their own consent, prevented from recording their votes, therefore all women, in all places, should be without their own consent, by law disqualified. Those who at the last election, visited the polling places in London and Westminster, and many other places, will bear me out in asserting, that a lady would have had no more difficulty or annoyance to encounter in giving her vote, than she has in going to the Botanical Gardens or to Westminster Abbey.

There are certain other difficulties sometimes vaguely brought forward by the unreflecting, which

I shall not attempt to discuss. Such for example, is the argument that as voters ought to be independent, and as married women are liable to be influenced by their husbands, therefore unmarried women and widows ought not to vote. Or again, that many ladies canvass, and canvassing by ladies is a very objectionable practice, therefore canvassing ought to be the only direct method by which women can bring their influence to bear upon an election. Into such objections it is not necessary here to enter.

Nor is it needful to discuss the extreme logical consequences which may be obtained by pressing to an undue length the arguments used in favour of permitting women to exercise the suffrage. The question under consideration is, not whether women ought logically to be Members of Parliament, but whether, under existing circumstances, it is for the good of the State that women, who perform most of the duties, and enjoy nearly all the rights of citizenship, should be by special enactment disabled from exercising the additional privilege of taking part in the election of the representatives of the people. It is a question of expediency, to be discussed calmly, without passion or prejudice. It has been my desire to meet, in a candid spirit, those, who without jealousy or distrust, are willing to extend to women any privilege which is likely to conduce to their advantage or the public good, but who reasonably shrink from precipitate action in a delicate and difficult matter. Such persons I would invite to a serious consideration of the question in all its bearings, confident that in proportion as the investigation is deliberate and searching, the conclusion will be in accordance with sound expediency.

BARBARA LEIGH SMITH BODICHON.

THE
POLITICAL CLAIMS
OF
WOMEN.

BY
JULIA WEDGWOOD.

Published by the London National Society for Women's Suffrage.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY W. WILFRED HEAD, 2 & 3, PLOUGH COURT,
FETTER LANE, E.C.

THE
POLITICAL CLAIMS OF WOMEN.

BY JULIA WEDGWOOD.

THE attempt to remove the political disabilities of women has now reached a stage through which every measure of national reform has to pass, and beyond which progress is extremely difficult. The grounds on which this removal is urged have been stated, enforced, and illustrated, again and again, till they have acquired a familiarity which deadens the attention and tends to mislead the judgment. But nothing is more certain than that words which we have learnt to associate with weariness often convey important truth. There are times when those who speak must reiterate, and those who hear must have patience with, statements of principle and of fact which, being obvious to all who think and observe, have been often made before. Indeed, it is the strong point of our case that they have been often made before. Our opponents have been so busy answering arguments which are not used, that they have not attempted to answer the arguments which are. They have thus imposed upon us a two-fold task. We have to say both what we do want and what we do not want, and the attempt at justifying actual claims which the arguments of our own side have made familiar is complicated by the necessity of disavowing possible claims which the attack of the opposite side have made conspicuous. Yet our demand is a very simple one.

We demand that the test imposed as a qualification for exercising the full rights of a citizen shall be applicable to every English subject; that those who do not vote shall be such as either abstain voluntarily or have not satisfied the conditions of the law. We claim that such of us as do a man's work shall do it with a man's advantages, so far as these can be secured by Acts of Parliament, and urge that if Parliament cannot confer the strong arm and the powerful frame, so much the more is it bound to shelter those who have to compete with the strong-armed in the difficult struggle for life from the shade of inferiority which attaches to all whom the State refuses to recognize as citizens. We want theories on this subject to be verified, like theories on any other, by the experience of life. Our demands rest not on any theory, but on the facts that a class of unrepresented workers has not the same advantages as one which is represented, and that more than 3,000,000 women are ill-educated and ill-paid workers. These women have to support themselves, and those dependent on them; the workhouse is not more agreeable to them than to men, and

their means of avoiding it are fewer. They are excluded from some trades and professions by the jealousy of men, from others by their want of physical strength, a requisite in many kinds of business where its necessity is not obvious; while the very fact of their not having a vote makes it difficult for them to keep a farm or a shop in their own hands. The persons who, in the face of all these difficulties, satisfy a certain money-test must possess rather more thrift and industry than the persons who satisfy that test without any of these difficulties; and we urge that this test should not be prevented from working where it would work most efficaciously. The class from which we, the opponents of Women's Political Disabilities, seek to remove the slur which such disabilities cast on mature human beings, is not one which we have done anything to create. We have not decided that one woman out of every three should remain unmarried, and that a majority of these women should have to earn their bread. These are facts, not opinions. The question whether the sheltered home or the busy world is a woman's ideal sphere has no bearing upon them. If there ever was a time when you might have regarded women as exceptional creatures, relieved by men from the burdens of life, and surrendering to them its graver responsibilities and some of its liberty, you cannot do so now, when more than a tenth of the nation have these burdens forced upon them. We urge that you should not force any set of persons to unite the disadvantages of both sexes.

Certain difficulties felt by thoughtful men to stand in the way of the proposed change are no doubt worthy of serious attention. They urge that important as is the welfare of half the human race, the welfare of the whole is yet more so, and they fear this might be imperilled by giving political power to persons so little instructed as most women. They fear that members might be returned to Parliament, for instance, hampered with some pledge extorted by women which men would never submit to see carried out. Our reasonable opponents know, too, that a part of the office of Parliament is imperial, and consider that, however much may be said for the influence of women on the domestic affairs of a nation, there is something questionable in allowing those to have any voice in the career of a nation, who, in a national crisis, can give no physical help. These grounds for hesitation are valid against some demands which we do not make. We are not asking that women should be represented *as women*. There has been much vague talk as if this were the case, but the truth is that the very arguments which prove that you ought not to *disfranchise* a ratepayer because she is a woman, prove also that you ought not to *enfranchise* any person because she is a woman; if privilege and responsibility cannot be withheld upon the ground of sex, neither can they be demanded on that ground. If the day ever comes when such a claim is made, the future opponents of Woman's Suffrage will find no answer so convincing as the arguments of the present advocates of Women's Suffrage. They can then reply, in the words of the supporter of the Bill of 1872, that, "There is not a male and female rate of taxation. Parliament does not give votes either to men or women, it applies a certain test, and gives votes to all who can submit to that test." It is a strange confusion to suppose that any application of the principle which these words embody can ever pass into the principle which they oppose. What possible extensions of the demand that all taxpayers should be represented can include the further demand that persons who are not taxpayers should be represented? In Mr. Bright's first speech on introducing his Bill, he gave some specimens (founded on the tests of women admitted to the municipal vote) of the proportions of male and female electors if his Bill became law. From these it appears

that at Bath, which is the high water-mark of female ascendancy, they would vote in the proportion of one to three (1 woman to 3.8 men); while at Walsall, the opposite end of the scale, the proportion would be one woman to twenty-two men. Thirteen per cent. is said to be the probable increase on the whole. Even if we suppose this addition to add to the electorate a compact homogeneous body, its influence need not surely alarm the most timid. We cannot concede that this would be true; women are not of one mind any more than men are; but, even supposing it true, it would not be dangerous.

Not on the present conditions of voting, it is conceded, but we are told that the present electoral test is a mere temporary stage in a rapid downward journey, the ultimate goal of which is universal suffrage. It is true that any movement in the suffrage will be downwards, and equally true that women form the majority of the nation; and in combining these two facts some thoughtful and liberal men feel a natural anxiety at the prospect of the balance of power lying with the sex physically unfitted to wield it. But surely this kind of anticipatory policy is not accepted in any region where men are really interested. To consider the burdens which we leave posterity no choice about bearing is our bounden duty, but it seems a futile precaution to abstain from any measure because our descendants may carry out the principle to inconvenient lengths. They will only extend the franchise at their own will. The electoral area is not expanded by any irresistible law; its extension no doubt is the tendency of our time; but this is the result not of any physical necessity, but simply of the wishes and expectations of human beings. Anything which changes those wishes and expectations will change the result. "Is it to be said," asked Sir Henry James, "that the man who sets the stone rolling at the hill-top is not to look to its effects in the valley?" To render this question pertinent, you must suppose the hill-side to be made up of ledges from which the stone can only be set rolling afresh by human agency, in which case surely the only thing to consider is whether the stone is wanted on the ledge below us. If the time ever comes when it will be proposed to include the adult male population in the electorate, the question is not at all settled beforehand by us, that the whole adult female population shall be included also. We do not decide for our descendants or for our future selves, that any set of persons should be admitted to the poll irrespectively of all tests whatever. We only say, when a certain test has been set up, do not cut off from its operation those to whom its fulfilment is the greatest testimony.

The whole view on which this anxiety is based is that women are much more alike than men are. There would be nothing to dread in their influence if it were supposed to be subject to the same variety of conditions that men's is, but it is considered that there is a certain feminine view of things which is dangerous, apart from its being erroneous, because it is inevitably one-sided. And no doubt this is true, so far that women seem to men more alike than men do to each other. But, then, so do men seem more alike to women than women do to each other. Each sex knows the other from a particular point of view, and members of each sex are apt to confuse the identity of their point of view with some monotony in its objects. Women seem more alike than men *to men*, for the same reason that Frenchmen seem more alike than Englishmen *to Englishmen*. The spectator from without will always discern more resemblance than one from within. No doubt the weak have common fears, and any admission of female influence would embody this element. But this is not what men are afraid of. The most contemptuous of our opponents would surely be glad to ascertain, and at least consider, all claim for protection that might

be made by women. This, we admit, would be a common element in the addition to the electorate we are seeking to make. But we urge that any supposed common element beyond this is an imagination which those who point out must justify by argument. Sir Henry James, whose speech against the change demanded was considered the strongest, in 1875, said, "The effect of this Bill would be to drive women to consider subjects connected, I will not say with sentiment, but, at all events, not always with good government. Were female franchise introduced into France the question affecting the elections in every department of the country would be whether there should be war with Italy to restore the temporal power of the pope." If the line of argument here suggested, in a somewhat elliptical form, and not quite consistent with its context, may be followed out, Sir Henry James appears to have meant that the influence of women would be injurious in enforcing some measure which would be for England what the re-establishment of the temporal power of the pope would be to France. Such an argument can only be met with the assertion of individual experience, not worth much, certainly, but worth more than an assertion which has nothing whatever to do with experience. Take the disestablishment of the Church as the nearest English parallel to Sir Henry James's instance, and consider the opinion bearing on it of those whom this Bill would enfranchise. If a single experience, neither short, nor peculiar, nor narrow of women's views may be regarded as a specimen of an average experience, it may be said that the women endowed with votes by this Bill would be just as keen on one side as on the other. A few would be very keen on both sides. A great many would be perfectly indifferent. Those who are not indifferent would be, perhaps, more keen, blinder to collateral issues, more bitter against compromise, than men would be, but all this just as much on one side as the other. The fear which influences those who would feel no other objection to female suffrage—that of largely increasing the power of the clergy—is the result rather of considering typical women and typical clergy in the abstract, than of experience among women as they are, at all events, of such women as would be enfranchised by admitting all those who satisfy the present electoral test.

No doubt clergymen have certain interests in common with women which no other men have, and perhaps there is as a result a certain feminine element in their characters, when much affected by their profession, which there is not in other men. But it argues a strange ignorance of human nature to think that this similarity gives influence. Women are as little under the influence of feminine men as men are under the influence of masculine women. If you can make a rule as to circumstances and characters so various, you may say that in both cases human beings are attracted by contrast.

A truer answer would be given by the mere computation of the female householders in a single acquaintance who would take any important step under clerical influence, if it were remembered that ladies would form an insignificant proportion of this class. Women who work are very much more like men who work than people fancy who know women, as most gentlemen do know them, as social equals. It is from considering only these kinds of women, we suspect, that so much is thought about the influence of the clergy, or that such fears are expressed as that the influence of female voters would be absolutely hostile to the real interests of women in such cases as the Married Women's Property Bill. The influence of ladies possibly might be so. But lower down in the social scale you would find a very different kind of view of the subject from that taken in drawing-rooms.

People are apt, in making up their minds on any subject of social interest, not to think of the men and women they know, whom there is always a curious but explicable tendency to classify as exceptions, but of some abstract type of the character supposed, and fiction is a large source of this kind of general opinion. The intriguing priest and the beneficent pastor are stock characters, and few people take the trouble to ask themselves how often they have seen them realized. When a type of this kind has become current, it acquires an authority of its own, the trouble of investigating its correspondence with fact seems superfluous, and the result of such investigation paradoxical, although, in truth, such types become prevalent through their vividness simply, and not through any faithfulness to the world of reality. But no one should let his opinions be moulded on them; he should consider, not whether women as they are painted in fiction or defined in treatises are under the influence of the clergy, but whether the actual women he knows—the shopkeeper, the schoolmistress, the lodging-house keeper, the writer in magazines, the painter of second-rate pictures—all the commonplace women of his acquaintance who earn their bread, are so. It will be an exceptional experience in which these elements compose a constituency in which clerical influence is an important element.

There is in this matter another source of confusion: people think of a clergyman's influence on the poor and on women together. On the needy classes (who, in London, hardly vote at all) a clergyman has a very definite influence, no doubt. He is the channel through which material help reaches them, and it would be easy for him to use his influence, made up in indistinguishable proportions of gratitude and interest, to get their actual or possible pensioners to vote for Mr. A. or Mr. B., if it were worth while, and if he chose to take the enormous trouble and run the considerable risk. But with this matter we have nothing to do; it is one where men would be concerned much more than women.

The objections felt by thoughtful men to our demand occupy a curiously small proportion in the whole bulk of argument against the measure we advocate. We find it said, as a ground for rejecting the demand of a quarter of a million persons, that women do not want the suffrage, that it will be a burden to them, that it would take them out of their sphere, that they have enough to do and to think of already. If it is asked what they have to do and to think of we are told their vocation is "to make life endurable." A measure justified on the ground that a large body of persons have to struggle for their own livelihood is opposed on the ground that these persons have enough to do in adorning the lives of others. Of course, in saying this Mr. Scourfield was thinking exclusively of the women who belong to his own class. The view is not universal even with regard to that class, but when a theory is irrelevant, it is waste of time to inquire whether it is true. It is about as good an argument against the proposed change to assert that it will make the position of rich women less comfortable as it would have been against the last Reform Bill to pretend that it would make the profession of barrister or physician less profitable. It is not an excusable fallacy when one to whom the nation has delegated the office of law-making talks as if the world were made up of ladies and gentlemen, and the shallowest and most frivolous of speakers would not venture to do so when the interests of men were at stake. A statesman ought to be able to see clearly and say boldly that, in considering a Bill which concerns a seventh of the nation, he may leave that small portion of it which belongs to good society out of account. If all women were in the position of the women whose supposed duty it is to "make life endurable," Parliament would not have heard of any Bill for doing away with woman's

disabilities. It is waste of time to argue whether even those women would not be the better for being made citizens of. Our whole case rests on the fact that a great many women have to work for their living, and that these women have the greatest difficulty, first, in getting an education that will enable them to do any work, and, secondly, in finding work from which they are not practically excluded by men. "I scarcely ever see," said the Prime Minister, in the debate of 1871, "I scarcely ever see in the hands of a woman an employment that ought more naturally to be in the hands of a man; but I constantly see in the hands of a man employment which might be more beneficially and economically in the hands of a woman." Take another illustration of the truth here stated. There were, in 1861, about 22,000 female farmers in England and Wales, being one eleventh part of the whole number. Now, that farming is a business for which women have no inherent disqualification is evident to any one who will consider how much of a farmer's duty consists in that careful inspection of details which is considered a woman's strong point, and is abundantly illustrated by experience. Almost every one who knows much of country life has some instance of a farm well-managed by a woman to bring forward. A single instance of the case, given in Mr. Bright's speech, 1873, may be given here; it is contained in the following extract from the pages of a journal not devoted to women's rights, the *Field*:—"It may be said, What business have women with farming? In answer to this query the report of the competition for the 100-guineas prize for the best-managed farm in the central districts of England, offered by the Royal Agricultural Society, may be referred to. Twenty-one farms competed for the honour. It was awarded to the tenant of Ash Grove Farm, near Ardley, Bicester, as showing the best example of good general management, productiveness, suitability of live stock, and general cultivation, with a view to profit. The farm is one of 890 acres; 1000 sheep and 70 cattle are wintered annually. The judges said the farm was an exceedingly good example of a well-managed farm," and accordingly granted the 100-guinea prize, but the society which gave it refused to accede to the tenant thus honourably distinguished the important advantages of membership, for the simple fact that this person was a woman. This is not the only instance that might be quoted of the disadvantages of women that have to earn their bread. The obstruction placed in the way of women in the watchmaking trade, for instance, would afford an example of a kind of difficulty which affects a larger number of individuals. But the case of farmers ought specially to be considered in this connection, because here the want of a vote has a directly injurious influence on the person concerned. In *all* cases it is an indirect disadvantage to a worker not also to be a citizen, but in the case of farmers it is actually a menace to the continued existence of their livelihood. It will hardly be said that a landowner to whom political influence is either indifferent or inaccessible is a common spectacle. No matter whether it ought to be so, the question is as to what *is*, and while it remains an object with the landholder that his tenant should have a vote, and a woman has none, so long one of the trades in which women are best fitted to excel will be closed to them. It is facts like these which contain the justification of our demand. Is it not childish to answer a claim thus supported by the assertion that "woman is the silver lining which gilds the cloud of man's existence?" (Mr. Knatchbull-Hugessen, 1872.)

But we are told that in seeking to escape the shadow of inferiority, thrown by political disability, we are really imperilling the shelter of acknowledged weakness. "The extension of the franchise to self-dependent women," said Mr. Beresford-Hope, in the debate of 1871, "might

seriously endanger their hard-earned competence by forcing them into the arena of political excitement, where they would be exposed to the animosities, the bickerings, and the resentments which are so unhappily inherent in the tough work of electioneering." Now, no one has ever justified the refusal of the franchise on the ground that it would be an injury to the claimant, when the claimant was a man. And no obvious difference of man and woman explains this different method of meeting their claims. If an election riot were the ideal condition of a new member taking his seat, indeed, there might be something to say for it, but even then we should say, let us take our share of the blows if we choose to do so. We do not care to argue the question as to the advantage of our claim to ourselves. That is our own concern. It is not for one set of mature human beings to decide what is or is not for the advantage of another. If we are often mistaken about our own vocation we are still more often mistaken about other people's, and whatever may be the right place for women, that is a subject on which women are less likely to be wrong than men.

But women do take this view of their vocation, it is said. The anxiety of the *Times*, that women shall not be dragged "from their drawing-rooms" to the polling-booths, is echoed by the whole acquaintance of more than one Member of Parliament, and one of the speakers read, in 1871, a letter from a lady friend who was "strongly opposed to the extension of the franchise to women," and who considered herself "exactly in a position to express opinions which might be regarded as the exponent of those of her countrywomen." That is, we should suppose, this lady had mingled with classes below her own; she knew the desires of the poor on the subject, and of that intermediate class which is more difficult to get at than the poor? Not at all. Extraordinary as it seems, this lady, who "has an immense circle of acquaintance," and is intimate with Members of Parliament, supposes herself to be a type of the class we seek to enfranchise. The delusion need not be dwelt on after what has been said; certainly the writer of that letter was the type of a class which would not have the smallest difficulty in defending itself from the importunity of candidates. However, to take a parallel case, what would have been thought, in 1829, of an opponent of the Bill for removing Catholic Disabilities, who read out a letter from a Roman Catholic, asserting that, considering the gain to the spiritual life of shelter from the temptations of worldly ambition, he regarded the proposed change in the law as a burden against which he protested? Would such an argument have been thought worthy of any more arduous refutation, than the assertion that it would be hard to force an important body of men to remain unrepresented because among them were some who wanted sense?

A Member of Parliament may continue for a long time to ask the lady he takes down to dinner whether she wants the franchise before he gets an affirmative answer. The class in whose interest we demand it is as much out of the reach of men of position as if each party belonged to a different nation. No Member of Parliament would allow his daughter to marry without settlements. It is one of the many advantages of money that it can obtain security for money. The classes who have wealth can get their wealth secured to son or daughter. But those to whom such money as they possess is far more necessary have no means of making the possession of this money by their weaker members sure. The efforts hitherto made have failed in securing immunity to anything but the earnings of married women; a magistrate consulted by a poor woman as to the possibility of keeping a little furniture belonging to her out of the hands of her drunken husband had no better advice to give her than to leave him

secretly and carry it off. And is it considered that the women to whom these things happen are indifferent to them? To suppose that any one can gauge the opinion of those who have experience of the ills needing legislative interference at a dinner party is foolish. If the persons whose wishes were concerned were men, any one would be ashamed of bringing the views of good society into the discussion. The evidence of women's wishes on this question must not be looked for in drawing-rooms. But surely no evidence which would be deemed sufficient to prove that any other class wanted the franchise is wanting in the case of women. Petitions have been presented, signed by about 400,000 persons, one or two of the signatures implying a great deal more than the wish of an individual. These signatures, it is said, have been obtained by "systematic agitation." But systematic agitation is not an entity. It is only a short and somewhat contemptuous way of saying that a few persons have cared very much about an object. Now, we consider that so moderate a demand as that persons otherwise qualified to vote should not be prevented from doing so on account of sex needs the minimum of justification. If voting were to be made obligatory it would be right, before any extension of the franchise, to ascertain the proportions of those who wished to have it, and those who wished to be without it; but there is no such necessity when these latter persons have the remedy in their own hands, and at the utmost their inconvenience will consist in the necessity of giving a decided negative. We are asking for permission to do something which no one will be forced to do. And as for the graces and refinements of life, we believe that they will survive when the women who lose the shelter accorded to weakness cease to be debarred from the independence conceded to strength. But supposing that we are mistaken in this; supposing that we must purchase the greater good by the lesser, we should say—let these things go. It would be a pity that ladies should lead less graceful lives in drawing-rooms, but it would be worth while, if it led to other women leading less miserable lives elsewhere.

The tone of opposition to our demand has sensibly changed during the nine years that have elapsed since it found its first spokesman in John Mill. The quotations made above are mainly taken from the earlier debates in Parliament, and those very words would not now, perhaps, be used in argument against our claim. But, though we mark this change with satisfaction, it is as true of the last debates as of the first, that in order to have made them relevant the question before the House ought to have been, not should a certain class be enfranchised, but should it exist. Almost everything true that has been said on the side we oppose is an argument not against women having votes, but against women having to earn their bread. Sir Henry James, for instance, dwelt emphatically on the physical weakness of women. He quoted Shakespeare's tamed shrew, in the speech where she rebukes one who by many will be thought to hold a more rational theory of a wife's duty, with the query—

"Why are our bodies soft and weak and smooth,
Unapt to toil and trouble in the world,
But that our soft condition and our hearts
Should well agree with our external parts?"

and the quotation was met with cheers, as if submission to kindly protection were the alternative of those women on whose behalf we make our claim! These women are all *obliged* to "take the position of men." They are not asking for independence, they have that already. They have no choice about being independent. I wish it were possible to make one of those gentlemen whose words are quoted here realize the position of a widow left

ill off. She bitterly realizes the truth of *Katharine's* words, she knows well that her body is "unapt to toil and trouble in the world," but she finds the difficulties and hindrances which nature has set in her way suddenly increased by others which till then, perhaps, she had not realized. She finds that a change has come over the feelings with which her claims are met by all but the generous. A promise to her means something less than it did. She can no longer expect that inconvenient engagements will be kept to her, tradespeople and inferiors generally look upon her as some one to be taken advantage of, and she finds every arrangement, every effort she has to make, rendered more arduous by the difference there is between the sense of justice that men have to men and to women. Parliament cannot at once change this, but it can refuse to sanction the different estimate which the vulgar take of the struggling woman and the struggling man. It can declare that in the eye of the Legislature no inferiority shall be recognized within the circle of those who fulfil the requirements it makes a test of citizenship.

In doing this Parliament commits itself to no further principle. If it is an exceptional thing that women have to earn their bread, then, speaking broadly, we may say that the withdrawal of women's disabilities would only emancipate exceptional women, for the heiresses and widows whom this measure would include are in number insignificant. We should naturally expect that if sex were not allowed to form a reason for disfranchisement, neither would marriage, and that the true theory of this subject—that the property test should be carried out without any exceptions, but those of lunacy and crime—would be ultimately embodied in Legislation. But as in normal cases a wife is by the necessities of nature cut off from those exertions of which the vote is in a rough way the symbol, she would be cut off from a vote in the same manner. Property is a rough and meagre test, no doubt, of the qualifications we desire in a voter, but no better has yet been devised, and on the whole it would be a little less rough and meagre in the case of women than men.

Some of the fears which stand in our way can only be regarded as an extravagant compliment to their object. It was said, for instance, that if women were admitted to vote, they must be admitted to sit in Parliament, as if all that was wanted to create female members of Parliament was an Act of Parliament rendering women eligible! Surely, if any one realized that all that an Act of Parliament could do was to confer on men the right to choose a woman to represent them, he would see that such a fear was a most extravagant compliment to women. No advocate of woman's cause would venture on so arrogant an anticipation of ascendancy.

Most of us have no anticipation of any approach to such a result. The desire for Female Franchise is compatible with every variety of opinion about the intellectual superiority of men. In the days when it was possible, by any stretch of imagination, to regard the Electorate as the intellectual aristocracy of England, the admission of the least instructed, and, possibly the least intelligent, part of the community might have been a questionable step. 1832 and 1867 have made that view impossible, and an elaborate arrangement for enabling persons to record their votes who cannot sign their names has made it absurd. Political ascendancy has now gone over to the ignorant, and one-half the people can no longer be excluded from representation on the ground of their ignorance. In urging their admission, we disavow all enthusiastic hopes. Indeed, the only fear with which we regard the proposed measure is that its effect should be at first imperceptible. If it be asked how, with this avowal, we can still urge it, we reply that in doing so we make an appeal to those who can look into the future. We are convinced that all other

measures for the benefit of women would find a new atmosphere and a new soil to grow in when once women were made citizens, and that till that time comes all such measures will form part of a mere patchwork. While men deal with the question as one of affording *protection* to women, the protection they concede will be at once inadequate and enfeebling. It is not till they learn to see that what we demand is *justice*, that they will satisfy those claims which, even from their own point of view, they would allow to be the appropriate demands of the weak.

WOMAN SUFFRAGE:

A REPLY.

BY

J. E. CAIRNES, LL.D.,

EMERITUS PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL ECONOMY IN UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, LONDON.

REPRINTED FROM MACMILLAN'S MAGAZINE, SEPTEMBER, 1874.

MANCHESTER:

ALEXANDER IRELAND & CO., PALL MALL.

1874.

WOMAN SUFFRAGE: A REPLY.

THE recent utterance of Mr. Goldwin Smith against Woman Suffrage has been for many friends of the cause, it may be confessed, a painful surprise. It seemed strange and almost portentous that the voice which had been so often, so boldly, and so eloquently raised on behalf of Liberal principles, should suddenly be heard issuing from the Conservative camp, in opposition to a measure which many Liberals regard as amongst the most important of pending reforms. No one, however, who has read Mr. Smith's essay will have any doubt that the opinions expressed in it—urged as they are with all his characteristic energy—are as genuine and sincere as anything he has ever written on the Liberal side. Whether he has made any converts to his views amongst the supporters of the movement he has attacked, is more than I can say; but as one of those who have not been convinced by his reasonings, I wish to state in what they seem to me to be unsatisfactory, and why, having given them my best consideration, I still remain in my former state of mind.

There is one portion of Mr. Smith's remarks into which, I may as well say here at the outset, I do not propose to follow him. I refer to what he has said of Mr. Mill's relations with his wife, and of his estimate of her mental powers. These are points respecting which, in my opinion, the data do not exist, at least within reach of the general public, for

forming a trustworthy opinion. They are, moreover, absolutely irrelevant to the practical controversy, which should be decided, as Mr. Smith himself in his essay confesses, "on its merits," "the interest of the whole community" being the test, and not by what people may think as to the life and opinions of any individual, however eminent. Further, their discussion cannot but inflict the keenest pain on more than one living person, who, from the nature of the case, are precluded from defending those whom they hold dear. To employ such arguments, therefore, is to use poisoned shafts; and I should have thought that Mr. Goldwin Smith would be about the last man living to resort to such modes of warfare.

Nor is this the only topic introduced by Mr. Smith into this discussion, which might, if not with advantage, at least without detriment to his argument, have been omitted. In his criticism of Mr. Mill's view of the historical origin of the present disabilities of women, there is much the connection of which with the practical question now before the English public it is not very easy to discern. When indeed Mr. Mill first took the question up, the discussion of this aspect of the case was imperatively demanded; because the thing then to be done was, not simply to find arguments to prove the expediency of admitting women to the suffrage, but first of all, and most difficult of all, to gain a hearing for his cause—to make some impression on the solid mass of prejudice that was arrayed against any consideration of the subject; and this could only be done by showing the factitious nature of the existing relation of the sexes. Accordingly, Mr. Mill addressed himself to this task, and in his work on the 'Subjection of Women,' deduced their disabilities from that primitive condition of the human race in which man employed his superior physical strength to coerce woman to his will. Such being the origin of the subjection of women, the disabilities complained of Mr. Mill regarded as, in ethnological phrase, "survivals" from a state of society in which physical force was supreme. To this explanation Mr.

Smith demurs, and contends that the "lot of the woman has not been determined by the will of the man, at least in any considerable degree." According to him it had its origin in those circumstances which made it expedient, on public grounds, that in the early stages of civilization the family should be socially, legally, and politically a unit. Into this portion of the controversy, however, I cannot see that there would be any advantage in entering. Whether Mr. Mill was right or wrong in his view of the historical question, he was at all events eminently successful in the purpose for which he introduced the discussion. He has secured a hearing for the cause of woman, so effectually, that we may now at least feel confident that it will not be ultimately decided on other grounds than those of reason and justice. Nor does it in truth matter whether in approaching the question of Woman Suffrage we adopt Mr. Mill's or Mr. Smith's theory. Both alike regard the existing disabilities of women as "survivals"—Mr. Mill, as survivals from a very early period in which physical force was supreme; Mr. Smith as survivals from the state of things which produced the peculiar constitution of the patriarchal family; but both as survivals, and therefore as belonging to a condition of life which has passed away. The point is thus of purely archæological interest, while the real question now before the public is, not as to the origin of woman's disabilities, but as to their present expediency; "the interest of the whole community," to borrow once more Mr. Smith's language, being "the test."

In the Bill lately before Parliament the intention of the framers, as the reader is aware, was to confer the suffrage on widows and spinsters only; married women having been expressly excluded from its operation. Mr. Smith, in entering on the discussion, is naturally anxious to deal with the question in its broadest form, and accordingly declines to be bound by this limited conception of it. He may be perfectly justified in this course; but the reasons given by him for extending the scope of the controversy are by no means convincing. To say that "marriage could hardly be treated as

politically penal" is to put the argument for his view into a neat phrase; but Englishmen have not hitherto been much governed by phrases, and I hope they are not now going to begin to be. The political disqualification which attaches to the military and naval services, as well as to some branches of the civil service, might also be described as a "penal" incident of those honourable callings, but it is nevertheless maintained; and I have no doubt that if people come to believe that it is advantageous to give the suffrage to widows and spinsters, but disadvantageous to extend it to married women, they will set epigrams at defiance, and draw the line exactly where it is drawn in Mr. Forsyth's Bill. Again, I deny altogether that there is anything in the logic of the case that would compel those who have given the suffrage to women, to take the further step of admitting them to Parliament. "Surely," says Mr. Smith, "she who gives the mandate is competent herself to carry it"—on the principle, I suppose, that—

"Who drives fat oxen should himself be fat."

But granting, for argument's sake, that she is competent to carry *her own* mandate, it still does not follow that she is competent to carry the mandates of *other people*; and this is what the right to a seat in Parliament means. Indeed it is only quite lately that the law has ceased to distinguish between the right to vote and the right to be elected;* and if the distinction no longer exists, its abolition has been due, not in the least to a desire for logical consistency, but simply to the fact that the qualification required by the law for a seat in Parliament was found in practice ineffective for its purpose and in other ways mischievous. If it prove on full examination that the character and circumstances of women are such as to render their admission to Parliament unadvisable on public grounds, those who are in favour of giving them the suffrage will be perfectly within their right in taking their stand at this point, and in refusing to grant them

* In the case of clergymen, as well as in other cases, the distinction is still maintained.

the larger concession. For my own part, as I do not believe that any detriment would come from including married women with others in the grant of the suffrage, or from the admission of women to Parliament, I am quite willing to argue the question on the broader ground on which Mr. Smith desires to place it.*

The most important argument advanced by Mr. Smith against the policy under consideration is contained in the following passages:—"The question whether Female Suffrage on an extended scale is good for the whole community is probably identical, practically speaking, with the question whether it is good for us to have free institutions or not. Absolute monarchy is founded on personal loyalty. Free institutions are founded on the love of liberty, or, to speak more properly, on the preference of legal to personal government. But the love of liberty and the desire of being governed by law alone appear to be characteristically male" (p. 145). From this position Mr. Smith concludes that "to give women the franchise is simply to give them the power of putting an end actually and virtually to all franchises together." "It may not be easy," he allows, "to say beforehand what course the demolition of free institutions by Female Suffrage would take." "But," he holds, "there can be little doubt that in all cases, if power were put into the hands of the women, free government, and with it liberty of opinion, would fall."

It cannot be denied that the consequences here indicated as likely to follow from the extension of the suffrage to women are sufficiently serious; and we may admit that a

* I cannot, however, go the length that Mr. Smith appears inclined to go in one passage, where he argues, or seems to argue, that all who are in favour of woman suffrage, are bound by their own principles to vote, under all circumstances, for woman candidates. He would scarcely, I presume, contend that all who are in favour of Catholic Emancipation are bound, when a Catholic offers himself, to vote for one; and, similarly, that those who favour Jewish Emancipation are bound, when they can, to vote for Jews; but, unless he is prepared to go this length, on what ground does he hold that the advocates of woman suffrage in America must, "if they had considered the consequences of their own principles," have voted for Mrs. Victoria Woodhull?

better reason could not easily be imagined for withholding anything from anybody than that its concession "would probably overturn the institutions on which the hopes of the world rest." But the greatness of a fear does not prove that it rests on solid grounds; and when we come to examine the grounds of Mr. Smith's dark forebodings, we find them about as substantial as the stuff that dreams are made of. "The female need of protection," he says, "of which, so long as women remain physically weak, and so long as they are mothers, it will be impossible to get rid, is apparently accompanied by a preference for personal government." "Women are priest-ridden;" but this does not go to the root of the "reactionary tendency characteristic of the sex." The effect of those physical and physiological peculiarities is, Mr. Smith thinks, to give "an almost uniform bias to the political sentiments of women;" this bias being opposed to law and liberty, and in favour of personal government; so that women may be trusted, whenever an opportunity offers, to act *en masse* for the destruction of free institutions.

Women in these passages are spoken of as if, so to speak, *in vacuo*: it is not to the women of any particular country or age that the description applies, but to woman in the abstract. In conformity with this, the illustrations which follow are taken by Mr. Smith from various ages and countries—I should have said with tolerable impartiality, if it were not that, strangely enough, scarcely any reference is made to the women of modern England. And yet it is the women of modern England whose case is in issue. Now this is a point of some importance; because it is quite possible, at least as I regard it—not being a believer in "natural rights"—that the suffrage may be a good thing for women in certain stages of social progress, as for men, but a bad thing for both where the social conditions are different. This being so, it is not obvious how Mr. Smith helps the intelligent discussion of the question by taking his examples at random from ancient Rome, Italy, France, the United States, England in the seventeenth century—in a word, from any source where

he can find cases to suit his purpose, but without the least reference to the special circumstances of each case. I have no desire to restrict unduly the range of the discussion; but I think that, when examples are taken from foreign countries, and still more when they are taken from former ages, with a view to prejudice the claims of Englishwomen to the franchise, some attempt should be made to show that the cases cited are really pertinent to the question in hand.

Turning, then, to the persons and country immediately concerned, let us consider how far the state of things here affords any support to Mr. Smith's speculations. I will not attempt to deny that there may be priest-ridden women in England, possibly in considerable numbers; nor will I dispute what some well-informed persons have asserted, that the passing of a Woman Suffrage Bill would not improbably, at all events for a time, give an accession of political influence to the clergy. But granting this, and even conceding, for the sake of argument, Mr. Smith's theory as to the natural bias of the female mind, we are still a long way off from the terrible catastrophe that his fears portend. "Female Suffrage," he says, "would give a vast increase of power to the clergy;" but we have still to ask if the English clergy, Church and Nonconformist, are, as a body, ready to join in a crusade against free institutions. I am quite unable to discover what the grounds are for such a supposition; but if this cannot be assumed, then their influence would not be exercised in the direction Mr. Smith apprehends, and his fears for free institutions are groundless. Even if we were to make the extravagant supposition that the clergy are to a man in favour of personal government and absolutism, there would still be husbands, fathers, and brothers, whose appeals on behalf of free government would not surely pass altogether unheeded. Is it being over-sanguine to assume that at the worst a sufficient number of women would be kept back from the polls to leave the victory with the cause that is "characteristically male?"

In short, we have only to attempt to realise the several

conditions, *all of which would need to be fulfilled before the catastrophe which Mr. Smith dreads could even be approached*, in order to perceive the extravagant improbability, if not intrinsic absurdity, of his apprehensions. But instead of attempting to follow further the possible consequences of social and political combinations which are never likely to have any existence outside Mr. Smith's fancy, let us consider for a moment the theory he has advanced as to the mental constitution of women, which lies at the bottom of the whole speculation. Women, it seems, are so constituted by nature as to be incapable of the "love of liberty, and the desire of being governed by law;" and this results from a "sentiment inherent in the female temperament, formed by the normal functions and circumstances of the sex." Now if this be so—if the sentiments of women with regard to government and political institutions are thus determined by physiological causes too powerful to be modified by education and experience, then those sentiments would in all countries and under all conditions of society be essentially the same. But is this the fact? On the contrary, is it not matter of common remark that the whole attitude of women towards politics is strikingly different in different countries; that it is one thing in England, another in the United States, something different from either in France and Italy, and something different from all in Turkey and the East? and, not to travel beyond the range of the present controversy, do we not find within the United Kingdom almost every variety of political opinion prevailing amongst women, according to the circumstances of their education and social surroundings? It may be true that the interest taken by women in politics has hitherto been in general somewhat languid; that, as a body, they are less alive than men to the advantages of political liberty and of legal government. But is not this precisely what was to be expected, supposing their political opinions to be subject to the same influences which determine the political opinions of men? As a rule they have from the beginning of things been excluded from politics; their whole education

has been contrived, one might say, with the deliberate purpose of giving to their sentiments an entirely different bent; home and private life have been inculcated on them as the only proper sphere for their ambition; yet in spite of these disadvantages, by merely mixing in society with men who take an interest in politics, a very great number of women have come to share that interest, while there are some, as Mr. Smith admits—I will add a rapidly increasing number—"eminently capable of understanding and discussing political questions." Can it be said that of the women who in this country take an interest in politics the bias of their political sentiments is uniformly in one direction, and this—the direction of personal government and absolutism? I can only say, if this be Mr. Smith's experience, it is singularly different from mine. No doubt there are women in abundance who care nothing for politics, and who would be quite content to live under any government which offered a fair promise of peace and security; but may not precisely the same be said of no inconsiderable number of men even in England? Would it not be easy to find men enough, and these by no means amongst the residuum, who take no interest at all in politics, and who, so far as they are concerned, would be willing to hand over the destinies of the human race to-morrow to a Cæsar, or to any one else who, they had reason to believe, would maintain the rights of property, and keep their own precious persons safe? This state of feeling amongst some men is not considered to prove that men in general are unfitted by nature for the functions of citizenship under a free government; and when we meet exactly the same phenomenon amongst women, why are we to deduce from it a conclusion which in the case of men we should repudiate?

In short, the patent facts of experience in this country (and if here or anywhere the facts are as I have stated them, they suffice to dispose of Mr. Smith's theory) are consistent with one supposition and with one supposition only—the existence in women of political capabilities which may be

developed in almost any direction, according to the nature of the influences brought to bear upon them. It may very well be that, when experience has furnished us with sufficient data for observation, a something will prove to be discernible in the political opinions of the two sexes in the nature of a characteristic quality; but at present conjecture upon this subject is manifestly premature; and Mr. Smith's arrow, apparently shot at a venture, we may confidently say, has not hit the mark. The love of liberty and the desire of being governed by law are feelings which have as yet been developed in but a very small proportion of men; they have been developed in a still smaller proportion of women, but the difference is not greater than the difference in the education and circumstances of the two sexes is amply sufficient to account for.

Mr. Smith having thoroughly frightened himself by the chimeras his imagination had conjured up as the probable result of giving the Suffrage to Women, puts the question:—"But would the men submit?" and he resorts to an ingenious, though perhaps questionable, speculation on the ultimate sanctions of law, to show that they would not. If the laws passed by women were such as men disapproved of, "the men," he says, "would, of course, refuse execution; law would be set at defiance, and government would be overturned" (p. 146). When, therefore, "the female vote" came to be taken "on the fate of free institutions," and the decree for their abolition went forth, it seems that, after all, it would prove mere *brutum fulmen*. The consummation would never take place; and the institutions on which the hopes of the world rest would remain erect, unharmed amid the impotent feminine rage surging around, much (if one may venture on a profane illustration) like one of those gin palaces in the United States that has held its ground against the psalmody of the whisky crusaders. One would have thought that this reflection would have brought some solace to Mr. Smith's soul; but, strange to say, he regards it as an aggravation of the impending evils; and would apparently

be better pleased if, in the supposed contingency, men in general should exhibit the same implicit subserviency which, he tells us, has been shown by a man, somewhere in the United States, who, under his wife's compulsion, is in the habit of working for her as a hired labourer—a fact, by the way, not very happily illustrating his theory of the ultimate sanctions of law.

In truth this portion of Mr. Smith's argument—and it is in a logical sense the very heart of his case, in such sort, that, this part failing, the whole collapses—is so utterly—I will not say, weak—but so utterly unlike the sort of argument ordinarily to be found in his political writings, that it is difficult to resist the impression that it does not represent the real grounds of his conviction, but is rather a theory excogitated after conviction to satisfy that intellectual craving which an opinion formed on other grounds than reason invariably produces. And this impression is confirmed, if not reduced to certainty, as we continue the perusal of his essay. In an early passage Mr. Smith had told us that he "himself once signed a petition for Female Household Suffrage got up by Mr. Mill;" adding that, when he signed it, he "had not seen the public life of women in the United States." Further on he gives us an account of this public life, as he conceives it; and I have no doubt that we have here disclosed to us the real source, if not of his present opinions on Woman Suffrage, at least of the intensity with which they are held. In the United States, he says, "a passion for emulating the male sex has undoubtedly taken possession of some of the women, as it took possession of women under the Roman empire, who began to play the gladiator when other excitements were exhausted." It seems further that there are women in the United States who claim, "in virtue of 'superior complexity of organisation,' not only political equality but absolute supremacy over man, of whom one has given to the movement the name of the 'Revolt of Woman.'" Again, "in the United States the privileges of women may be said to extend to impunity, not only for ordinary outrage,

but for murder. The poisoner whose guilt has been proved by overwhelming evidence, is let off because she is a woman; there is a sentimental scene between her and her advocate in court, and afterwards she appears as a public lecturer.* The Whisky Crusade shows that women are practically above the law." Once more it appears that "in the United States the grievance of which most is heard is the tyrannical stringency of the marriage tie. . . . Some of the language used . . . if reproduced might unfairly prejudice the case." Already "male legislatures in the United States have carried the liberty of divorce so far, that the next step would be the total abolition of marriage and the destruction of the family;" and this is followed by a story of "a woman who accomplished a divorce by simply shutting the door of the house, which was her own property, in her husband's face." It would be easy, had I space at my command, to add to these extracts; but the foregoing will suffice. One is led to ask what is the bearing of such statements, assuming the facts to be all correctly given, upon the question of Woman Suffrage? Mr. Smith has not troubled himself to point this out—apparently has never

* Mr. Smith gives neither dates nor places, but there can be little doubt that in the allusion in the text two distinct transactions are confounded: the inference suggested, moreover, is such as the facts by no means warrant. "The poisoner whose guilt has been proved by overwhelming evidence," but who is "let off," must, I think, refer to the case of a woman tried some time ago in one of the eastern cities, I think Baltimore. It is true she was "let off," but, as an American barrister informs me, with perfect propriety; the evidence against her not being sufficient to sustain the charge. In this case there was no sentimental scene in court, and no appearance afterwards as a public lecturer. These latter incidents belong to a case which occurred in San Francisco, in which a woman, Laura Fair by name, was tried, not for poisoning, but for shooting her paramour in the open street, and was acquitted in the face of the most conclusive evidence. The advocate, however, as I am informed, was passive in "the sentimental scene," and afterwards sued the lady for his fees. It is true, too, that she appeared shortly afterwards as a public lecturer; but Mr. Smith omits to add—what is surely pertinent to the question in hand—that she was hooted by the audience from the platform, and found it prudent to leave the town without delay. No one who knows anything of the United States would regard San Francisco as a typical American city; it is rather an extreme example of all that is most pronounced in American rowdiness; yet even in San Francisco we find that popular feeling on the immunity of women from penalties for crime is something very different from what Mr. Smith represents it.

considered it; but finds it simpler to throw in such sensational allusions here and there as a sort of garnishing for his argument, trusting no doubt that they will produce upon the minds of his readers the same impression which they have evidently made upon his own. The case seems to be this:—Mr. Smith's finer susceptibilities have been rudely shocked by the antics of a sort of Mænad sisterhood holding their revels here and there in the vast territory of the United States; and a state of mind has supervened which leads him to regard with disfavour any cause with which these women happen to be associated. Woman Suffrage, unfortunately, is one of those causes; and therefore Mr. Smith is opposed to Woman Suffrage.

Now, to let one's opinions be formed in this way is not to be guided by experience, as some people would have us believe. Let not anyone suppose that Mr. Smith has any such solid support for the views advanced in his essay. Woman Suffrage has nowhere yet, out of Utah, been tried in the United States; whereas we in England have witnessed its working at least in our municipal and school-board elections. In point of experience, therefore, we who have remained at home have the advantage of Mr. Smith. His sojourn in America, however, has brought to his notice the sort of women—or, more properly, a sort of women—who contrive to make themselves conspicuous in the United States in social and political agitations. It may be allowed that, as depicted by him, they are not a gracious band; though hardly less attractive than some of the male politicians who figure at Caucuses, Rings, and other political gatherings in the same country. Is Mr. Smith, in disgust at this latter product of American institutions, prepared to abolish male suffrage, and with it representative government—to abolish it not merely in the United States, but here and everywhere? for to this length does his argument against Woman Suffrage, drawn from analogous manifestations on the part of some American women, carry him.

As I have said, Mr. Smith has not pointed out the bearing

of his sensational allusions on the question of Woman Suffrage. If he intended them to support his case he was undoubtedly prudent in not doing so. Let us consider one or two of them in connection with the question at issue. We are told, for example, that "in the United States the privileges of women may be said to extend to impunity, not only for ordinary outrage, but for murder;" and then comes the story of the poisoner which I have examined in a note. Further on he says, "if the women ask for the suffrage, say some American publicists, they must have it; and in the same way, everything that a child cries for is apt to be given it without reflection as to the consequences of the indulgence." Now, assuming (what I am by no means disposed to admit) that the state of feeling towards women in the United States is such as these remarks suggest, it is to be observed in the first place that it is a state of feeling which has grown up, not under a female, but under an exclusively male, suffrage, and it is not easy to believe that the extension of the suffrage to women could make it worse. In the next place, the feeling in question is merely an exaggeration of that sickly sentimentalism regarding woman and all that concerns her which has come down to us from times of chivalry, and which has hitherto been fostered by the careful exclusion of women from political life, as well as from the great majority of useful and rational occupations. In the United States, a portion of the women appear, from Mr. Smith's account, to have suddenly broken loose from many of these restraints; and the use they are making of their freedom appears to be about as wise and edifying as the use which men commonly make of political freedom when it has been suddenly conferred upon them after centuries of servitude. The sentiment deserves all the scorn that Mr. Smith pours upon it; but the corrective for it, if it exists, is not to be found in a continuance of the state of things which produced it, but in opening to women those spheres of action from which they have been hitherto debarred, and in subjecting them to the free and bracing air of equality, alike in rights and in responsibilities, with men.

And this consideration furnishes the answer to another of Mr. Smith's arguments. He considers that the admission of women to the suffrage, instead of mitigating, is likely to aggravate the violence of political strife, and in support of this view refers to the Reign of Terror, the revolt of the Commune, and the American Civil War. I must own this latter reference has taken me by surprise. I have never heard before that the women of the United States during the civil war "notoriously rivalled the men in fury and atrocity." I remember some very great atrocities committed during that war; for example, the massacre at Fort Pillow, the treatment of prisoners of war in some of the Southern military hospitals, the attempts to burn down some of the public buildings and hotels in New York; but these were all committed by men, and I have never heard of similar acts committed or attempted by American women. If Mr. Smith knows of any such, he ought to enlighten the world by stating them, or else withdraw his injurious assertion. On the other hand, I have heard, and I imagine so must Mr. Smith, of the magnificent devotion to their country shown by the women of the Northern States in organising and working hospital corps, and in actual services rendered to the wounded on the field, mitigating thus the hardships and horrors of war in a manner to reflect honour on their country and on their sex. As to the women of the Reign of Terror and the Commune, they were, at all events, not worse than the men; and the shocking crimes committed by both, so far as they are not purely mythical, are, no doubt, referable to the same causes—the tremendous excitement of the time, the wild doctrines current, and, above all, the absolute inexperience in political affairs of those to whom power for the moment fell.

Again, what is the bearing of Mr. Smith's statements regarding the great freedom of divorce existing in some of the States of the Union? "Male legislators," it seems, "have already carried the liberty of divorce so far that the next step would be the total abolition of marriage and the

destruction of the family." Does it follow from this that female, or rather mixed, legislatures would go further in the same direction? for this seems to be the drift of this portion of Mr. Smith's remarks. In an earlier part of his essay he had told us that it was inherent in the nature of women to be subservient to the clergy: he now suggests that, if admitted to the suffrage, they would probably enact the abrogation of the marriage tie. Perhaps he sees his way to reconciling these two opinions, but it is not obvious on the surface, any more than it is easy to reconcile the latter with what he tells us a few lines lower down, that women have a far deeper interest in maintaining the stringency of the marriage tie than men. If so, then, one naturally asks, why will they not use their influence to maintain it? Are they such imbeciles as not to discern their interest in so important a matter, or, discerning it, to throw their weight into the scale adverse to their most vital concerns? Here again Mr. Smith answers himself: he tells us, "the women themselves [I presume the Mænads] have now, it is said, begun to draw back."

I now turn to a side of the question on which Mr. Smith lays very great stress, and of which I am not in the least disposed to underrate the importance—the extension of the suffrage to married women. I do not yield to Mr. Smith, or to anyone, in the firmness of my conviction that the family is at the bottom of our existing civilization, and I should, for my part, regard as dearly purchased any gain in material or political well-being which should introduce a jar or weakness into this pivot of our social system. But I believe that to open political life to women, far from being fraught with the disastrous consequences Mr. Smith anticipates, would, taking things in their entire scope, be productive of quite opposite effects. If I were asked to name the principal element of weakness in the family as things now stand, I should have no hesitation in pointing to the want of sufficient subjects of common interest between man and woman. It is owing to this that matrimonial engagements are entered into so rarely

on the basis of any broad intellectual sympathy, such as might furnish some security for lasting affection, and so often at the bidding of impulses and fancies that do not outlive the honeymoon; and it is owing to the same cause that so very large a proportion of the lives of most husbands and wives are spent practically apart, with little or no knowledge on the part of either of the objects or aims that engross the greater portion of the other's thoughts and energies. That under such circumstances the marriage tie is, on the whole, maintained as well as it is, seems rather matter for wonder; and to argue that the introduction of a new source of very profound common interest for husband and wife must of necessity weaken the bond, is, in my opinion, to evince a singular inability to appreciate the real dangers now besetting the institution. It is true, no doubt, that every new subject of common interest for husband and wife, must, from the nature of the case, constitute also a new possible occasion for disagreement; but if this is to be accounted a good reason for excluding women from politics, they might with equal justice be excluded from literature, from the fine arts, from everything in which men also take an interest—above all from religion. The value of these several pursuits as bonds and cements of married life is just in proportion to the degree of common interest which husbands and wives take in them, and just in the same proportion also is the possible danger that they may become the grounds of dissension. Mr. Smith is greatly scandalised at the prospect of a man and his wife taking opposite sides in politics. I cannot see that it would be at all more scandalous than that a man and his wife should take opposite sides in religion—going, for example, every Sunday to different places of worship, where each hears the creed of the other denounced as soul-destroying and damnable. It will serve to throw light upon the present problem if we consider for a moment how it happens that this latter spectacle is on the whole so rarely presented; and that, even where the event occurs, it is so frequently found consistent with tolerable harmony in married life.

The explanation, I have no doubt, is of this kind: where difference of religion consists with matrimonial happiness, it will generally be found that one or both of the partners do not take a very deep interest in the creeds they profess; while, on the other hand, where people do feel strongly on religion, they generally take care, in forming matrimonial alliances, to consort with those who, on fundamental points, are of the same opinion with themselves. Now it seems to me that this may serve to illustrate for us what will be the practical working of politics in respect to married life when women begin to receive a political education, or at least to learn as much about politics, and take as much or as little interest in them as men do. A number only too large of men and women will probably continue for long enough to take but small interest in public affairs, and these will marry, as they do now, with little reference to each other's political opinions; but the danger of discord from politics under such circumstances would be infinitesimal. The only cases in which this danger would become serious would be when both husband and wife were strong politicians. Here, no doubt, there would be danger; though no greater, I think, than when two persons of strong but opposite religious convictions enter into marriage. Mr. Smith seems to think that, because "religion is an affair of the other world," it is less likely than politics to be an occasion of strife. This is probable enough when people do not believe in another world; but when they do, and believe also that the fate of people there will depend on what they believe in this, I cannot see the wisdom of his remark. Some of the worst and cruellest wars that have ever been waged have been religious wars; and so notoriously is religion an engenderer of strife, that it is now scarcely good manners to moot a religious question in private society, where politics are quite freely and amicably discussed. If persons of genuine but different religious opinions can contrive to get on together in married life, they would certainly not be likely to be severed by political differences, however strongly their opinions might be held. But, however this

may be, my argument is that, in practice, such cases would very rarely occur. When politics became a subject of interest alike for men and for women, it would very soon become a principal consideration in determining matrimonial alliances. Even now this is the case to some extent, and it will no doubt become more and more so as the political education of women advances. Mr. Smith's question, therefore, "Would the harmony of most households bear the strain?" may be answered by saying that in very few households would there be any strain to bear; while in most—at least in those in which politics were intelligently cultivated—home life, no longer the vapid thing it is so often now, would acquire a new element of interest, and the family would be held together by powerful sympathies that now lie undeveloped.

Mr. Smith seems to think that, if women are only excluded from the suffrage, the harmony of married life can never be endangered by politics; but this is to attribute to the mere right of voting a degree of efficacy which I, for one, am not disposed to allow to it. If women only come to take an interest in politics—it matters not whether they have the suffrage or not—all the danger that can arise from the suffrage to married life will be already incurred. It is not the giving of a vote every four or five years that constitutes the danger, if danger there be; but the habitual mental attitude of husband and wife towards each other. Those, therefore, who share Mr. Smith's apprehensions on the present subject, ought clearly to take their stand against the suffrage movement very much higher up. They ought to oppose every extension of female education which may reasonably be expected to lead women to take an interest in politics. The intelligent study of history should, in the first place, be rigidly proscribed. Political economy would be excluded as a matter of course; and along with it, that large and increasing class of studies embraced under the name "social." Every one of these, intelligently cultivated, leads inevitably, where faculty is not wanting, to an interest in

contemporary politics; and if women are to be shut out from this field of ideas, lest perchance they should adopt opinions which should not be those of their future husbands, their education ought at once to be truncated by this large segment. Mr. Smith indeed suggests that women who are capable of discussing political questions "will find a sphere in the press." Does he then suppose that there would be less danger to the harmony of married life from women writing in the press—writing leaders, perhaps, for strong party papers—than from tendering a vote at the polls every four or five years? Besides, the suggestion falls utterly short of the requirements of the case. The number of women who are capable, or who desire, to find a sphere in the press are never likely to be more than a handful: the numbers who desire a liberal education, in the best and broadest sense of that word, and who are or may become quite fitted to form sound opinions on political questions, are already to be numbered by thousands, perhaps I might say by tens of thousands: what their numbers will become in another generation, I will not pretend to conjecture. Mr. Smith's suggestion, therefore, though graciously meant, is hardly to the purpose. Plainly nothing short of lopping off from the education of women some of the most important branches of human knowledge will meet the difficulty.

I must, before concluding, refer briefly (for my space is all but exhausted) to an aspect of the case touched on at the opening of these remarks—the probability of the admission of women to Parliament as a consequence of giving them the suffrage. As I have already pointed out, the latter concession by no means necessarily involves the former; so that it is quite open to those who are in favour of Woman Suffrage to decline, if they see fit to do so, to concede the latter privilege. For my own part, however, I desire to say frankly that I am in favour of removing, not only this, but all legal impediments whatever, to the freest choice by women of a career whether in political or in civil life. It is not that I look forward to women taking advantage, in any very large

degree, of the new fields of activity that would thus be opened to them; for I am not of Mr. Smith's opinion, that women can be "unsexed" by Acts of Parliament. I believe that all the substantial reasons of convenience, natural aptitude, and taste, which, in the division of labour between men and women, make it desirable that women should, as a rule, take charge of the domestic half of the world's work, and men of that which is transacted out of doors, will, whatever laws we may pass, remain in their full force, and will keep the general distribution of occupations between the sexes, even under the freest competition, in the main not very different from what it now is. Still, though this, as I believe, will be the rule, there will no doubt be numerous exceptions to it; and why should there not be? If some women find it suitable to their circumstances and to their natural talents or taste to embrace careers now open only to men, why should they be debarred from turning their abilities to the best account? If they make mistakes, as very possibly at first many will, and adopt unsuitable occupations, they will discover their mistakes as men do now, by experience, and their failures will serve as a warning to others. If, on the other hand, they prove successful in their ventures, their success can only be a gain for themselves and for society at large. All this would hold true, even though the alternative of marriage and domestic life were really open to every woman in the country. But it is a fact of very great importance as regards the practical aspect of this question that no inconsiderable number of women in this country pass, and cannot but pass, their lives unmarried. Mr. Smith, indeed, regards this as connected "with an abnormal and possibly transient state of things." For my part I regard it as a perfectly normal phenomenon in such a country as England, and, therefore, as likely to endure. In any case, while it lasts, the exclusion of women from professional and other careers is something more than a theoretical injustice. It is a real and substantial wrong, involving penury and all its consequences, inflicted on a large number of persons whose only crime is

their sex, and who only ask to be permitted to earn a livelihood by making themselves useful to their fellow creatures. The claim to be admitted to Parliament, indeed, if it should be advanced (which it has not yet been), would stand on somewhat different ground. Exclusion in this case would not mean exclusion from the means of earning a livelihood, and therefore the reasons in favour of the claim are undoubtedly less strong than those which may be urged in favour of opening professional and industrial careers; but why should women not be allowed the fullest and freest use of their faculties in any walk of life, whether lucrative or otherwise, in which any competent portion of the community may think it expedient to employ them? At all events the onus of proof lies with those who would resist such a claim; and if opponents have nothing better to urge than the fatuous jokes which have hitherto been the staple of their argument, but from which Mr. Smith has had the good taste to abstain, the case against women is certainly not a strong one. Whether many women, if the opportunity offered, would be ambitious of a parliamentary career; or whether, in this case, they would find many constituencies disposed to elect them, are questions, the consideration of which may perhaps be left, without disadvantage, to a future day.

THE END.

FEMALE SUFFRAGE:

AN ARTICLE REPRINTED FROM THE
"VICTORIA MAGAZINE" OF 1874,

WITH SOME REMARKS ON THE

Late Debate in the House of Commons,

BY

W. T. BLAIR, ESQ.,

Magistrate for Somerset.

LONDON:

VICTORIA PRESS, 85, PRAED STREET, PADDINGTON, W.

1876.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

THE HOUSE OF COMMONS
IN PARLIAMENT ASSEMBLED
THAT THE PETITION OF THE
WOMEN OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND IRELAND FOR THE
PURPOSE OF OBTAINING
THE SUFFRAGE BE
REFERRED TO A SELECT
COMMITTEE OF THE
HOUSE OF COMMONS
TO ENQUIRE INTO THE
MATTERS CONTAINED
IN THE SAID PETITION
AND TO REPORT THEREON
TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS
AS SOON AS MAY BE
CONVENIENT
AND THAT THE
SAY COMMITTEE DO
HAVE POWER TO
SEND FOR AND
EXAMINE SUCH
PERSONS AS THEY
SHALL THINK FIT
AND TO TAKE SUCH
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SAY COMMITTEE DO
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DO ALL SUCH OTHER
THINGS AS THEY
SHALL THINK FIT

Fiat Justitia, ruat Cœlum.



ALTHOUGH the question of giving the parliamentary vote to women has been frequently and largely discussed already, I wish to offer a few remarks on the subject through the medium of the *Victoria Magazine*. I do this, not because I think the cause lacks any additional argument to demonstrate either its reasonableness or its justice, but simply because the reiteration of a plea often prevails with a certain class of persons who are utterly impervious to the voice of reason. There are those who have turned a deaf ear to your argument for the nineteenth time who will yield to the twentieth appeal from its sheer importunity, like the unjust judge, who, though he feared not God nor man, yet said, "because this woman troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming, she weary me." These persons are only to be won over by *wearying* them.

I have no intention of entering on the question of what may be termed women's rights in the abstract—whether they involve equality or subordination in the marriage relation, or whether there is any such natural and fundamental difference in the mental powers of the two sexes as indicates such an inferiority on the part of women as should disqualify them for the exercise of certain professions and occupations that have been hitherto closed against them. I leave it to the philosopher or the psychologist to show whether there

is any radical inferiority in the intellectual powers of women, or whether any mental differences supposed to exist between the sexes are to be attributed to their different education and circumstances. My task is a much humbler one, and is entirely independent of any such considerations. Stripped of all adventitious circumstances, the question I propose to discuss really lies in a nut-shell. I would state it thus: Representation being now reduced to a property or household qualification, it is unjust and unconstitutional to exclude from the parliamentary franchise on the ground of *sex* only those householders who fulfil all the conditions which entitle to a vote for members of Parliament. Under whatever conditions men are admitted to the suffrage, there is not, I contend, a shadow of justification for not admitting women under the same.

But the assumed inferiority, and the actual subjection of women to men has created so deep and general a feeling, that to attempt any departure from long established rule or custom appears unnatural. It is difficult to obtain a patient hearing against such deep-rooted prepossessions and feelings. To show how slowly established customs and institutions give way before advancing civilization and the progress of Christianity, it is only necessary to call to mind the fact that within the memory of those now living it was the law of Christian England that persons might hold human beings, like cattle, in bondage, and work them to death for the love of gain, unmixed and undisguised, and this abomination well nigh survived the life-long labours of Wilberforce and Clarkson and other noble-minded philanthropists. Can we wonder, then, that established custom and the general feeling of society should have hitherto denied the parliamentary suffrage to all women, irrespective of qualification, from the mere accident of birth? To say that an individual being born a girl instead of a boy shall disqualify from exercising the franchise would only be equalled by

the folly and injustice of the slave holders in America, who maintained that the colour of the skin determined the question of freedom or slavery—that the dominion of the white man over the black was *natural*—that the black or African race is by nature incapable of freedom, and is marked out for slavery. This fact of birth determining the question at issue can only be regarded as the law of the strongest—the exercise of might over right—a remnant of that barbarism which once condemned the whole of the female, and a great majority of the male, sex to slavery, and cannot be shown to conduce in any way to the good order or advantage of society. It stands almost a solitary and striking instance of unequal legislation, to which women are exposed by the mere fact of their birth, and it is one which we may hope will soon disappear, like many other prejudices and customs, social, commercial, and political, that have ceased to exist. Indeed evidence is not wanting that this relic of a barbarous age is fast giving way before the advancing claims and interests of humanity, in the fact that the municipal suffrage has been already conceded to women, and their eligibility to act as members of School Boards has been recognised; and it is, I believe, universally acknowledged that these functions have been exercised by them with manifest advantage to the public service. This, I take it, completely governs and settles the question of parliamentary suffrage, and is a guarantee that it will be used with equal benefit to the country.

But it is time briefly to consider some of the most popular objections that are made against the measure for which we contend. One of the most common is that women ought to have nothing to do with politics. Now, admitting this for the sake of argument, I would ask how far women are likely to be drawn into the vortex of politics by the fact that, once in five, six, or seven years, they may be called upon to deposit a voting paper in the ballot box, an act that will occupy

about five or ten minutes of their time, and is unattended with the slightest excitement or outward display. The ballot system having been established, and all the main sources of riot and tumult at elections having been got rid of, one of the stock arguments against the enfranchisement of women is removed. Our position under this head is greatly strengthened when we remember that the voting at municipal and School Board elections comes round every three years, and yet we do not find that this function withdraws women from any of their domestic and feminine occupations.

Another objection very frequently urged is, if you begin in the sliding scale of concession, where are you to stop? A sagacious remark which, if acted upon, would be an effectual bar to all reforming movements, civil or religious. All experience, however, shows that the real danger consists in letting evils and wrongs alone, and not in attempting prudently to remove them. Nothing can be more unfair than to argue against the legitimate use of anything from the possibility of its abuse.

The right to share in the choice of those who are to exercise a public trust is altogether a distinct thing from that of competing for the trust itself. It is one thing to have a vote in choosing a member of Parliament and quite another thing to claim admission to Parliament itself.

I have now briefly considered two of the objections that we meet with every day amongst the ordinary class of unthinking and unreasoning people; but what are the objections that have been put forward by men in Parliament—by our “most potent, grave, and reverend signiors?” If one takes the trouble to run through the debates in the House of Commons of '72 and '73, it is impossible not to be struck with the marked difference in the style of the speeches of the advocates and opposers of the measure. On the one side is earnestness, fact, and argument, founded on

justice and the principles of the constitution. On the other side we see reckless assertions, sarcasm, banter, and levity, showing how hard certain persons are driven for excuses in opposing a just and reasonable demand. It is seldom, however, as Lord Macaulay observes, that oratory changes votes. A member of Parliament is reported to have said that he had heard many speeches that had changed his opinion, but never one that had changed his vote. And so we may presume it to have been on this occasion. It was asserted by more than one honourable gentleman that Englishwomen did not desire the measure to become law, and that all the agitation in its favour was confined to a few itinerant ladies, who went about the country lecturing. But what is the evidence in support of this sweeping assertion? It is absolutely *nil*; for while petitions have been presented in its favour from all parts of the country, bearing nearly half a million of signatures, scarcely a single petition has been presented against it: and it is worthy of particular notice that petitions in favour of Mr. Jacob Bright's Bill have been presented from the very place which one of the honourable members who makes the above assertion represents, so uninformed would he appear to have been of the views and feelings of his own constituents. Another member told the House that in the evening after he had voted for the bill, in 1870, he met a lady and said to her, “I have been working for your cause to-day; I have been endeavouring to remove the electoral disabilities of women;” and her answer was, “You might easily have been better employed.” And so, regarding this lady as the mouth-piece of all the women of England, he voted against the bill.

It is to be hoped, for the credit of the sex, that there are very few ladies who would have exhibited the same fickleness and inconstancy of purpose on such slender grounds as the gentleman in question.

Again, we are gravely assured that the mental faculties of women are inferior to those of men, and

that they would be incapable in the choice of representatives of considering the important questions of finance, commerce, or politics, foreign and domestic, that are discussed in the Houses of Parliament. In regard to this assumption I would observe, let any one take an equal number of men and women of the same class, and then say if the latter, morally and intellectually, are less capable than the former of forming a sound judgment on any matters on which they would be called upon to decide. But in order to place in the strongest light the folly and the injustice of the present state of the law, let us take the case of the Baroness Burdett-Coutts. There we see a lady of immense possessions and boundless benevolence, which she administers with great wisdom, yet is considered incapable of exercising the humble function of giving a vote, while perhaps just outside her gates some clodhopper is living who may be unable to write his name, but who being a householder, and belonging to what Lindley Murray calls the "more worthy gender" (for which Miss Edgeworth terms him the uncourtly grammarian), he is entitled to a vote. Another sagacious remark made by one gentleman is, that the measure would be unexceptionable if it were intended to go no further, but he should vote against it, because it was the commencement, not of a new reform, but of a revolution in the country. *Mirabile dictu!* Two or three hundred thousand women, if admitted to the exercise of the franchise, are about to revolutionize the country! The same humorous speaker also tells us that if the question of female suffrage were carried, women would not only claim to be returned to the House of Commons, but that to balance the Constitution they must be allowed to sit in the House of Lords, and, he presumed, to occupy seats on the Episcopal Bench!!

All this might be very amusing, and well calculated to raise a smile, but was hardly worthy of a serious debate in the House of Commons.

On the whole I think the state of the question is highly encouraging. "Hope deferred may make the heart sick," but that is no cause for despair, or even despondency, for if truth and justice lie at the foundation of our claim, we shall surely "reap if we faint not." *Magna est veritas, et prævalebit.* "Faint, yet pursuing" has been the motto of the patriot and philanthropist in many an arduous struggle—witness Anti-Slavery, Anti-Corn Law, the Ballot, and numerous other reformatory movements. Of this we may be assured, that no high and generous purpose,—no sincere attempt to promote either the glory of God or the good of our fellow creatures, shall ultimately fail. "Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days." Both the present and the late Prime Minister may be expected to support the measure. The principal objection urged by Mr. Gladstone has been removed by the adoption of the ballot system, and Mr. Disraeli has stated, in reply to a memorial signed by 11,000 women of England, that he believes the anomaly of withholding the parliamentary suffrage from women, while it is given to men, to be injurious to the best interests of the country, and he trusts to see it removed by the wisdom of Parliament. I cannot conclude this article better than in the words with which Mr. Maguire wound up an eloquent appeal in favour of the measure in the debate that took place in the House of Commons in 1872. He said: "I support this bill with all my heart, because I believe its passing would infuse into politics a higher tone of feeling than that which at present exists, and because I regard the demand which it makes as alike logical and constitutional."

THE foregoing article was published in the *Victoria Magazine* for April, 1874. During the present Session another debate took place in the House of Commons on the Female Suffrage question, which was decided adversely by a majority of 87. I am induced, in consequence, to reprint the article, as a separate paper, for the purpose of adding a few brief comments on the speech of Mr. Bright, who was the chief opponent of the measure, whose opinion, doubtless, told considerably on the division. But before doing this, I cannot pass over in silence the speech of a man of a very different stamp; one who, I suppose, must from courtesy be called the *Hon. Member for Cambridge*, or, as he has been styled by the *Morning Post*, one of the *chartered Libertines* of debate. It is to be hoped that this individual stands almost alone in the House of Commons for the ribald coarseness with which he ventured to cast the most offensive aspersions upon women, and for his gross indelicacy in mentioning by name the relatives of some of the most respected Members of the House, and attributing to ladies of their taste and refinement a desire to revel in prurient matter, and for which he was justly rebuked by Mr. Fawcett. Such language will not, it is confidently hoped and believed, be forgotten when next he presents himself to his constituents. But enough of Mr. Smollet.

I turn now to a very different opponent;—a man and a statesman, who is held in the highest respect by all parties and classes wherever his name is known, not merely for his distinguished abilities, but for his life-long labours in the cause of justice and humanity, and constitutional liberty, and who has laid his country under obligations that can never be forgotten as long as public virtue and personal dignity are held in honour amongst us. I need scarcely say that I refer to Mr.

Bright; and just in proportion as I honour and respect him, in the same degree am I pained to see him, for once in his long and benevolent career, (and now, as I believe, only through an error of judgment), arrayed on the side of what I must term political and moral wrong and injustice. But it is time to notice some of the most salient points of Mr. Bright's speech.

The first point that strikes one is the assertion that Mr. Forsyth's Bill is based on an assumed irreconcilable hostility between the sexes. That this opinion may have been expressed, like many other extravagant and erroneous opinions, by certain persons in public and in private, I am not prepared to deny, but this view is expressly disavowed by all the men and women who have taken a prominent part in advocating the measure, and it is placing the question on a totally false issue. The interests of men and women are, I believe, identical, and yet no one knows better than Mr. Bright, that there has been in former days a great deal of class legislation, owing to the unequal and unjust bestowment of the suffrage amongst the male population of the country, and no one has done more than Mr. Bright to redress this wrong. The same partial and unjust state of things exists now to the prejudice of women, without supposing there is any war between the sexes. The cases in which women suffer under the present system are too well known to render it necessary to enumerate them in detail. I will only mention one, the crowning wrong; and that is, the right which the law gives to the husband, not only while living, but to his heirs after he is dead, to snap the nearest and dearest and most sacred of all human ties, by taking the child away from its mother. That this cruel and iniquitous law would be repealed in the first Session of Parliament after the franchise was conferred upon women, I cannot doubt for a moment. As a set off against the injustice of the law which affects the property of married women, Mr. Bright cites the injustice

of the laws which affect the property of men, and asks if younger sons have no reason to complain under the operation of the law of primogeniture, which, if a man dies without a will, gives the whole of his real estate to his eldest son, leaving, it may be, the rest of his family, sons and daughters, in a state of destitution. Mr. Bright would, I have no doubt, say there was great reason to complain in this case; but whether he does or not—two or more blacks can never make a white—one wrong can never be pleaded to justify another wrong. Nor can one case of injustice be cited to justify or balance another case of injustice. And there is this great difference between the two cases, that these younger sons have the means, that are denied to women, of making their grievances known to those who have the power to remedy them.

But the favourite weapon employed by our opponents, and Mr. Bright does not disdain to use it, is, that there are ulterior objects contemplated by the supporters of the Bill, that are not avowed in the Bill itself. Mr. Bright must have been familiar enough with this sort of language, when pleading for many of those measures of reform and progress of which he has been the distinguished advocate. But if these prognostics of ulterior objects and dangerous results had been allowed to prevail, we might have waited till doomsday before we should have seen Law Reform, or Army Reform, or Municipal Reform, or Parliamentary Reform, or Household Suffrage, or the repeal of the Test Act, or the abolition of the Corn Laws, or Church Rates; and yet, in spite of this bugbear of the danger of concession, and all the predictions of evil that were to follow in its train, we have seen these measures, and many others, carried, not only without any hurtful consequences, but with the greatest benefit to the country, giving peace and contentment to all classes, in the place of a chronic state of sullen discontent and factious disaffection to the Government. Let us, then, in the case before us,

be just and fear not. Let us generously concede, at once, what is generous, and just, and reasonable, and in harmony with the recognised lines of the constitution, and when any thing is demanded that is unjust, or unreasonable, or unconstitutional,—then it will be time to make a stand.

I prefer to rely on the declaration of the Hon. the Recorder of London at the meeting in St. George's Hall on the 14th May, and on the ladies and gentlemen who spoke on that occasion, as to the simple and single object sought by the Bill that was submitted to Parliament this year, rather than on any loose and vague notions of ulterior objects that may be imputed to its supporters.

Mr. Bright mentions two or three particulars in which he considers women to be specially favoured, and as compensating for any disabilities under which they may labour. One is, that women servants are not taxed, while men servants are taxed, which, he says, is an advantage to women as against men. To this I answer, that if the men servants themselves paid the tax, while the women servants were exempt from the payment, the advantage on the side of the latter would be obvious enough; but when it is considered that the tax is paid by the master or mistress of the man servant, I don't see what advantage the woman possesses over the man. Again, Mr. Bright said that in cases of breach of promise of marriage, the advantage on the side of women seemed to be enormous, for that they almost always get a verdict, and very often he was satisfied when they ought not to have got it. My only reply to this must be, that I think it would be far safer and more reasonable to trust to the decision of a court of law, including judge and jury, as to the merits of such cases, than to the opinion of any private individual. Mr. Bright further urges as an advantage that women possess over men, the greater lenity shown to them in the matter of

capital punishment. Admitting this to be the case, the instances in which it might occur, are so few and far between as to weigh as nothing as between the sexes, and as less than nothing if the distinction is meant to be applied to the class of women likely to exercise the suffrage. But after all, a question of this kind, involving grave moral and political considerations, never can be settled, and ought not to be attempted to be settled, by this balancing of *pros* and *cons*, or on the comparative advantages and disadvantages of the respective parties. The question, I conceive, is one of right or wrong, of justice or injustice, and Mr. Bright put it on that ground when he said, "a man lives in this house and votes; a woman lives in that house, and why should she not have a vote? That was a very plain question, which it was not always easy for a man to answer." There Mr. Bright spoke like himself. The gist of the matter really lies, as Mr. Bright truly says, in the difficulty of answering this question, the impossibility I should say of answering it satisfactorily on any view, consistent with justice and the principles of constitutional right and equity. No doubt, as Mr. Bright stated, the country had a right to determine how it should be governed, whether by one, or by few, or by many; but it would be a new doctrine in England if such questions were to be determined in an arbitrary, despotic, or capricious manner, without regard to the principles of judicial impartiality, of sound reason, and the general welfare of the country. These are the principles on which Mr. Bright has himself always acted in pleading for those measures of reform in which he has taken so prominent a part. All we ask is that the same principles should be applied to the question before us; and if they are, I cannot for the life of me see why the suffrage should be denied to women to the extent asked in Mr. Forsyth's Bill.

It can hardly be doubted, I think, that the cause of

Education and of Temperance, bearing as they do on the peace and happiness of domestic life, and on national morality generally, would be largely promoted by the addition of the female vote to the present constituency, and it should constantly be borne in mind in considering this question, that the connection between *votes* and *laws* lies at the very root of the representative system, and those free institutions of which the country is at once so jealous and so proud.

One word more and my task is finished. The present Prime Minister is reported to have expressed himself as follows, in a speech delivered a few years ago: "I say that in a country governed by a woman—where you allow women to form part of the other estate of the realm—peeresses in their own right, for example where you allow a woman to hold land, to be a lady of the manor, and to hold legal courts—where a woman by law may be Churchwarden and Overseer of the poor—I do not see, where she has so much to do with State and Church, on what reasons, if you come to right, she has not a right to vote." After so strong, and I venture to think, so unanswerable an expression of opinion, should we not be justified in expecting from the Right Hon. gentleman something more than a silent vote in favour of the measure for which we plead? Without making it a party question, and nothing is further from the wish of its friends and supporters than this, if the Prime Minister should see it consistent with his position to give it his support openly in the House, no one, I imagine, can doubt what the result would be. While I believe it would settle the question in the House, it would, outside its walls, be the means of conferring an important boon on a highly respectable class of the community, and thus of adding another element to the harmonious and happy working of the constitution.

W. T. BLAIR,
Magistrate for Somerset.

Twickenham Park,
July, 1876.

SPEECH

OF THE LATE

JOHN STUART MILL

AT THE

GREAT MEETING

IN FAVOUR OF

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE,

HELD IN THE

MUSIC HALL, EDINBURGH, JANUARY 12, 1871.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

EDINBURGH: PRINTED BY JOHN LINDSAY,

FOR THE

EDINBURGH NATIONAL SOCIETY
FOR WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE.

MDCCLXXXIII.

S P E E C H

OF THE LATE

JOHN STUART MILL.

MR JOHN STUART MILL (who was received with great enthusiasm, the audience rising and waving their hats and handkerchiefs,) said—If there is a truth in politics which is fundamental—which is the basis of all free government—it is that when a part of the nation are the sole possessors of power, the interest of that part gets all the serious attention. This does not necessarily imply any active oppression. All that it implies is the natural tendency of the average man to feel what touches self of vastly greater importance than what directly touches only other people. This is the deep-seated and ineradicable reason why women will never be justly treated until they obtain the franchise. They suffer, assuredly, much injustice by the operation of law. But suppose this changed; even then—even if there were no ground of complaint against the laws, there would be a break-down in their execution as long as men alone have a voice in choosing and in removing the officers of Government.

All our recent constitutional reforms, and the whole creed of reformers, are grounded on the fact that the suffrage is needed for self-protection. All experience proves that if one part of the community is held in subjection by another part, it is not trusted with the ordinary means of self-defence, but is left dependent on the goodwill and pleasure of those who are more privileged, the most vital interests of the subject-portion are certain to be, if not recklessly trampled upon, at least postponed to almost anything else.

The treatment of women is certainly no exception to the rule. They have neither equal laws nor an equal administration of them. The laws treat them as they could not long be treated if they had the suffrage; and even if the laws were equal, the administration of the laws is not. Police magistrates and criminal judges cannot be exceptionally bad men; they are not chosen for their bad qualities; they must be thought, by those who appoint them, to represent fairly, or better than fairly, the moral feelings of average men. Yet, what do we see? For an atrocious assault by a man upon a woman, especially if she has the misfortune to be his wife, he is either let off

with an admonition, or he is solemnly told that he has committed a grave offence, for which he must be severely punished, and then he gets as many weeks or months of imprisonment as a man who has taken five pounds' worth of property gets years.

We are told that the good feelings of men are a sufficient protection to women. Those who say so can never, one would suppose, look into the police and law reports. If good feeling does not protect women against being beaten and kicked to death's door every day of their lives, and at last beaten and kicked to actual death, by their special guardians and protectors, can we expect that it will secure them against injuries less revolting to humanity? Most men, it will be said, are incapable of committing such horrible brutality. Perhaps so; but it seems they are quite capable of letting it be committed. If women who are maltreated by their husbands found a defender in every other man who knew of it, they might have some chance of protection without the weapon of the suffrage. But it is never so; slaves did not find it so; serfs did not find it so; conquered nations do not find it so; and neither do women. There are many men who would not consciously do them any wrong; but there must be a great moral improvement in human nature before most men will exert themselves to prevent or to redress wrongs committed by others under the sanction of law. And of these two things—the suffrage for women, and a grand moral improvement in human nature—the suffrage, to my thinking, is likely to be the soonest obtained. (Cheers.) I could afford to stop here. I have made out an ample case. There is a portion of the population, amounting in number to somewhat more than half, to whom the law and its administration do not fulfil their duty, do not afford even the bodily protection due to all—this half happening to be that which is not admitted to the suffrage. Their most important interests are neglected—I do not say from deliberate intention, but simply because their interest is not so near to the feelings of the ruling half as the ruling half's own interest. The remedy is plain: put women in the position which will make their interest the rulers' own interest. Make it as important to politicians to redress the grievances of women as it is to redress those of any class which is largely represented in Parliament.

If nothing more than this could be said in support of their claim to the suffrage, no claim could be more fully made out. (Cheers.) And if the claim is just, so also is it strictly constitutional. One of the recognised doctrines of the British Constitution is that representation is co-extensive with direct taxation. The practice of the Constitution, it is true, for a long time did not correspond with the theory; but it has been made to conform to it at last, in cities and

boroughs, provided the tax-payer is of the male sex; but if a woman, she may be the largest tax-payer in the place, and the person of greatest practical ability besides; no matter, she has no vote. This is something very like punishing her for being a woman. The conditions which in the eye of the law and of the Constitution confer a title to a voice in public affairs are all fulfilled by her, with the single exception of having been born a male. This one deficiency, which I humbly submit she cannot help—(laughter)—is visited on her by the privation of a right as important to her as to any man, and even more important, since those who are physically weakest require protection the most. This is not an injury only, but an indignity. I grant that those who uphold it are in general quite unconscious of its being so; but this comes from the inveterate habit of having one rule and measure for all that concerns women, and another for everything else.

Men are so much accustomed to think of women only as women, that they forget to think of them as human. (Hear, hear.) It is not only for their own sake that women ought to have the suffrage, but also for the sake of the public. It is for the interest of us all, both men and women, and of those who are to come after us. The reasons that may be given for this are many, but I may content myself with two. One, and the strongest, is what we sometimes hear unthinkingly urged as an argument on the other side—because women have so much power already. (Laughter.) It is true they have much power. They have the power which depends on personal influence over men. They have the power of cajolery—(laughter)—and often that of a petted favourite; power sadly inadequate to their own just and necessary protection against wrong, but sufficient at times to produce only too much effect upon the public conduct of the men with whom they are connected. But as this power, instead of being open and avowed, is indirect and unrecognised, no provision is made for its being rightly used. As it is conventionally assumed that women possess no power outside the domestic department, the power which they do and always will possess is exercised without the necessary knowledge, and without the proper responsibility.

It having been decreed that public matters are not a woman's business, her mind is carefully turned away from whatsoever would give her a knowledge of them, and she is taught to care nothing about them—that is, until some private interest or private likings or dislikings come in, when of course these private feelings have it all their own way, there being no public principles or convictions to control them. The power, therefore, which women now have

in public affairs is power without knowledge. It is also power without responsibility. A man's wife is very often the real prompter either of what he does well and nobly, or of what he does foolishly or selfishly; but as she gets no credit for the one, so she is not held accountable for the other; if she is selfish, a very little art suffices to exempt her from censure though she succeeds in compassing her ends; if she is simple and well meaning, she does not feel bound to inform herself, so as to have a reasonable opinion on what is solely the man's business, though all the while her ignorant prepossessions or her natural partialities may be acting as a most pernicious bias on what is supposed to be his better judgment. From this combination of absence of instruction and absence of responsibility, it comes to pass that, though women are acknowledged to have, as a rule, stronger conscientious feelings than men, it is but a very small minority of women who have anything that deserves the name of a public conscience. How great an evil this is, there needs no argument to show. What is the greatest obstacle which the friends of political and social improvement have to struggle with—the drag which is constantly obstructing their efforts and disappointing their hopes? Is it not the weakness of the average citizen's political conscience? Is not this the special danger and failure to which popular institutions are exposed—that the elector does not sufficiently feel his obligations to the public, and either stays away from the poll, or goes there and votes on the prompting of some private interest? And how can we hope that he will learn to postpone private interests to public, while he has beside him, in the person of his closest intimate, one who has been trained to have no feeling whatever of his duties to the public, but who has the keenest feeling of his duties to his family, and who, even without intending it, cannot but sway his mind strongly in the direction of the only interests which she understands and appreciates? (Applause.) It must be remembered, too, that this is a growing evil. Time was when the wife was very little a companion of her husband—their lives were apart; the associates of his leisure and of his recreations were other men. But now the home and its inhabitants are so much to a man, that no other influence can, as a rule, compete with theirs. The time, therefore, is come when, if we would have public virtue in our men, we must have it in our women. (Hear, hear, and applause.) And how can a woman have a conscience about the public good, if she is told, and believes, that it is no business whatever of hers? Give women the same rights as men, and the same obligations will follow. Instead of hanging a dead weight on men's public conscience, their greater

general susceptibility of moral feeling will make their habitual influence a most valuable support to the honest performance of public duty. (Loud applause.) This, then, is one of the reasons why it is for the good of all that women should have an admitted right to take part in public affairs. Another is the vast amount of brain power and practical business talent which now runs to waste for want of an outlet into those great fields of public usefulness, in which no one, I suppose, will pretend that such qualities are not very much wanted. Few men, I suspect, are sufficiently aware of the great amount of administrative ability possessed by women; for want of considering that the essential qualities which lead to practical success are the same in what are called small things as in great.

It is my belief that, in all those parts of the business of life which depend on the vigilant superintendence and accurate estimation of details, women, when they have the necessary special knowledge, are better administrators than men. And I am now speaking, not of women as they might be—not as some improved mode of education would make them—but of women as they now are, and of the capacities which they have already displayed. If an example is wanted of what women's powers of organisation can accomplish in public life, I appeal to one of the most striking facts of modern times, the Sanitary Commission in the late American War. The history of that Commission ought to be as well known all over the world as it is in America. From the beginning, and throughout, it was women's work. It was planned, organised, and worked by women. The Government was jealous of them at first, but the hopeless inferiority of its own arrangements made it soon glad to make over the first place to them. Not only had such work never been so well done, but nobody had ever supposed it possible that it could be so well done. I am aware that this argument would carry us much further than the suffrage; but I suppose it will be acknowledged that those who are themselves eminently capable of practical business, must be fit to take a share in the choosing of those to whom practical business is to be entrusted. The ability which is specially required for the exercise of the suffrage—that of selecting the persons most capable for the work that is to be done—is one of the qualifications for business in which women have always excelled. Great queens have in nothing shown themselves greater than in their choice of Ministers. When the ladies of the Sanitary Commission wanted men to help them, they knew the right men and how to use them; and they distinguished themselves not less by the work which they caused to be done, than

by that which they did in their own persons. (Applause.) These are some of the reasons which make it equally just and expedient that the suffrage should be extended to women. It must, at the same time, be borne in mind that, by admitting them to the suffrage, no other question is in the smallest degree prejudged.

Supposing it true, what some people are so fond of affirming, that women have nothing to complain of, and that the vast majority of them do not desire any change; if so, giving them the suffrage can do nobody harm, and would afford them an opportunity of showing their perfect contentment with their present lot, in a manner beyond the reach of dispute. (Applause.)

If what we are told is true, that women ought to be, and always must and will be, in a state of domestic and social subordination to men, why, then, they require the suffrage so much the more, in order that the sovereignty of men over them may be exercised under the fitting responsibility. None need political protection so much as those who are in domestic dependence, since none are so much exposed to wrong. On every possible supposition, therefore, they have a claim to the suffrage. And we live at a period of human development, when the just claims of large numbers cannot be permanently resisted.

The whole movement of modern society, from the middle ages until now, greatly accelerated in the present century, points in the direction of the political enfranchisement of women. Their exclusion is a last remnant of the old bad state of society—the regimen of privileges and disabilities. All other monopolies are going or gone. The whole spirit of the times is against predetermining by law that one set of people shall be allowed by right of birth to have or to do what another set shall not, by any amount of exertion or superiority of ability, be allowed to attain. (Applause.)

If nature has established an ineradicable and insuperable difference in the capacities and qualifications of the two sexes, nature can take care of itself. What nature has decided may safely be left to nature. But when we find people making themselves uneasy for fear that nature's purposes should be frustrated unless law comes to her assistance, we may be pretty certain that it is not nature they are so careful about, but law pretending to be nature. To all such pretences the growing improvement of mankind is making them more and more adverse.

I do not know how long a time it may require to get rid of women's disabilities. Great changes in the habits and opinions of mankind are always slow. But of one thing I am certain—that when once they have been got rid of—when their true aspect is no longer disguised by the varnish of custom and habit—they will appear in the retrospect so devoid of any rational foundation, and so contradictory to the principles by which society now professes to guide itself, that the difficulty which will be felt will be to conceive how they can ever have been defended, and by what possible arguments they can ever have been made to appear plausible. (Loud and prolonged cheering.)

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS:

BEING

ARTICLES AND EXTRACTS

FROM THE

LONDON AND PROVINCIAL PRESS,

RELATING TO THE DISCUSSION ON

MR. MASON'S RESOLUTION

IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, JULY, 1883.

PRICE THREEPENCE.

PUBLISHED FOR

THE NATIONAL SOCIETY FOR WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE.

Central Committee:

29, PARLIAMENT STREET, LONDON, S.W.

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WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE.

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS, 1883.

WEEKLY DISPATCH, July 1st.

Whatever decision is arrived at next Friday, it is to be hoped, in the true interests of Liberalism, that this measure of justice will not long be denied to English women. In one of the United States it has for years been granted, and it will not be very long before Canada follows the example. The chance of women lending their aid to the Conservative side is entirely outweighed by the far more important consideration that their political education will tend to lessen that apathy which has always been the great stronghold of the Tories. To the energetic Liberal who seeks by every legitimate means to awaken his neighbours to a sense of their citizenship, knowing that if they only study the questions of the day they are pretty sure to become adherents to the party of progress, women's suffrage will be a valuable aid, and the sooner it is granted the better it will be for the coming generation of voters.

GLOBE, July 5th.

* * Mr. Mason's resolution in favour of extending the Parliamentary franchise to women who possess the qualifications entitling men to vote, does not go beyond the principle that the object of granting the franchise to any given class is to ensure the representation of intelligence and of property; indeed, it only develops to a logical conclusion the constitutional axiom that those

who share in the burdens of the country should have a voice in the disposal of their contributions. From this point of view alone, it is unquestionably an "anomaly"—to use the favourite word of the hour—that an independent woman of wealth and position should, by reason of her sex, be deprived of the privilege which is enjoyed by the average labourer, who, thanks to the present arrangement of taxation, is scarcely compelled to contribute a penny to the finances of the country unless he pleases. This is not to maintain the "flesh and blood" doctrine in the slightest degree. The extension of the franchise to qualified women, so far from levelling downward, would have the distinct effect of raising the average of property and intelligence among the voting population, nor can it be assumed—to take a somewhat lower point of view—that the existing balance of parties would be perceptibly changed. It is true that a certain political section have been doing their utmost to take the question into their own hands, and this has no doubt helped to foster a degree of very natural prejudice against a reform of the franchise in this novel direction. But the movement has never been in want of Conservative sympathy—notably in the case of Lord Beaconsfield; and we need not go out of the way to remind our readers that Conservatism has never failed to give its active support to any and every reform of which the justice and social or political expediency have once been plainly proved.

In the present case, we have always held that these essentials have been plainly proved. * *

DAILY TELEGRAPH, July 6th.

* * Whatever be the fate of Mr. Mason's resolution to-night, it is pretty certain that the victory of the principle which it embodies will not be much longer delayed. It needs, indeed, but little foresight to perceive that the recognition of the political rights of women, in a qualified form at any rate, is fast becoming inevitable. The denial of the Parliamentary franchise to women who already possess the municipal suffrage was always a theoretical anomaly of a sufficiently irrational kind; and recent legislation and its results have made it so prominent as to disturb even our national indifference to symmetry and logic. Dialectical ingenuity was at one time wont to employ itself in inventing distinctions

between local administration and Imperial politics, with the view of proving that those who are consulted on the former matter possess no necessary fitness to have a voice in the latter. Such distinctions, however, have always been wanting in substance, and have never survived examination. The female ratepayer is a taxpayer also, and her interests in the second capacity are, of course, much greater than her interests in the first. It is of far more concern to her whether there shall be peace or war, light taxation or heavy, wise or foolish legislation, a capable or incapable Executive, than it is whether the streets of her town be well or ill kept, or its poor-law system providently or improvidently administered. To deny her all right of assisting to choose those in whose hands these greater interests are to be placed, while she takes a share in selecting those who are charged with the care of minor civic concerns, is an utterly indefensible paradox. So long, however, as the female ratepayer, excluded from the Parliamentary franchise, only illustrated this paradox by her municipal vote, it was far less conspicuous than it has at present become. It would, indeed, have been just possible to argue that the proper remedy was not enfranchisement but disfranchisement, and that we ought to correct the anomaly rather by depriving women of the municipal than by granting them the Parliamentary suffrage. The passing of the Education Act of 1870, however, and the election of women to the membership of School Boards, dealt a fatal blow to any reasoning of this sort. It was a recognition of the complete civic equality of the sexes in respect to a highly important—perhaps, indeed, the most important—function of municipal life; and even perversity itself could hardly long resist the obvious inferences which flowed from it into the sphere of political duties and political rights.

That the force of these inferences will be practically acknowledged in the coming Reform Bill is no very hazardous prediction. All the omens seem favourable for it; all the signs of the times appear to point to it.

In the extensive form in which some of its supporters demand it, "women's suffrage," doubtless, is not likely to be soon or perhaps ever conceded; but in some modified shape the concession is inevitable. The franchise will be conferred on women who hold property, and thus the conditions which enable them now to vote

for local administrators, or even to act as such themselves, will be deemed, as they should be, sufficient to entitle women to a share in the choice of a Parliamentary representative. Effect would then be given to Mrs. Fawcett's ingenious and persuasive appeal to the Conservatives to enfranchise women of independent means in the name of the "interests of property," and with the view of securing to it the fullest possible representation. Whether the bare householder qualification of the male elector will, as was impliedly demanded by the resolution passed last night, be treated wherever it exists in the case of a woman as similarly qualifying her for registration, is another question. But even if the forthcoming legislation should go as far as this, the initial change in our electoral system would not be very great, nor the addition to the register very large. There are but a limited number of women who would be entitled as householders and personal ratepayers to be admitted to the register, and their enfranchisement would, on that ground, perhaps, be regarded with comparative equanimity even by those who disapprove of it on principle. * *

DAILY NEWS, July 7th.

Mr. Mason's motion in favour of giving the suffrage to women otherwise qualified was rejected in the House of Commons last night by the narrow majority of sixteen. There is nothing in this result seriously to discourage the supporters of a reasonable reform. The debate was interesting and important, though it necessarily travelled over familiar ground. Mr. Mason, in his moderate and sensible speech, was careful not to go beyond the terms of his own resolution. He asked the House of Commons to affirm that all women who can now vote in municipal elections ought to have the Parliamentary franchise conferred upon them. This would exclude all married women, for it has been judicially held that they cannot exercise the local suffrage, even if they are otherwise qualified. It is a little matter no doubt, but we cannot see why a wife who is also a ratepayer should not be entitled to a voice both in municipal and Parliamentary contests. However, the number of such cases is so small that the point is not of much practical moment. The question really is whether women who in the existing constitution of society have their own way to make

in the world, and who contribute to the maintenance of public funds, are to be debarred from all share in the election of a body supposed to represent the entire community. To say that they are intellectually unequal to the task is a mere impertinence, of which only very stupid men are guilty. It is idle nonsense to say that an educated woman is not capable of forming a rational opinion on the political topics of the day. The "St. James's Gazette" courteously and sagaciously contended yesterday against the introduction of what it called the "hysterical element" into politics. Considering the frequent, not to say the daily, contributions which our contemporary itself makes to that factor, its objection might be called highly disinterested if it did not slightly savour of jealousy. The notion that all women would vote alike on all questions, which is one of several absurdities postulated by this theory, is, of course, wholly absurd. There are just as many diversities of political opinion, and shades of political partisanship, in the one sex as in the other. Equally unreasonable is it to urge that women should not be allowed to vote because they will be influenced by the clergy. The assertion is unfounded, and if it were true it would be irrelevant. It might as well be argued that Roman Catholics ought to be disfranchised, to say nothing of the clergy themselves, who, if their instruction is so pernicious that it must be artificially counteracted, ought surely to be excluded from the polling-booths.

Mr. Mason made a good point last night when he referred to the Election Commission at Macclesfield. The expenses of that inquiry were very heavy, and they were most properly levied upon the ratepayers of a constituency in which gross corruption had been shown to prevail. But among those called upon to pay this fine were more than fifteen hundred women who could not by law take any recognised part in the election, and who could not therefore have sold their votes. This case indicates a very serious injustice, and one which Parliament ought to lose no time in removing. It may fairly be said that there is no department of public or social activity where women have been given the chance of succeeding and yet have failed. Of late years the limits of their work have been very greatly extended. The battle of life does not become easier for them, and they, or many of them, are called upon to perform duties from which one would gladly see them

relieved. But it is aggravating and not mitigating the evil to shut out some of the most labourious members of the community from all part in public affairs. The opponents of Mr. Mason's resolution made but a poor show in the discussion last night. Mr. Edward Leatham's "immemorial basis" was made to do such arduous and continuous duty that it palpably gave way under the strain. The supporters of female suffrage are called "sentimental politicians" by the soft-headed and rough-mannered persons who believe that all sentiment is a sign of weakness. But in this debate the dry fact and hard argument were on the "sentimental side." The facts are all in favour of the capacity of women for business and for practical life. The maxim that representation should follow taxation, or, in more homely language, that those who pay the piper should call the tune, is not exactly the random suggestion of feeling divorced from reason. On the other hand, "sentiment" does not become rational because it is narrow, grudging, and ill-informed.

DAILY CHRONICLE, July 7th.

* * The key-note of Mr. Mason's speech was the inquiry whether it is just to give women a vote. He left mere expediency out of account, and did not think it necessary to consider how the vote would be used if it were given. It was not difficult to show that by refusing to give women the Parliamentary franchise we are not only guilty of inconsistency but of violating an essential principle of the Constitution. The inconsistency lies, of course, in allowing women to take part in municipal elections, and to refuse them the privilege of voting for Members of Parliament, while it is an acknowledged constitutional principle that taxation and representation should go together. Mr. Mason quoted the case of Macclesfield, where there are five thousand five hundred electors and fifteen hundred women ratepayers; and it is certainly difficult to justify the practice of making them pay rates and taxes, and refusing to give them a voice in the administration of affairs for which they help to pay. Mr. Henry Fowler put this point forcibly when he said that, as women are taxed, they ought to be represented. We do not think there is equal force in Mr. Leatham's contention, that the suffrage should not be given to women because it would disturb the "immemorial basis" of the representation, for

this kind of argument would have been fatal to such a measure as the Married Women's Property Act, as well as various others. The Attorney-General advanced more forcible reasons against the concession asked for, and he was able to show that there is, on this as on most other subjects, much to be said on both sides. But as the municipal franchise has been given to women, and as no evil results have followed, it is not unreasonable to conclude that the concession of the Parliamentary franchise, though refused at present, must ultimately be granted.

PALL MALL GAZETTE, July 7th.

When Mr. Mill introduced his amendment in favour of substituting "person" for "man" in Mr. Disraeli's Reform Bill of 1867, he carried seventy-three members into the lobby with him. The first vote on the same question in the present Parliament has raised this number from seventy-three to one hundred and sixteen. The discussion last night must on the whole be pronounced inferior in breadth and force to that which took place sixteen years ago. Arguments against the extension of the franchise are always very like one another. The reasons why householders who pay rates should not have the parliamentary vote if they chance to be women were much the same as the reasons that were formerly given why male householders should not have votes if their annual rent chanced to be under ten pounds. The same reasons will be heard again next year when it is proposed to extend household franchise to the counties. Women are ignorant of affairs, said the Attorney-General; of the army and the navy, of foreign policy, of law, and of the great currents of trade and business. As if exactly the same will not be said, and more truly said, of the rural labourer. What does Hodge know of foreign policy, of law, of the great stream of public affairs? Yet Sir Henry James will vote for giving the franchise to him with unquestioning alacrity. Women will be under the influence of priests and parsons. As if Sir Henry James himself had not just insisted on a clause in his own Corrupt Practices Bill for protecting male voters against the undue spiritual influence of priests and parsons. Yet nobody is ever so foolish as to use the susceptibility, say, of Catholic voters to spiritual persuasions as a reason why Catholics should not have

votes. As if, too, one main cause of this influence did not lie in the exclusion of women from the bracing influence of political discussion and political responsibility! If the influence of the clergy be so great, how have they acquired it? First, because the exclusion of women from the responsible cultivation of political notions has tended to throw some of the best of them into the other great field of serious interest. Second, because the clergy take trouble to arouse and attract the enthusiasm of women towards their own subject; and that is altogether to their honour. If women had votes, laymen who care about politics would have a motive for taking the same pains to instruct and persuade them in great matters of public concern as priests and parsons take in things of purely spiritual concern. As a matter of fact, there is no reason to believe that women, taking them all round, are more especially under the thumbs of their spiritual advisers than men are. The majority of those whom Mr. Mason would enfranchise are women of the humbler rank, who are just as independent, and just as likely to resent the intrusion of the clergyman outside his own sphere, as mechanics and artizans notoriously are. But, as Mr. Courtney put it, why need we go further than experience? What is the use of wasting time in abstract reasoning about the comparative value of men's faculties and women's faculties, when we have an opportunity every day of seeing by practical observation how little this difference, whatever it may amount to, affects the fitness of women to vote for School Boards and for Boards of Guardians, and not only to vote but to be members of such Boards? If there was one thing, Mr. Courtney said, that might have been deemed more hazardous than another, it was allowing them to be members of Boards of Guardians, because the Poor Law has qualities about it which the supposed peculiarities of women would have made them singularly reluctant to recognize and to act upon. But they had properly appreciated the character of the Poor Law, and had assisted so admirably in carrying out its provisions, that the Local Government Board had itself nominated them where they had not been elected, and successive Presidents had promoted their election. What greater inconsistency can there be than to allow women to administer a law much of whose effect depends on the mode of administration, and to prevent them from having any voice in making the law? But

they have a voice, it will be said; if a woman has anything to urge she can lay her views before a Member of Parliament just as if she were a man. It is too late at this time of day to bring back the exploded theories of virtual or indirect representation. Wherever an extension of the franchise to a new class has been proposed, the opponents of the change have urged that the class in question could influence the Legislature just as efficiently without actually having votes as if they had them. No doubt next year we shall be told by Mr. Beresford-Hope and Mr. Raikes, though not by Sir Henry James, that the views and interests of the agricultural labourer are quite adequately represented by the present County Members. The argument will not be listened to by half of those including Mr. Gladstone, who went into the lobby against the admission of female householders and ratepayers last night. Mr. Gladstone will proclaim with Olympian thunder that no class can be safely trusted to represent the views and the interests, the opinions and the wants, of any other class. With what face, then, can it be contended that in a representative and parliamentary system like ours, one half of the community can be fairly excluded from power, on the strength of the care which the other half will take of their interests?

The usual eloquent pictures were drawn of the purity of the home, the beauty of the female character, the sacred duties of the wife and the mother. Words, words, words. Just as if you could metamorphose human nature by a vote; as if the family and maternal instinct were so light and superficial an affair that it would vanish from the female breast before the overwhelming delights of the canvassing-book and the polling-booth. Men are not always thinking of politics, simply because they have political power. Most men think of politics very little, and a great many men do not think about them at all. It would be the same with women. Why should they sink all their other duties for the sake of active politics, any more than men do? Of course nothing of the kind would happen. The vote, and the political curiosity which its possession would arouse, would only be an interest the more in lives that would be all the better worth living for the addition of responsible interests. Not only would the lives of women themselves be better worth living, but in at least an equal degree so too would the lives of the men who are their companions,

and to whom they are in a thousand respects the most potent of all surrounding forces. The truth is that half of this idealization of "woman's life" is flat hypocrisy. The chief opponents of the proposed reform conceal under their fine words a very hearty contempt for women. It is they who think no term so contemptuous as "womanish" who talk of the proposal of last night as the device of "womanish men," though that is hardly the name that we should think fit for a good many hundreds of its supporters, from Jeremy Bentham down to Lord Beaconsfield and Mr. Henley.

ECHO, July 7th.

The Woman's Suffrage Question had a fair discussion in the Commons last night. Its warmest advocates and most strenuous opponents represent Liberal constituencies. Two speeches—one for and the other against—came from the Treasury bench. Mr. Courtney, with unusual warmth, vindicated the political rights of women, and the Attorney-General, with still more warmth, opposed them. It would have been comical to see Mr. Fawcett answer the Attorney-General, and it would have become confusion worse confounded to have heard Mr. Gladstone answer Mr. Fawcett. Such a state of things might have occurred last night, but it was obviated by the lateness of the hour into which the debate drifted. There was scarcely an argument used last night against Mr. Mason's motion for granting the privilege of voting to widows and spinsters who are householders and who pay rates, which has not in modified forms been used against the extension of the suffrage to men who are householders. In fact the debate last night resembled, in one primary feature, the debate which took place in the House of Lords a week before on the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill. The opponents of the latter Bill, and particularly the Bishops, foretold dreadful consequences if the Bill passed. They said it would break up the foundations on which the marriage law has existed for fifteen centuries in the principal parts of Christendom, and introduce a disturbing and destructive influence into family life. As the Bishops of Winchester, Lincoln, and Exeter regarded the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill, so Mr. Leatham, Mr. Inderwick, and the Attorney-General regard the Woman's Suffrage Question. Mr. Leatham

would prevent women "sharing in the mire and filth of political elections," as if such elections consisted only of mire and filth. The Attorney-General regarded woman's suffrage with terror, as it would be politically detrimental and socially disastrous. We have heard similar forebodings, but from other lips, before. Other changes and reforms which were heralded by gloomy prediction were not succeeded by the deluge, and it is probable, to say the least of it, that if thirty or forty thousand women who are rate-payers, and who now vote at municipal elections, and who also exercise the right of voting for Poor-Law Guardians and School Boards, and who are eligible to serve as Guardians and as members of such Boards, should also have Parliamentary votes, that the decadence of England would not be the inevitable result. We are inclined to look at the matter in a different light. We are rather inclined to think the introduction of woman suffrage into political elections would tend to elevate and purify those elections, and at the same time broaden and deepen our constitutional system. During the last twelve or fifteen years the question has been well argued in and out of the House of Commons. It is questionable whether a repetition of the arguments for or against the innovation will, for some time to come, modify convictions or alter votes. Much now will depend on the attitude and action of women. If they want the suffrage, no power in this country can keep them from it. We do not mean a comparatively few women, but a fairly large proportion of the intelligent women of the country. If they are sufficiently numerous and sufficiently in earnest, they have only to unite and stretch forth their hands and they will obtain what sentiment may dictate and reason may claim. But we question whether they can command the most attention by using the coercive portion of the general machinery of political agitation. More ground can, in the long run, be gained by quiet and patient action than by more stormy demands. The still small voice, the private letter—which is in itself a mighty engine—and the home meetings of twenties or fifties, will, if sufficiently multiplied and persistently employed, become irresistible. Such were the methods which were to a large extent adopted to modify opinion and to create a majority in favour of the repeal of the Compulsory Clauses of the Contagious Diseases Act. If the means we indicate are not

successful it is because there is insufficient moral force in this country to put the woman who is at the head of a household, and who pays rates, in possession of the political franchise.

EVENING NEWS, London, July 17th, 1883.

* * It is only logical that those who contribute to the income and property tax should have the chief control over the expenditure of Parliament. A widow or a spinster, very often a person of narrow income, contributes just as much to the public burthens as a man. She feels the results of good or bad legislation just as much as a man. Public affairs are of as much interest to women, and they take as much interest in them as the sterner sex. If, then, the principle that representation and taxation should be co-extensive is a true one, upon that principle, women who contribute to the direct taxation of the country, either in the shape of rates or income tax, are entitled to a voice in the election of representatives to Parliament.

Again, there are many questions which come before the Houses of Parliament which affect women far more than they do men, and in regard to which women are capable of forming a sounder judgment than men do. We might instance two Bills that have been before the House of Lords this year—the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill and the Bill for the Protection of Young Girls. It seems strangely unjust that women should have no direct voice in the election of the representatives who are ultimately to decide such questions as these.

If, then, upon other grounds it be just and politic that the Parliamentary suffrage should be extended to women ratepayers and taxpayers, have we any reason for supposing that there is any inherent infirmity in their sex by reason of which they cannot rightly exercise those powers? On the contrary, we believe that women as a class would prove to be, if anything, a more conscientious body of electors than men. We think, too, that most men will agree that women as a class are far more religious than men (using the word in its best sense), and have a far higher standard of morality. There are few men of mature years who would not in honesty have to confess that the average moral code which they

recognised in their youth appears low and contemptible to them in their late years. With women, especially in the upper and middle classes, matters are very different. They are carefully reared at home, out of the reach of the "seamy side of life," upon a code of truth and morality very far superior to any which is recognised by the schoolboy or undergraduate. It is to this height of moral aim and purity of conscience that women owe the great influence they possess over even the best and most thoughtful of men, who carry for decision before their purer judgment, doubts and difficulties which their own consciences, deadened more or less by contact with the world, are unable to discriminate. If, then, this purity of aim and strength of conviction is the chief characteristic of women as a sex—and we think that few thoughtful men will doubt it—why should we deprive ourselves as a community of the value of their judgment, which as individuals we prize so highly? Surely in the present day the besetting sin of politics is desertion of principle. Principles—religious, moral, social and political—which Conservatives and Christians have heretofore regarded as axiomatic are now declared, on high Liberal authority, to be "as dead as the worship of Osiris," or "only fit to be relegated to the planet Saturn." Whatever may be the temporary aberrations of the feminine mind, though they may now and then wander astray after crotchets, to those great principles they are warmly attached. We are confident that their moral superiority will infuse fresh life into politics, and enable us to hold fast some of those cherished truths which now seem to be slipping out of our grasp.

We think, then, that women ratepayers and taxpayers are entitled to claim the Parliamentary suffrage as a right, on the ground that those who directly contribute to the burdens of the commonwealth are entitled to a voice in its administration. We think that the country on its part is entitled to claim the benefit of their judgment in the election of representatives to Parliament in an age when their characteristic good qualities render that judgment of infinite value. We will hereafter treat of the necessary limits to the feminine element in politics, and endeavour to show that the objections usually urged to female voters are in reality applicable to female representatives.

MODERN SOCIETY, July 14th.

It may probably be a mistake to allow women to vote, but, then, why are they to be called upon to pay? It is a matter of taste upon the part of the ladies whether they will exercise the right to vote, and perhaps a great number of good women will always refuse to do so, but the question is one of constitutional justice. It is possible to push the question of disqualification of sex too far, for it would lead us to say we erred in accepting Elizabeth, Anne and Victoria as Monarchs. Did ever King do better, or was his reign more illustrious?

WESTERN MORNING NEWS, Plymouth, July 5th.

The leaders in the movement ought to be encouraged by the alarm which it begins to cause. Whenever a project is said to be changing the basis of the constitution, destroying the family life, and launching us forth upon a sea of disaster, we may be sure that it is going to pass. This exaggerated language is always the rhetoric of a despairing argument. It is the natural moan of a lost cause. It but precludes the acquiescence in change which follows the change. Such a point have we now reached: the opponents begin to declaim with more vigour than common-sense. Women seek the franchise just as men seek it, not to destroy the family, but to gain justice for themselves and to ameliorate the general conditions of life. The mere entrance into the political arena has changed the point of view of our politicians. Women have obtained higher education, the right to their own property, the right to sue in the courts, places on our School Boards, openings for a career in the civil service, and positions as doctors and lawyers. Gradually their sphere has widened; and no independent-minded young girl now needs to choose between the life of a governess and that of being a burden to her family. Complete justice is not yet done, and will not be done, until women have the vote; but the change in twenty years is so great that the prophet who in 1863 predicted it would have been laughed to scorn. It is to complete this great work that women now demand the franchise. They will do more. Instead of interfering with the work that is being done, with the lightness of irresponsibility, they will

have to devise themselves means for the abatement of intolerable evils. Instead of crying out about rights they will have to get rid of wrongs; and they will keep the Legislature to the point. The enfranchisement of women means an abatement of the great evils which now afflict our social constitution.

SUSSEX DAILY NEWS, July 5th.

* * Time is on the side of the political equality of women, and the only arguments which can be used against them are such as time is gradually removing.

At one time it was regarded as a solecism in manners to talk politics before ladies; they were supposed to be too deeply immersed in the petty affairs of the household to give a thought or have a care for the deep problems of humanity agitating the great world. Nobody talks and few think like that now. Women are almost as keenly political as men; they take part in every political movement and help to form public opinion, and to restrain political action. From them have proceeded many of the movements of the time. There is hardly a great cause now agitating the world which does not find women engaged in it, whether it be the liberty to marry deceased wives' sisters, or the right of our Hindu fellow-citizens to equality with ourselves. The drawing rooms of London are as political as, in times of great interest, have been the *salons* of Paris. The great prejudices which prevented women from being interested in politics have been broken down; the woman is called a baby who does not know something about them, and she generally knows as much as the man; and with her interest in politics, should come her admittance to direct political interest.

Her exclusion is doing untold harm. A prejudice against "masculine legislation" has grown up among women, which is not only hurtful to our social progress, but is in some directions an absolute bar to it. Women are obtaining a veto upon legislation, while they are powerless to propose substitutes for it. We can always be certain that, if they unite in opposition to any bill, however salutary, it is doomed. They have proved it this very year. But when, having prevented men from taking their own way by the influence they exert, they are asked to propose a substitute for the check, which they have destroyed, upon an intolerable evil,

they admit their powerlessness. They ask us to give them the vote. Already they look after the poor as Guardians; already they tend the children as members of School Boards; they are eligible as High Sheriffs and as Churchwardens. Their enfranchisement needs only one more step. It is illogical and absurd to deny it to them. It is said they have not the physical capacity to vote, but to drop a paper into the ballot box needs no very great exertion. It is said they have not the intellectual capacity to judge of members; but put the women who pay rates alongside of the agricultural labourers, who are about to be admitted to the franchise, and it will be admitted that, for keenness of intelligence, they are not inferior to the men. They will be revolutionists, say some; priest-ridden, say others; blind and bigoted Tories, the strident Radicals declare. To hear people talk it would be supposed that our mothers, wives, and daughters were as unknown as the savages who inhabit the unexplored interior of New Guinea. Some of them will no doubt be revolutionists. There is a Louise Michel as well as a Rochefort. Some of them will be priest-ridden; there are such women, and there are priests. Some of them will be Conservatives; and it is just possible that in the sex one might be found to emulate the intelligence, the agreeable methods, and the beautiful innocence of Mr. Warton. This is just possible, but not at all probable. But if we are to disfranchise women because of Louise Michel, we should disfranchise men because of Rochefort. If we disfranchise women because they go to church too often, we should disfranchise the clergy who go to church to help the women. If we disfranchise a sex that probably does not contain a Warton, we ought to make Mr. Warton unable to sit in Parliament.

BRADFORD DAILY TELEGRAPH, July 7th.

Mr. Hugh Mason's resolution affirming the desirableness of extending the Parliamentary franchise to women was defeated last evening, by a majority of sixteen, in a small house, the numbers being 114 for and 130 against. Comparatively little interest was manifested in the trial of conclusions, and Mr. E. A. Leatham with doubtful taste twitted the supporters of the movement upon the fact. Said the latter gentleman: "From having possessed in former years

the robust proportions of a Bill, it had shrunk to the lowest form which a motion could take to be a motion at all—a Friday's motion on going into Committee of Supply." Well, the reason of this retrograde movement is clear enough to most men's minds, if not to that of Mr. Leatham. We are within measurable distance of a new Reform Bill, and it may be taken for granted that when the measure is presented to the House it will be found to include a provision for removing the present electoral disabilities of women.

BRADFORD OBSERVER, July 7th.

It would be flattering both supporters and opponents of women's suffrage to say that they made the debate in the House of Commons last night exceptionally interesting. Few of the speakers went beyond the stock arguments; and we do not notice that one of them dwelt with sufficient emphasis on the fact that the suffrage movement is only part of a far wider social change, which has been going on with unprecedented rapidity during the present generation, and which is beating down point by point the same kind of emotional dislike that meets the suffrage demand. This social change cannot be checked at the present stage any more than in the past; and those who cannot understand nor bring themselves to sympathise with it have simply to reconcile themselves to it gradually as best they may. In almost every direction women are expected to do more for themselves, and they have therefore necessarily greater liberty, than was the case a generation ago. Mere inattention to and ignorance of the real significance of the suffrage movement can alone excuse those who allege that it is an artificial agitation, got up by a few theorists and "social failures," and unsupported by any real sense of grievance shared by a considerable proportion of women. The truth is that in modern times the chivalrous ideal which sought to make of all women a sort of semi-angelic aristocracy has vanished altogether with many other similar ideals. It was never very successfully carried into practice, save amongst the wealthier classes; the facts of life proved too much for those lower in the social scale. Women must work as well as smile and weep, or they will be left to starve as unkindly as if they were men. And during this generation they have had to work in rapidly-increasing numbers. We need not at present inquire into

the economic or other causes to which the phenomenon is due; nor would the inquiry be of any avail to the women themselves. Enough that the causes operate on a large scale; that not only in the artisan class have multitudes of women to earn their living—the chivalric ideal never reached them—but in the middle classes, up to a line which is continually rising, is it more and more necessary that women should acquire some business by which they can obtain food and the comforts of life by their unaided exertions.

This is the phenomenon that explains the whole movement of which the women's suffrage demand is but a detail. Until the economic or other social causes have been removed or altered, it is sheer emptiness to quote or invent poetic phrases relating to the troubadour ideal of womanhood. Indeed, it is worse than emptiness, for it falsifies the problem which must be solved, and is being solved. * * Every class must do its best to influence the Legislature in its favour. It must agitate, propagandise, appeal to electors who happen to be ignorant and indifferent, hold meetings, put every kind of available pressure on members and candidates. If ten thousand women agree that there is some peculiar obstacle in the way of earning their livelihood which only the Legislature can remove, or any other grievance peculiar to them, what are they to do? They must proceed just as any other aggrieved class proceeds. They must associate, and the cleverest and most leisured of them must become leaders, and the leaders cannot help becoming politicians if they are to do their duty to their clients. How many thousand women, does Mr. Leatham suppose, have reason to thank leaders like Miss Becker for promoting legislative and social reforms which have opened careers to them and given them the title to their own property! How else could Miss Becker and her allies have done all this except by becoming most active and influential politicians, whose opposition or support is of very serious importance to Parliamentary candidates and to candidates for other public positions? And is it not absurd to withhold from women whose word already influences votes by the thousand, the right to record and enforce directly their own unit of influence?

Thus we see that the opponents of women's suffrage are not resisting a mere theory, or a false and mischievous notion about the equality of the sexes. They are trying to resist a great human

tide-movement arising from influences utterly beyond their control. Intellectual or physical equality of the sexes has nothing to do with the question. Here are a multitude of women who have some brains and some physical strength, which they are compelled to make the most of, for the same reasons which impel men to similar effort. To those who say that they are incapable of this, that, and the other, they make the same answer as a man—"We must try." And nothing else but experiment will be a satisfactory test. How many of the trials have resulted satisfactorily everyone knows. These women are convinced that the Parliamentary franchise will in various ways facilitate their struggle for existence. People who have not passed through their experience tell them that the vote would not help them in any way. They know better; for they have found their influence upon other voters of service to them, and they regard it as nonsense to say that the addition of more votes on the same side would not help it. They equally regard it as nonsense to talk about the immemorial experience of mankind and the laws of nature; because they know at first hand their own experience, which happens, the circumstances being changed, to differ from the alleged experience of former generations; and they have as good a right to discover what are the laws of nature as their opponents. An increasing number of women have to earn and live an independent life, it is becoming more the custom to expect that they should do so, and they want every weapon that will help them in the fight—there, in a nutshell, is the case for the women's suffrage movement, and the reason why it must presently succeed.

DERBYSHIRE TIMES, July 7th.

We cordially trust that the day is not far distant when women householders will have votes. If you tax a woman and impose on her the responsibilities of a man, we cannot see why she should be deprived of the franchise. There are thousands of unmarried ladies at present who maintain themselves, do much useful work in the land, bear their share of the burdens of the State, and yet have no votes simply because of their sex. It is not urged that they are incapable of forming as good a judgment, or a better, of the qualifications of a candidate as many men voters. That would

be too absurd when we see the mental stamina of many of the present voters. Nor is it argued that women would be likely to vote for bad measures, for it is notorious that the sympathies of women would be more certainly given on the side of those things which are good than could be said of an equal number of men. By an accident women obtained the municipal franchise, but they have certainly used it so well that no one would now seek to deprive them of it. Why then should they not vote for members of Parliament? We can see no valid reason, and we hope that the extension of the franchise in this direction will speedily be effected. Laws are made for women, as well as men, and they have therefore a right to have a voice in the election of the law-makers. Married women vote by their husbands, but at present the independent woman householder has every burden thrown upon her, and has no privilege except that of paying. The anomaly cannot last, and it ought not to do so.

LIVERPOOL MERCURY, July 7th.

* * Women's rights as thinking and acting members of society have for years been impressing themselves with growing strength upon the consciousness of public men, and the hour has arrived when an earnest effort should be made to remove from the sex the one grievance regarding which they are now so sensitive and clamorous. Besides—and this is the most powerful plea of all—they possess the franchise in every election that is not to seat a member of Parliament. They vote for municipal corporations, for school boards, and for boards of guardians. If they are worthy of exercising a choice in the selection of all sorts of local representatives, it is an absurdity to assume that they are not equally worthy and capable of exercising a choice in the selection of our lawmakers. We draw no contrast of the kind as regards men, and there is something ridiculous in retaining it as regards women who have the same social responsibilities. The tendency of our legislation, indeed, is rather to broaden privileges in proportion to the higher importance of the electoral duty to be discharged, and this is illustrated, for example, in the fact that the Parliamentary franchise is much wider, fairer, and embracing than that which is put in motion to choose local boards of health. And this being

the actual and reasonable bent of our system, it is proportionately irrational to tell the woman that we form our judgment on what is right and expedient in the matter without any reference to her.

LIVERPOOL DAILY POST, July 7th.

Although Mr. Leatham says that Woman Suffrage is making no way it is difficult to come to any other conclusion than that its triumph is at hand. The public are beginning to see that there is a want of reason in granting the municipal and withholding the Imperial franchise. Women are permitted to rent houses. Women who rent houses are compelled to pay rates. Taxation without representation is tyranny, and the sex of the taxed person who is not represented clearly makes no difference. These considerations suffice to establish a *prima facie* case, which must hold good unless great inconveniences can be brought home to female suffrage. No such inconveniences fall within any experience or can be divined by any ingenuity. We all feel—even if we prefer, as a matter of taste, that women should not take any part in politics—that there is no real fear of their becoming unsexed, or neglecting for politics those home duties which so well become them. In the absence of all complaints and of all reasonable apprehensions, it may fairly be presumed that the equality of householders before the electoral law will soon be established. The question would be discussed in a manner much more acceptable to many persons if it were deemed politic to put the argument for the change on higher grounds. With every extension of the scope of female intelligence it will be found that good is done. The common sense of home life is increased. The standard of family conduct is raised. And the line taken by public advocates becomes worthier of the politics of a great nation. This would be very largely the effect of extending the suffrage to women, and such ideas are really the animating forces at the back of the agitation. But it is not thus that we proceed in England, and Mr. Hugh Mason confines himself to the strictest demonstration of the justice of the principle of equality between householders in this matter. Fortunately this argument is strong enough to prove his case, and it will ere long be strong enough to silence or convert all gainsayers.

MANCHESTER EXAMINER, July 7th.

* * The question of women's suffrage occupies a very different position from what it did some years ago. The bestowal of the municipal franchise on women has changed the whole practical aspect of the case. The privilege which is now asked for in the election of members of Parliament has long been possessed by every female householder in the election of members of our local Parliaments. The experiment has thus been tried, and is found to answer well. Women are eager to vote; they vote in large numbers at every municipal election. The greater orderliness produced by the ballot enables them to exercise the suffrage without any inconvenience to themselves, and without a shade of unseemliness. Nor can there be much doubt that the change has had good social results. It is felt that a disability has been removed. Women are more alive to the injustice they once suffered, when, while bearing their share of the burdens of the municipality, they had no voice in the expenditure, or in the general management of the town, and they are sensible of the value of the privilege conferred upon them. What is true of municipal elections applies equally to School Board elections, with the significant difference that women can be elected on the Board. It must be admitted that, as a matter of principle, only very narrow standing room is left between conceding the municipal and School Board franchise and refusing the Parliamentary franchise. Most of the objections, we might say all the objections, which are urged against the bestowal of the Parliamentary franchise, apply with equal force to the municipal franchise, while as regards the latter they have been discredited and set aside, without the smallest inconvenience accruing. The nation is only a larger municipality. Essentially the same interests are involved in the one case as in the other. It may be urged that Town Councils are subordinate institutions, while Parliament is supreme. It may be further urged that Parliament deals with foreign as well as with domestic questions, and that foreign affairs occasionally involve operations in which women can take no part. Some theoretic arguments adverse to the claims of women, may be drawn from these facts, but they have but little practical weight. If women cannot take part in a campaign abroad, neither can one half the men. When a captain

is compulsorily retired at forty, and a recruit of that age would be laughed at, the non-combatant character of women cannot count for much as a political disqualification. In other respects, besides the admission of women to the municipal franchise, the aspect of the question is greatly changed. The Universities are thrown open to women. They compete on equal terms with men, and are equally successful in proportion to the numbers who enter the lists. One of the professions is opening its doors to women. Their claims have been and still are jealously contested, but they will have to be recognised. It is impossible, moreover, not to be struck with the growth of political capacity among women, taking as examples those of them who are most before the public. A monopoly of political intelligence can no longer be pleaded by those who would exclude them from political privileges. And the results of the greater political activity of women have been in a high degree beneficial. Important and most salutary legal changes must be placed among them. After giving due weight to these facts, it must appear almost absurd to refuse to women who possess the statutable qualifications, the right of giving their votes for members of Parliament. * *

BIRMINGHAM DAILY POST, July 9th.

* * The debate on Friday night, when Mr. Mason moved a resolution in favour of conferring the franchise on those women who possess the qualifications which enable men to vote, plainly showed that the opposition was merely sentimental. The arguments in support of the motion were clear, intelligible, and, in our judgment, irresistible. It was first insisted that all persons alike, whether men or women, when owning or holding premises, paying rates and taxes, and being subject to the other responsibilities of citizenship, were entitled to a voice in the representation. Next it was shown by the experience of local elections—such as those for Town Councils, School Boards, and Local Boards—that there is no practical objection to the suffrage being exercised by women. Here the cause might have concluded; but some members thought it necessary further to point out that examinations and University competitions in late years have proved that women are a match for men in the intellectual powers an elector is supposed to require for guidance in the disposal of his vote. A

contrast was also drawn between the educated woman now excluded and the masculine elector who cannot even read the names of the candidates on the voting papers. The cause was no doubt strengthened by these additional recommendations; but it was quite strong enough without them.

The reasons given by different members for opposing the resolution were variously stated, but they were only repetitions of a few well-worn ideas, or we will venture to say antique prejudices. The first was that enfranchisement of women would be contrary to the "universal practice or experience of mankind," a proposition which might have been employed in resisting the introduction of railways, steamboats, telegraphs, or any other modern improvements. Then came the argument that woman is subordinated to man by Divine ordination, and is required to acknowledge her subjection at the marriage ceremony. As to this it is sufficient to remark that the resolution only proposed to confer the franchise on women who occupied an independent position. If it had been intended to enfranchise wives, there might be some force in the objection, but when a woman has to pay her own rent, rates, and taxes, and to get her own living, it is nothing short of a mockery to tell her that she occupies a position of dependence on man. Coming to the third reason, we find it still more feeble. It was that women do not possess that robustness of character which would fit them to fight and tussle in the streets during an election. How many men would also be disqualified if the want of this endowment were to prevail with them? But the time has gone by for fighting and tussling over elections in a physical fashion, and men who give themselves to such practices are the least worthy of being entrusted with the vote. We come then, to the fourth reason, which was that women had not asked for the franchise; but the supporters of the resolution declared that they had asked for it, and we are certainly under the impression that the demand has been repeatedly made. "Widows and spinsters" are not sufficiently numerous in the constituencies to get up monster demonstrations; but meetings are frequently held for the assertion of their political claims, and, unless reports are deceptive, they nearly always terminate with a unanimous vote in favour of the object Mr. Mason seeks to promote. Great stress was next laid on the argument that, if women obtained the right to vote, they

could not be denied the right to sit in the House of Commons. Singularly enough, this was especially dwelt upon by Mr. Raikes, though he represents a constituency composed in great part of clergymen, who, being graduates, can vote twice—once for the university and once for a county or borough—but who cannot be returned as members. With this example before him, Mr. Raikes could scarcely have been talking seriously when he contended that it could not be followed in regard to women. As if conscious that this and the preceding objections were too shadowy to rely upon, the opponents further asserted that if women were allowed to vote, once in five years or so, at Parliamentary elections, they would be rendered unfit for those domestic duties which constitute their proper employment; and also, that no one had a right to the privilege of the vote except those who were prepared to undertake the rougher work of fighting for their country. A large percentage of men would be excluded if the latter of these contentions were acted upon; and as to the former, it is strangely put forward at a time when women have already been voting at annual and triennial elections for 14 years. The Attorney-General, who was the propounder of the soldier theory, did not hesitate to attack the groundwork of the women advocates by denying that the right to vote depended on the property or occupying qualification. He said it was fitness that was required, and that qualification was merely one form of evidence of fitness. If, he said, putting the famous joke of Franklin in a new form, occupying was absolutely to qualify, it would not be every man who held a house that would vote, but every house that held a man. Believing women not to be fit, he thus got rid of their claim, though people will not find it easy to follow his line of reasoning, for, in point of fact, the property or occupying qualification is universal, with such rare exceptions as but serve to prove the rule. Mr. H. Fowler, in taking the part of the women, very properly said that as the owners and occupiers of one sex were admitted, it rested with those who objected to show why the other sex should be excluded. Instead, therefore, of asking why women should be admitted, he would rather put it—why should they not? Mr. Hope, Mr. Newdegate, Mr. Raikes, and the Attorney-General devoted themselves to answering this question, but their replies were so inconclusive that they may be said to have left the cause of women

stronger than it was before. The resolution was defeated by a majority of 16, but, after carefully reading the whole, we are driven to the conclusion that prejudice had a far greater share than reason in causing its rejection.

EASTERN MORNING NEWS, Hull, July 9th.

The most Radical House of Commons ever elected has rejected the proposal to enfranchise women by a majority of 16. If we are to judge of the reasons for this rejection by the arguments used in the debate, they were very weak. After all, they came only to an assertion that women are women and ought not, because they are women, to vote. Mr. Leatham has discovered that it is quite unscriptural, and declares it to be a new heresy. Sixty years ago he would probably have defended slavery on the same ground. It is worse than unscriptural, however; it is Nihilistic. A woman who wants to go to the ballot box and drop a paper in is of the persuasion of Vera Sassaulitch. But though this woman is a Nihilist, yet her shrinking from physical trouble is a bar to her enfranchisement. "Were women," Mr. Leatham asked triumphantly, "prepared to fight and tussle in the streets?" Because women are *not* prepared to fight and tussle, therefore they are to be disfranchised. No doubt Mr. Leatham is prepared for fighting and tussling. What the nature of his preparation for indulgence in street rows may be we do not know; but it is to be hoped that the police of Huddersfield, the town which he represents, will remember at the next election what he is prepared to do. If, however, Mr. Leatham will not disfranchise men as well as women, we may tell him that even men are not prepared to fight and tussle in the street at election time. No doubt it is a proof of the degeneracy of man, but it is a fact; and probably Mr. Leatham will soon be alone in his desire to carry on elections in this way. Sir Henry James put the argument somewhat higher when he said that the vote involved an obligation to military service, and there would be something in his position if the women of England were likely to send their husbands and brothers to fight in an unjust battle. But, as a matter of fact, the stress and strain of war are felt as much by women as by men; and it is unjust to deprive them of the political power which they would almost certainly use to

preserve peace. Quite as beside the mark was Sir Henry James's contention that women have not the requisite knowledge to judge of politics. "They lacked the experience," he declared, "which was necessary for the conduct of public affairs. The men sitting in that House had all had practical experience in different walks of life. Some had military experience, others legal, and others commercial. But what knowledge had women of such matters? Their only experience was domestic experience, which fitted them, perhaps, well enough for service on the School Board; and when questions of peace or war should arise, they would be found timid in a time of panic and violent in a time of outbreak. He believed that were a war to be proposed for the purpose of restoring the temporal power of the Pope, every woman in France would advocate it. If women were given political power they would often be guided by the impulses of the heart rather than by the reason of the mind." But is this so? Do not women now gain as much knowledge of the world bearing on politics as men? Sir Henry James doubtless has a larger experience than most women, but he has also a larger experience than most men. What is there in the daily life of a miner, or a carpenter, or a shoemaker, or an agricultural labourer which more fits a man to decide whether Mr. Gladstone is a good Prime Minister than the daily life of an ordinary housekeeper? If you desire knowledge of human nature you do not go to Dickens for it in preference even to George Elliot. Who shows more acquaintance with life than Mrs. Oliphant? Take the agricultural labourer and his wife, and we venture to say that the wife will be found the more cultivated of the two, and quite as shrewd in judging as her husband.

The whole argument rests, in fact, upon a prejudice. It is the idea that a woman who thinks about politics, who knows the difference between a Liberal and a Conservative, who can form an opinion on such a question as the annexation of New Guinea, or the Government of Ireland, will cease to be charming. "There was a class in this country," said Sir Henry James, in minatory tones, "which did not often make its voice heard, and yet it had at times determined the state of parties. He referred to those men who cared little for political life, who found their happiness in their homes, and who believed that upon the stability of those homes the greatness and prosperity of the country depended. If

once they should think that the women who formed their happiness were about to be called from their houses to join in political affairs, they would unhesitatingly prohibit such a movement. The proposed change could add nothing to the happiness of domestic existence, and in public life it would be a source of weakness, and it would, therefore, be detrimental to the interests of the country." But all this is so much rubbish. As a matter of fact, a woman who understands politics will simply have her head filled with something else besides the dress which she wears, and the heresies of the last new curate. She will talk politics as men talk politics. She will no more quarrel with her husband about the questions at issue between them in politics than she does about the questions at issue between them, say on Church Ritual or the use of the Athanasian Creed. The notion that with everything else in daily life to quarrel about, a couple will be good and sweet in their relationships so long as politics are excluded, but if politics become a topic of interest between them, will forthwith be maddened into furious controversy, is of all notions the most stupid. On the contrary, the introduction of questions of the sort will be beneficial to any home where the interest is narrowed. Loud and ribald laughter greeted Mr. Courtney's argument upon this head, but it was a good one. "If they wanted the heroic woman, the woman of public spirit, the companion and helpmeet of the ideal English citizen, they must have a woman who could understand and sympathise with the ideas of the age, and with the life of her husband. In many cases the husband was pulled down by a wife of deficient education and possessing no sympathy with the motives and ideas of his life, and unless they made a woman helpmeet for man they would not only find stunted woman but would be punished by finding society fall away, and the national life become impoverished, poor, and petty." What there is to laugh at in that we do not see; the laughter with which it was greeted is the measure of the reverence which the present House of Commons has for true womanhood.

LEEDS MERCURY, July 9th.

Mr. Mason, the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne, asked the House of Commons on Friday night to declare that in its opinion the Parliamentary franchise should be extended to women who possess the qualifications which entitle men to vote, and who, in

all matters of local government have the right of voting." It will be observed that the terms of the resolution were limited "to women who possess the qualifications which entitle men to vote;" in other words, to women who are independent owners or occupiers of property. The question has been from time to time so exhaustively discussed, both in Parliament and outside, that it would be impossible to say anything new upon it. The claim is urged upon the ground that morally and intellectually women possess qualifications equal to those of men, and that in the eye of the law they are equally responsible; and that single women, or women engaged in business independently of their husbands, are liable to all taxes and rates as if they were men. Responsibilities of this kind imply duties, and duties involve rights. Those rights are recognised as regards men, and in many respects as regards women. In all the ordinary relations of civil life women enjoy a status scarcely inferior to that of men. Politically, however, they have no recognised existence. It is against this illogical disability that the supporters of women's suffrage protest. Indeed, the maintenance of this disability can only be defended on the ground that it exists. It is a kind of conservatism, however, which is daily losing its hold upon the minds of thinking people. It is true that Mr. E. A. Leatham, who bolstered up a somewhat frivolous argument by an appeal to the authority of Scripture, asserted that the movement championed by the Member for Ashton was losing ground in the country. But there is little need to take account of this assertion from the lips of the representative of a borough the Town Council of which has petitioned in favour of the proposed change. The desire that properly qualified women should be enabled to vote for Members of Parliament gains ground in proportion as the popular aversion to injustice increases, and as it is more and more generally realised that the rights of citizenship with which women have recently been endowed have been used worthily, and, therefore, to the public advantage. There are still, indeed, those who argue as if physical strength sufficient for the adequate discharge of the functions of a special constable were a necessary qualification for the franchise. But we are glad to believe that the intelligence and the moral sense of the community condemn such reasonings, and that though Mr. Mason's motion was defeated by a small majority, the moderate claim to a share of

political rights which he urged on behalf of women will not much longer be rejected.

WESTERN MERCURY, Plymouth, July 9th.

It appears to us to be just as indefensible to refuse to assimilate the municipal and Parliamentary franchise, as far as women are concerned, as it is to refuse to grant to residents in the counties the same advantages as are enjoyed by inhabitants of the boroughs. We cannot disguise from ourselves the fact that Liberals are somewhat apprehensive of the way in which the female vote would go. Well, the female vote would not be large, and when the agricultural labourer is enfranchised, its influence at the poll would be proportionately reduced.

But as soon as the female receives the Parliamentary suffrage she would be appealed to on Imperial grounds, and although there are some weak women, as there are some weak men, we do not think that, when great issues are at stake—issues involving the continuance of a Ministry of despotism, of interference, of war,—the women who would be generally found subsisting upon the profit of investments, and keenly alive to the causes of a declension in their value, who are invariably found in receipt of incomes certain to be diminished by the pursuit of a policy of disturbance, would often be found casting the weight of their suffrages into the wrong scale. At any rate, Liberals ought never to shrink from the right because they fear that their party may suffer. They have never suffered in the end, and would not eventually suffer by making a sacrifice for the sake of the principle now under discussion. It is not to be forgotten that the pioneers of this agitation did not discover that they ought to hold votes before they found out that they could not avoid becoming Liberals, nor that the female politician, who has obtained any distinction at all in the world, has always been an advanced social reformer.

WESTERN INDEPENDENT, Devonport, July 11th.

* * When the question is properly defined and limited, we can hardly conceive that a majority of men would refuse Parliamentary representation to qualified women who have no husbands to vote for them. The principle of such feminine representation is not at all new in some other public matters. Female ratepayers

are entitled to vote for town councillors, guardians, vestrymen, and members of various local boards, including School Boards, and they may themselves sit as representatives in some of these bodies. Local franchises have in some cases been recently conferred on women, with the understanding that it was done to test their capacity for taking their share in public life; and we have heard no complaints of any evil effects following from such enfranchisement. On the contrary, we think it is generally acknowledged that a limited participation by women in public business has produced beneficial effects. There is one little consideration, however, that might perhaps check the ardour of unmarried women to obtain the Parliamentary franchise. If they thus receive the full rights of citizenship there seems to be no good reason why they should not fulfil its duties also, as, for instance, in the matter of serving on juries. Many men, now drawn from their business, would welcome this innovation; but some of the lady voters might not appreciate it as a favour, although the office would not be distasteful to a good many.

NOTTINGHAM DAILY EXPRESS, July 12th.

The day when women will have votes does not seem very far off when a resolution in favour of giving them the suffrage is only lost in the House of Commons by a majority of 16 votes. There is a curious admixture of parties among the supporters of the resolution, of firm Tories and advanced Liberals. Baron de Worms and Jacob Bright, Mr. Puleston and Sir Charles Dilke, Mr. James Round and John Morley are not often found voting side by side. One little dependency of the British Crown, not five hours' sail from our coasts, has already conferred the franchise on women. In the Isle of Man any woman who is possessed of separate property is, with certain qualifications, entitled to a vote.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE TIMES, July 13th.

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE.—The time was, and that not so very long ago, when the proposal to give the suffrage to women was pretty generally regarded as a mere fad or crotchet on the part of a few. The recent division in the House of Commons, however, shows two things—first, that the subject is seriously entertained by a large House (248, including tellers), and, secondly, that if the

majority of the members of that House are opposed to the proposal, the minority is a very respectable one. Mr. Mason's abstract motion called on the House to express an opinion in favour of giving the suffrage "to women who possess the qualifications which enable men to vote, and who in all matters of local government have the right of voting." The amendment called on the House to say that "it is undesirable to change the immemorial basis of the Parliamentary franchise, which is that men only shall be qualified to elect members to serve in this House." The motion was rejected by 130 to 114, giving the opponents of female suffrage the small majority of 16 only. The subject is thus disposed of, so far as the Legislature is concerned, for this session; but those who take the affirmative side are much encouraged, and will certainly continue their agitation with a view to another division on a similar motion next session.

PETERBOROUGH STANDARD, July 13th.

The House of Commons has refused to adopt a resolution in favour of extending the Parliamentary franchise to women. 114 members supported, and 130 voted against it. This is a question which, so far, has not become a party one, for we find a Radical proposing and a Conservative seconding the proposition; whilst in the division-list there is the same mixing up of party men. For ourselves, we agree with Lord Beaconsfield in respect to the justice of admitting women to the franchise. Some people talk as if it would be an innovation. It has been pointed out that prior to the Reform Bill of 1832 women possessed and exercised voting power, and the words "male person," which were introduced into that measure, actually disfranchised them. It should be borne in mind, too, that every one in seven holders of land, above an acre in extent, is a woman; and that there are between 300,000 and 400,000 female householders who possess the qualification for a Parliamentary voter. As yet, however, they are to be satisfied with the qualification.

SOUTH DURHAM HERALD, July 14th.

* * Mr. Ashmead-Bartlett asserted that the bestowal of the franchise on women would be an essentially Conservative measure. Undoubtedly it would, and it must be for that reason

the Liberal element shuns it as it shuns the pestilence. How easy it is to talk about liberty and progress, until the test is applied! I suppose the Liberal programme of "universal suffrage," over which members of Parliament grow fervid at mass meetings, does not include female enfranchisement. "We, the people, the men, the lords of creation;" that is the notion of the party of progress. The arrogance and impudence of some men is astounding. Most of the women of my acquaintance are a great deal more capable of forming a safe and sound opinion on the leading questions of the day than half the men one meets.

MIDLAND COUNTIES DAILY EXPRESS, Nottingham,
July 16th.

It is evident that the proposal to bestow the privilege of voting on women has a great many advocates in the House of Commons—sufficient, indeed, to justify a continuance of agitation. A minority of 16 is one of those defeats second only to a victory, and notwithstanding that we live, as was suggested, in an age of fads, it is difficult to resist the impression that the time is not far distant when all women who already vote in municipal and other elections will have the Parliamentary franchise extended to them. Argued on the ground of necessity, there is, perhaps, not much to be said in favour of the proposal; but regarded in another light, that of strict justice, there is not much to be said against it. The Attorney-General, in his speech, said that inasmuch as a woman could not act as a special constable, a juror, or a bishop, she was unfit to exercise the duty of a voter. We are not disposed to endorse this theory, because each of the offices named would involve physical exertion, for which it might be presumed ladies are not designed; whereas the act of voting might, if the possessor so desired, be a perfectly silent deed. Stronger arguments than these will be required to stave off the proposed extension of the franchise to a distant period of the future.

NORTH BRITISH DAILY MAIL, July 7th.

* * The exclusion of women from the franchise is nothing more than a surviving remnant of the evil of old days when they were mere serfs, having neither property nor volition except those of their lord. Society has changed for the better in many respects

since then, but in none more conspicuously than in the larger place and the higher respect accorded to women. It has been supposed that to allow them to descend into the political arena and mingle there in the rough strife of tongues, would diminish the chivalrous feeling with which they are now very properly regarded. To discuss seriously considerations of this airy and tangible sort is to enter simply upon the region of cloudland. If the property qualification be a sufficient evidence of stability of mind and seriousness of purpose in the case of men, it ought to be equally admissible and conclusive in that of women. It is too late to introduce a Bill this session embodying the reform pointed at in Mr. Mason's resolution, nor is it desirable to separate this from other questions connected with the reform of the franchise. It may be taken for granted, however, that the next readjustment of electoral power will provide for this most just and necessary demand.

ABERDEEN JOURNAL, June 9th.

* * When we have a Queen on the Throne—and the best Queen that ever reigned—it is rather too much to contend that women are unequal to political duties; yet the Radical Mr. Leatham moved the traversing amendment, which was carried, and which thereby committed the Radical party to opposition to the political rights of the sex. It would have been well had the House considered, before coming to a vote, that in the election of both parochial and School Boards, women have now votes on the same terms and principles as men; and that in the course of time it must follow that the Parliamentary franchise shall be also conceded to them. It is even a moot point whether, as the law at present stands, women have not the right to vote at municipal elections; and most certainly it will not much longer remain in doubt. Mr. Fowler was the best exponent of Conservative principle who spoke in the course of the debate, when he showed that the Crown called the representatives of property to Parliament to give counsel as to how the people should be taxed for their national expenses. In such a case, a woman holding property to the amount of the minimum fixed by Parliament is just as much entitled to vote as a man; and it is a matter of fact that, under the *regime* of our old Saxon and Norman kings, certain lady abbesses and peeresses were summoned to Parliament equally with abbots and peers. There are

many functions in public life in which woman has not yet taken her proper part, but which this agitation for her enfranchisement in politics will help on. We refer especially to the care of the poor. If anywhere, the presence of a woman is especially desirable at a parochial board; for it is in the care of the poor, in charitable work, and in the outgoing of the heart in the work of healing and aiding, that woman finds her proper sphere. In this respect we have a lesson to learn from those whom in our pride we consider uncivilised, viz., the so-called "savages" of Central Asia. In the life of General Scobelev, recently published, we find that the Akkhal Tekkes, according to a very interesting communication made to the Russian Imperial Geographical Society, "although barbarians, are remarkable for the position which they accord their women." With them woman is the equal of man. She is not the slave of her husband. Her property is her own after marriage as it was before. "She can vote in all the national assemblies; and if her husband treats her badly she can demand a divorce." In this country, with a woman for chief ruler, there can surely be no dread of the influence of womanhood legitimately exercised on public affairs.

DUNDEE ADVERTISER, July 7th.

* * If the principle that taxation and representation should go together is to be consistently acted upon, the claim put forward in behalf of women householders ought in fairness to be conceded. It does not affect the argument to contend, as some do, that it is only a noisy minority of strong-minded females who ask for enfranchisement. The fact that representation has been based on the payment of rates should settle the question. To deny the franchise to the woman householder who is obliged to pay rates, simply because she is a woman, is to violate the principle upon which representation in this country is professedly based, and to establish a disability of sex. This is virtually the meaning of Mr. Leatham's amendment to Mr. Mason's motion. Mr. Leatham maintains that "it is undesirable to change the immemorial basis of the Parliamentary franchise, which is that men only shall be qualified to elect members of Parliament." This sounds strange in the mouth of a Liberal. The opponents of reform have always laid stress upon "immemorial" usage, and it is somewhat ungallant to plead

immemorial usage as a barrier to the extension of the suffrage to women householders. It is beside the question to say that the proper sphere of woman is to be found in the home, and not in the arena of political strife. It will hardly be seriously contended that those women who are obliged to fight their own way in the world are less capable of recording a judicious vote than the average male householder. Women, as a rule, do not concern themselves much about politics, but they are probably as well informed and as little liable to act from mere caprice as the bulk of those upon whom the Legislature in its wisdom has seen fit to confer the suffrage.

DUNDEE COURIER, July 7th.

* * There is an anomaly in the fact that a highly educated female landowner cannot vote for a Member of Parliament, while the ignorant yokel who works on her land possesses the franchise. The strongest ground on which a change can be advocated is the fact that taxpaying and power to elect Parliamentary representatives ought to go together. The principle of allowing women who are ratepayers to vote for their representatives at public Boards has been practically acknowledged, and a man may legitimately hold that a female ratepayer might exercise the franchise for the election of a Member of Parliament without thereby unsexing herself. At the same time, the question is one which will have to be decided by the growth of public opinion on the matter. If the public come to think that a female ratepayer ought to possess the right of voting for the man who is to represent her in Parliament, and who will have power to vote away her money, then the Parliamentary franchise cannot be kept back from women. While it might be said that Mr. Mason's resolution could issue in nothing practical, the advocates of women suffrage might truthfully reply that the discussion of it is useful in familiarising the public with the arguments for and against the proposal. The result of the division is one with which Mr. Mason and those who think with him may be well satisfied, the figures being—For his motion, 114; against, 130—showing only a majority against of 16 votes.

NORTHERN WHIG, Belfast, July 7th.

The probability of a new Reform Bill being introduced before the dissolution of the present Parliament has given additional interest to the movement for conferring the Parliamentary franchise on women householders. On Thursday the ladies held their annual meeting on this subject in London, and at the evening sitting of the House of Commons yesterday, Mr. Hugh Mason moved a resolution "That in the opinion of the House, the Parliamentary franchise should be extended to women who possess the qualifications which entitle men to vote, and who in all matters of local government have the right of voting." This resolution is a very reasonable one. As a question of political justice the motion could not be opposed by Liberals generally. Women householders who have often to bring up families after the deaths of their husbands, or spinsters who have the responsibilities of providing for households thrown upon them, are likely to be as able to make a good use of the Parliamentary franchise as many men to whom the Legislature has given votes, or to whom it is intended to extend the right of voting. Women in England vote for representatives in the Town Councils and the Poor Law Boards, for churchwardens, and even surveyors of roads. In Belfast they can also vote for Harbour Commissioners and Poor Law Guardians, and some other local representatives. It is not easy to see why they should not vote for members of Parliament. * *

BELFAST EVENING TELEGRAPH, July 7th.

* * Throughout the whole of the United Kingdom, the labours of the benevolent women have excelled those of the other sex, and they have given proof in the Prison Gate Missions, and in other instances, that they hold a high status of education. The question, therefore, at once arises, why is it that women should be deprived of the general rights of citizenship? Against this decision there can be no fair cause shown. There is no reason why there should be inequality, or that the female descendants of a family should not possess equal rights and privileges with the male members of the race. The denial of this right is foreign to the whole of our national instincts. It has been said that the child is

father to the man, but, according to the existing course of law, where is the mother?

While it may not be desirable that women should occupy seats in the Parliament of England, and sit, vote, and make their speeches from the benches, where they might captivate the support of several members of a youthful and promising description, there can be no reason why, in the course of general elections, the privilege of voting should not be afforded to a legitimate extent. In the course of electioneering contests, notwithstanding every Act of Parliament, the influence of the ladies has been felt, and, it is discovered that, in every instance, they are powerful factors throughout the United Kingdom on these occasions. It is impossible to disregard the importance of their power. It comes home to us in every circle. The person who proceeds to the ballot-box is scarcely an "independent elector." He has discussed the question at home. He is not the real, although he may be the practical voter. There is the wife in the case, who advises the manner in which he should make his cross on the ballot-paper. It is difficult, therefore, to see why it is that this powerful indirect influence should not be directly recognised. The rejection of the motion is opposed to the common sense and progress of the period, but, sooner or later, its promoters must achieve success.

CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE, London, July 12th.

"Shall ladies vote for members of Parliament?" was the important question which the House of Commons debated last week for four consecutive hours. Mr. Beresford Hope raised a laugh by suggesting the possibility of a young lady premier, and intimated that the leader of the Opposition and she might marry, and thus form a coalition Government. But the debate was a dull one on the whole. By 130 to 114 the House shelved the matter for another year. The House evidently does not hold with us in our views about the ministry of women. We think the House is wrong, and should have voted with the minority had we been there.

THE TABLET, July 14th.

SHALL WOMEN VOTE?—The debate upon Women's Suffrage was, if possible, a little more unreal than on previous occasions.

The Ministry opposed it, and on grounds which ought to weigh ten-fold force when the question of county franchise comes up for decision. Then it will be idle to talk of the danger of adding a body of ignorant, fickle, and gullible electors to the governing power of the country. If these epithets are applicable to any considerable body of English women, they apply to the whole of the rustics whom the Ministry are pledged to bring within the pale of the constitution. It is held sound reasoning, now, to urge that women are careless of politics, but when the same argument is urged against the agricultural labourers, Sir Henry James will tell the House that the best way to rouse them to an intelligent interest in the welfare of the nation is to let them feel that they have some share in the ruling of their own land, and in the shaping of the laws beneath which they live and suffer. We have no patience with the silly talk which would have us believe that the giving of a vote once in seven years would tell with disastrous effect upon the homelife of the country. The interests, the hopes and fears of most men lie quite outside the sphere of politics, and there is no reason to suppose that the lives of many women would be seriously changed because they were enabled to show effective approval of the conduct they thought best for the nation. It is legitimate, now, to say that the interests of women are well cared for by men, but that same argument will be torn to shreds when the County Franchise Bill comes on—we shall be told the old truth, that no class is fit to be trusted to legislate for another.

PROTESTANT STANDARD, Liverpool, July 14th.

Notwithstanding the defeat of Mr. Hugh Mason's resolution in favour of the ladies enjoying the Parliamentary franchise, yet have we little doubt that sooner or later the measure will be carried, unless indeed the so-called "lords of creation" evince a higher standard of capabilities than they have hitherto shown to protect the gentler sex from many gross acts of outrage and injustice which they are at the present time more or less subject to. As matters at present exist there is an unequal administration of some laws in relation to the sexes. An aristocratic debauchee may accost a woman in the street and escape unpunished, while a woman acting in the same manner towards a man is liable to im-

prisonment. Again, the C. D. Acts still exist for the purpose of degrading women to the vices of men, therefore, on account of these things and others of a minor nature which bear harshly on women, we think that it is high time that the ladies should be enfranchised in order that they may vote for such representatives in Parliament as will enact laws bearing with equal and even-handed justice on the morals of both sexes.

NORWICH ARGUS, July 14th.

That the question of Women's Suffrage, of which we have heard but little since the general election, has not been dead but sleeping, we had the proof in the lively discussion which took place on Friday evening, on the motion introduced by Mr. Hugh Mason and seconded by Baron H. de Worms. * * A special degree of interest was excited on the subject, because this was the first time it was brought before the present Parliament, although it had been introduced almost annually in the last. And although there was the counter attraction of the State Ball, and the time fixed for the debate was an evening Friday sitting, when, of all hours in the week the House of Commons is inclined to lassitude, yet, including tellers, no fewer than 248 members were present at the division, and this did not by any means indicate the full interest felt in the discussion, for there were no fewer than 40 pairs. The motion was rejected by a majority of 16, the narrowness of which is exceedingly significant, and indicates that the day is not distant when some change of the kind proposed will be introduced into our system of Parliamentary representation—not improbably when the time arrives for the extension of the county franchise and the redistribution of seats. The debate was conducted with commendable moderation and no small ability on both sides. Mr. Mason limited his claim for female franchise to unmarried women—whether widows or spinsters—who possessed the same qualifications as property owners or ratepayers as entitled men to vote. * * But it is not merely on the ground of property qualification that we would base the right of women to the franchise. Other considerations lead us to believe that the privilege might, with advantage, be confided to them. Withdrawn from the muddy current of party strife in which men so much intermingle, their judgment is likely to be calmer and less warped

than that of the angry combatants who meet in the excited arena of party conflict; and we will not conceal the conviction that, beside the essential justice of the measure, we believe the conferring the franchise upon women would give an additional element of strength to the Conservative party, as all who have studied the female character will agree with us that women who stand in an independent position are, as a rule, much more cautious with regard to great changes, and therefore naturally more Conservative than men. And in addition to this it is an anomaly which no ingenuity has been able to reconcile, that females should be denied the right of voting for Parliamentary representation under a Government at the head of which a woman sits and performs with such capacity the duty of a ruler. That this was the view taken of the subject by the great Conservative leader who is gone, there is no doubt, and on every occasion that the question was brought forward of the extension of the franchise to independent women who possess the qualification requisite for men, Lord Beaconsfield, then Mr. Disraeli, voted in its favour, and not only voted, but on various occasions spoke with great decision. Many years ago—in 1866—he expressed himself in these terms:—“A woman having property ought now to have a vote in a country in which she may hold manorial courts and sometimes act as churchwarden.” And subsequently speaking on the same subject, he expressed himself with equal emphasis and equal clearness. “What we desire to do,” said Lord Beaconsfield, “is to give every one who is worthy of it a fair share in the government of the country by means of the elective franchise.” For ourselves, we believe that the truest interests of the Conservative party will be most promoted in this matter by acting on the counsel of the wise philosopher who is gone, but who still speaks.

WILTS AND GLOUCESTERSHIRE STANDARD, July 14th.

* * For ourselves, not being very strong partisans on the question, and being therefore able to look at the matter in a judicial spirit, we have never been able to see any very good reason why women should *not* vote when they possess the same qualification as men; nor did the strength of the arguments lie on the side of the majority in Friday night's division. Mr. Leatham, for example,

fell back upon the time-worn arguments of immemorial usage and Holy Writ: would he allow either of those pleas to influence his vote on the marriage with a Deceased Wife's Sister Bill? Immemorial usage is a good and valid argument against innovations, unless good cause can be shown for the change, but it is a Conservative argument, and hardly fits the mouth of a Radical, whose principle rather is that if a practice or an institution has existed for centuries it is time it should be changed. There was also a good deal of assertion without proof or argument in Mr. Leatham's speech, as, for instance, when he said that "it was essential that the voter should be a man." Why so? That is just begging the question, when the very contention is that the woman is just as well able to exercise the power of voting with discretion as a man. He also asked "were women prepared to fight and tussle in the streets during elections?" Does he mean that to be a voter a man must know how to handle his fists? Has Mr. Leatham himself had many fights in the act of recording his vote? We have taken part in contested elections in which party spirit was running high, not only in our own quiet little borough here, but in a large town noted for its rowdiness, without losing *much* blood. Some men fight at elections, no doubt, and possibly some stout-limbed woman might "go for" an opponent under the influence of an exciting contest, but it is rather a coarse comment on the gentler sex to say that a woman of property and intelligence is not as competent to give a vote, and take a thoughtful interest in political questions, as some drunken brute who is ready to "tussle and fight" with any one who wears a ribbon of a different colour to his own.

A much better argument was that the logical result of assenting to Mr. Mason's resolution, taken in connection with the Married Women's Property Act of last session, must be to give the franchise to all women who are owners of property, whether married or single, since the vote represents a property qualification, and inasmuch as a married woman can now hold property independently of her husband, without the cumbrous intervention of a trust, there is no reason why her property should not carry a vote as well as her husband's. Well, if we were governed by strict logic there might be considerable force in that objection, but seeing that we are about the most illogical people in the world we may very well be content to adopt it as our rule that for electoral purposes the

husband represents the family of which he is the head. That is a tolerably well-defined line to which we can reasonably stick, logic or no logic. But what we fail to see is why, when that glorious creature, the husband, is removed, the family should have no representation at all. If the suffrage is an incident of property, representing a stake in the welfare of the country,—as it certainly is, since the pauper has no vote—why should not that property be represented when it is in the hands of a woman as well as when it is in the hands of a man? Seeing that one-seventh of the landowners of England and Wales are women, it does not seem to be a very logical argument to allow that they are competent to hold and manage their estates, and yet refuse them a political privilege which is given to an ignorant boor who is unable to sign his own name, merely forsooth because the creature is a *man!* At any rate, if women are not to be allowed to vote at Parliamentary elections, they ought at least to be exempt from charges incident to such elections. If men claim the franchise as their sole and special prerogative it is not unreasonable that they should alone be responsible for any expenses that may arise out of their own abuse of their privilege. It does seem hard that the 1,500 women ratepayers at Macclesfield should have to pay their share of the expenses of the commission that enquired into the wrong-doings of that corrupt electorate with which they had nothing to do. * *

THE RIGHTS AND DUTIES OF WOMEN
IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT:

A PAPER BY MISS BECKER,

*Read at the Conference on behalf of extending the Parliamentary
Franchise to Women, held in the Victoria Rooms, Clifton,
Bristol, on January 24th, 1879.*

Price One Penny

MANCHESTER:
A. IRELAND & CO., PRINTERS, PALL MALL.
1879.

THE RIGHTS AND DUTIES OF WOMEN
IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT.

Representative government is the fundamental principle which regulates the conduct of public affairs in this country. The principle had its origin in local government. The application of this principle in the supreme government of the country appears to be of comparatively recent origin. Before the reign of Egbert consolidated the Saxon kingdoms into a nation, all government might be said to be local government. During the reign of the Saxon kings, the representative assemblies had a real share in the government. Women took part in these assemblies. Gurdon, in his antiquities of Parliament, says the ladies of birth and quality sat in council with the Saxon Witas. The Abbess Wilde, says Bede, presided in an Ecclesiastical Synod.

The Norman conquest introduced the feudal system of government, in which the kings were little more than military chiefs. The various struggles for the crown from the death of Henry I. to the accession of Henry VII. were determined by military successes, and not in any sense by the choice of the people. A few hundred knights and men-at-arms, fighting hand to hand, gave the crown first to one prince, then to another, the people as a party standing aloof from a struggle which, in truth, concerned them very little. But local or

municipal government was not dead. It survived in the government of parishes, cities, and counties, and it formed the basis of the more general representative government which first took definite form under the guidance of Simon de Montfort, the man who caused to be summoned the first House of Commons.

Women were not left out of consideration in the earlier forms of parliamentary government. We learn from Gurdon that in the times of Henry III. and Edward VI., four abbesses were summoned to Parliament, namely of Shaftesbury, Berking, St. Mary of Winchester, and of Wilton. In the 35th of Edward III. were summoned to Parliament, to appear by their proxies, Mary, Countess of Norfolk; Alienor, Countess of Ormond; Anne Despenser Philippa, Countess of March; Johanna Fitzwater Agusta, Countess of Pembroke; Mary de St. Paul, Mary de Roos, Matilda, Countess of Oxford; Catherine, Countess of Athol.

This indication of a sketch of the rise of parliamentary government, and of the connection between this and the earlier form of local government, is intended to prove that the annual local franchise, instead of being a secondary and subordinate vote of little or no importance politically, is in truth the foundation on which the whole of our system of government is built. Women have, and always have had, coeval rights with men in regard to local franchise; they have a share in the foundation, and they have a right to a corresponding share in the superstructure that has been reared upon it.

For an illustration of the proposition that local self-government, by means of representative assemblies, is antecedent to national self-government, we may turn to the condition of the village communities in Russia. Here representative government in imperial affairs is non-existent. The Czar is abso-

lute autocrat. But local affairs are regulated by village communities named "Mir;" these are described by Mr. Mackenzie Wallace as "a good specimen of constitutional government of the extreme democratic type." The constitutional members are the "Heads of Households." The "Mir" apportioned the land of the community, regulates agricultural operations, and exercises authority over the taxes, and also over the movements of the villagers. Women are represented in these gatherings. Mr. Wallace says:—

"In the crowd may generally be seen, especially in the northern provinces, where a considerable portion of the male population is always absent from the village, a certain number of female peasants. These are women who, on account of the absence or death of their husbands, happen to be for the moment Heads of Households. As such they are entitled to be present, and their right to take part in the deliberations is never called in question."

Should parliamentary government come to be established in Russia, these village communities will in all probability form the basis of the electoral districts, and we may see representative government in imperial affairs accorded concurrently to women and men.

Men in this country obtained parliamentary representation in and through local government. They used the power they had, and they obtained more extended power. We urge women to follow their example—to take an interest in the local affairs in which they have a legal right to be represented, to make their votes felt as a power which must be recognised by all who would govern such affairs, and to be ready to fill personally such offices as they are liable to be nominated for, and to seek those positions to which they are eligible for election.

The parochial offices to which women may be nominated are

churchwarden, overseer, waywarden or surveyor of roads, guardian, parish clerk, and sexton. Women now occupy, or have very recently occupied, all these offices. Recently, a parliamentary petition was placed in my hand signed by a lady as churchwarden of a parish in Wales. There are many parishes now in England where women are overseers. There is a parish in Cheshire where there are but six or seven farmers eligible for the office of overseer. One of these is a lady, and she takes her turn with the rest. Moreover, while many of the men employ a deputy, she performs the work herself.

The office of overseer is a very responsible one. When the guardians or other lawfully-constituted authorities require money for the relief of the poor or for other purposes, they issue a "precept" to the overseers to furnish the required amount. The overseers are then personally liable for the sum. On the other hand, they are armed with stringent powers over the property of the ratepayers. They have to adjust the burden of the impost equitably among those who are to bear it, and they must collect the money from the people, either personally or by deputy. They have power to seize the goods of any person who does not pay the rate, and their own goods are liable to seizure if they do not collect the money from the parish. The office of overseer is unpaid, and the persons on whom the duties are imposed must discharge them under the penalty of a considerable fine. Women are not excused from these duties on account of their sex, and many women are now discharging these duties in various parts of the country.

A few years ago, Mrs. Gold, a widow lady of sixty years of age, was appointed overseer of her parish in Montgomeryshire. She objected to serve, and applied to the Court of Queen's Bench to release her from the obligation to do so. Her application was refused; she would therefore be compelled either to

fulfil an office entailing much trouble and no honour, or to pay a heavy fine.

A widow lady was recently appointed waywarden of a parish in Westmoreland. This lady had complained to the surveyor of the state of the roads, and at the next election he prevailed on the ratepayers to elect her to the office. Perhaps he imagined that she would decline to serve, and render herself liable to the penalty of twenty pounds for refusal. But the lady was equal to the occasion. She accepted the duties imposed upon her, and as she keeps a clerk and has ample means, she has no difficulty in obtaining a thorough supervision of the work. It is said that she has made some important discoveries as to the state of the accounts.

The conditions of local government vary greatly in different districts of England. They may be classified under three heads:—

1. Government of parishes by vestry meetings, in which every ratepayer had a right to vote, and which were convened for the imposition of rates and the election of parochial officers.
2. Government by vestries or other local commissioners under the provision of some local act applying only to the particular district therein specified. This is the condition of the metropolitan parishes outside the city of London, and of large districts in the country.
3. Government by local authorities elected under a general Act of Parliament specifically applied—a kind of permissive act, which may be extended on application by the ratepayers of any district in which it is not in force. Of this nature are the Public Health Act of 1848, the Municipal Corporations Act of

1833, with its amendments of 1869; and the Elementary Education Acts of 1870—1876.

In all of these provisions for local government, the rights of women are recognised.

I have before me, as I write, a copy of an Act passed in the year 1774, when George the Third was king, for the local government of the parish of Clerkenwell. It is a quaint document, printed in black letter. The preamble sets forth that whereas the poor of the said parish are very numerous, and the present workhouse is not large enough to contain them, and a considerable debt for their relief has been unavoidably contracted; and whereas the present method of raising and applying money for the relief of the poor is attended with many inconveniences, &c., &c., &c., the Act proceeds to set forth the names of a number of gentlemen to act together with the ministers, churchwardens, and overseers of the parish as guardians or governors of the poor for carrying the Act into execution. The Act further provides that in the event of a death, or removal, or refusal to act of any of the before-named persons, it shall be lawful for the inhabitants of the parish paying to the rates for the church and the poor to assemble and meet together in the vestry-room of the said parish, on Tuesday in Easter week every year, or within one month after, to elect one or more persons to be guardians.

It is further provided that the inhabitants as aforesaid are authorised and required to assemble on the Tuesday in Easter week, or within ten days after, to nominate a list of eight persons to be overseers, and the persons so nominated shall be bound to serve under a penalty of ten pounds. It is further enacted that the churchwardens, overseers, and inhabitants are authorised and required to assemble on Tuesday in Easter week,

or oftener, as occasion serves, to make a general equal pound rate or assessment for the relief of the poor, or for the other purposes of this Act.

The requirement to assemble in the vestry on the Tuesday in Easter week, for the election of overseers and the imposition of rates, is laid on all inhabitant ratepayers, without mention of sex. There is no doubt that women ratepayers are summoned equally with men, and that they may attend and vote.

In the clauses relating to the qualification of guardians masculine pronouns only are used; it is said no person shall be capable of acting as guardian unless *he* shall be assessed at the annual sum of twenty pounds, &c. Also, in the provision relating to the penalty for refusing to serve as overseers, the words "if *he* or they shall refuse," &c., are used. Notwithstanding this, it is probable that women might be guardians or overseers under this local Act, and it is certain that they may fill these offices in other districts.

But when it comes to the clauses providing for the payment of rates there is no possibility of mistake as to whether women are intended to be included. The pronouns *he*, *she*, or *they*, *his* or *her* house or houses, etc., occur. These feminine pronouns are not, however, introduced everywhere, and it would not be possible to construe the Act so as to exclude women in every case where masculine pronouns only are employed.

This old Act is the only one which I have had the opportunity of examining, but, as it is probably a type of many similar ones for other parishes, I have thought it worth while to describe its provisions.

I desire particularly to impress on women the fact that Tuesday in Easter week is the day for vestry meetings and parochial elections of churchwardens and other officials, that

women ratepayers have equal rights with men in such elections, and I would urge them to assert these rights by taking part in the elections whenever practicable. Thus Tuesday in Easter week would in parishes become what the first of November is in boroughs, a day when thousands of women in different parts of England may be seen taking part in public affairs, forming a demonstration of women electors, and giving a practical proof that women desire and care for the suffrage.

The Public Health Act of 1848 contains an interpretation clause in virtue of which, to use the clumsy and ungrammatical phraseology of our legislators, "words importing the masculine gender are deemed and taken to include females." There seems to be nothing to prevent women from becoming members of Local Boards of Health; and I cannot help thinking that some of the energy which is successful in keeping the insides of our houses clean and well ordered might be usefully extended to the care of the outside arrangements for the same end.

The Municipal Corporations Act was originally intended to apply to men only. When its operation was extended to women in 1869 the extension was specifically declared to be to the right of voting for councillors, auditors, and assessors. It seems therefore probable, though not absolutely certain—because the question has never been raised in such a form as to call for a legal decision—that women are not eligible for election to Town Councils.

The Elementary Education Act, on the other hand, was from the beginning intended by its framers to include women in all its provisions. Women have not only the right to vote, but to sit on School Boards, and to be elected to any official position in connection with the work for which men are eligible. A woman may be chairman, vice-chairman, or clerk of a School Board, and ladies actually fill such offices.

The principle on which this part of the Act was based is that, as half the children to be educated are girls, women have an equal right with men to regulate the conditions of the education. But if this is allowed in the case of education, its application cannot be logically arrested here. Half the people to be taxed are women, half the people to be governed are women, half of the people whose interests are affected by the national policy are women; women therefore have as much right to a share in regulating these matters as they have to a share in the regulation of education.

Political freedom begins for women as it began for men, with freedom in local government. It rests with women to pursue the advantage that has been won, and to advance from the position that has been conceded to them in local representation to that which is the goal of our efforts—the concession of the right to a share in the representation of our common country.



The principle on which this part of the Act was based is that as half the children to be educated are girls, women have an equal right with men to regulate the conditions of the education. But if this is allowed in the case of education, its application cannot be logically arrested here. If all the people to be taxed are women, half the people to be governed are women, half of the people whose interests are affected by the national policy are women; women therefore have as much right to a share in regulating these matters as they have to a share in the regulation of education.

Political freedom begins for women as it began for men, with freedom in local government. It rests with women to pursue the advantage that has been won, and to advance from the position that has been conceded to them in local representation to that which is the goal of our efforts—the extension of the right to a share in the representation of our common country.

A LETTER

TO THE

RT. HON. JOHN BRIGHT, M.P.

FROM

A LADY IN "THE GALLERY."

London:

PRINTED BY E. MATTHEWS & SONS,
54, BERWICK STREET, & 377, OXFORD STREET, W.

1876.

TO THE RT. HON. JOHN BRIGHT, M.P.

London, May, 1876.

SIR,

I listened to your Speech in the Women's Suffrage debate with painful interest.

If I had any personal feeling with regard to your public opposition to a reform which you once supported, and for which your nearest relatives have given years of labour, this feeling was second to another. My chief regret lay in my belief that history would have to record that your long and useful career had been stained at its close by an ungenerous act to your countrywomen.

I felt "the pity of it" when you rose with pale face and laid a trembling hand on the table before you for support, whilst, with hesitating accents, you repeated against us the worn out arguments you have so often, and so mercilessly, exposed when uttered by your opponents.

The bench on which you sit has often, as you know, done its utmost to obstruct the cause of the Representation of the People. If it is to play that part again, should it not be represented by some other voice than yours?

I watched you, and I watched the faces on our side the House. If you looked ill at ease in your novel *rôle*, the liberal benches contained anxious and constrained countenances. They reminded me of those we used to see on the other side of the House when Mr. Disraeli was engaged in the process of "educating" the conservatives to "Household Suffrage." You are now submitting the liberal party to an opposite species of training, and this is the doctrine you wish to enforce:—that it would be a most dangerous thing for the Constitution and social life if Household suffrage should become a reality.

If it were less pathetic, there would be something irresistably comic in these two pictures of the education of the conflicting parties of the State by their respective leaders in principles radically opposed to those they commonly profess. On the one hand we have a great conservative statesman diligently educating his party to liberalism; on the other we have a great liberal statesman industriously training his followers in the traditions of toryism. All that is wanted to complete the parallel is that Mr. Disraeli should rise and retort on you the taunts you have so often hurled at him for poaching on other people's manors.

I wish to address you with the greatest respect, for the women who are now working for the right of representation owe you much.

You have been in the past the true expounder and defender of political justice; you have fearlessly assailed power in high places which oppressed the weak; you have contended against privilege on behalf of the people; you have denounced class legislation, and you have destroyed the theory of "virtual representation;" you have made the English people care for, and understand the meaning and use of representative institutions.

Who ever thought to see John Bright plead for privilege! Who ever thought to hear him praising indirect or "virtual representation!" or saying that people "did not suffer in the least from not having what was called direct representation in that House," and expounding to his astonished audience that it is "no advantage" to the governed to be able to select their governors!

You say that our "Bill is based on an assumed constant and irreconcilable hostility between the sexes." It is, on the contrary, based on the belief in the constant and trustful sympathy between the sexes. We believe that it is entirely owing to this sympathy, and to the necessary mutual dependence of men and women that the present unjust legal position of women does not make *every* home wretched.

We are assured that men are willing to do us justice; we are equally assured that they don't know how. You, who came forward as the defender of family peace and male justice, are still obliged to confess that men fail in justice, sometimes through ignorance. That confession is all we require. Is it possible you can believe that men alone ought to have the prerogative of declaring what is just and what is unjust in legal relations of the sexes, or in the laws which govern women? If men were to carry out such a theory in our houses, what would become of us? Why, all the life and joy and heart of the household would die out, if women had no voice in its interests, but were in fact—what they are in law—the dull slaves of their master.

Our Bill is based, then, on faith in men, not on hostility to them. Do we assert hostility when we affirm that we are likely to be better judges of our own feelings, and views, and interests, and grievances than anybody else can be? And do not millions of women love men and care for their interests, and work day and night for them, as much and more than men do for women? Yet would you think a demand for the entire exclusion of men from political representation on the ground of this devotion reasonable?

Our Bill is based on the belief inspired by your own words, "no class can legislate for another class." You say women are not a class. Let us not quarrel about words. If a woman believes she has a right to something, and the law allows a man to take it from her by force, it will take a great deal to persuade her that she does not belong to a class widely separated from the robber, even though he should bear the name of "husband."

Women are more than half the nation, and when they tell you in gentle and dignified language that they are treated as a class, that they are legislated for as a class, that the delicate instincts and feelings you are so anxious to shield are daily outraged by the Acts of a Parliament of which you were a Member, and of a Government in which you held high

office; when they can say that, though thus deeply responsible and holding your own female relatives so "near to your heart," you have, yet, during eight years, never raised your voice in protest, nor lifted a finger in this matter on behalf of the miserable daughters of the people, how can you ask them to believe that the House of Commons, as at present constituted, is better able than yourself to represent the honour and safety of their countrywomen?

You say the House is disposed to judge fairly on all questions affecting the property of married women. It is true that the "Married Women's Property Bill," which professed to give women equal rights of property and contract with men, passed a second reading in 1873, and was voted into Committee, where it remained entombed till the close of the Session. Why? There was a large majority in its favour, and the only reason I can find is, that every time it came up for discussion not 40 Members could be got to take the trouble to keep a House and vote it through Committee. It was counted out six times in that Session. Do you think if it had been a "Married Men's Property Bill" this would have happened? Yet the Members of the last House were as well supplied with mothers and wives and daughters and sisters as the Members of the present House. The conclusion we are driven to is in strict accordance with the principles you have always preached, and which you now appear shocked to find that we have learned by heart. Human nature is a curious study. Some months ago a man murdered his wife in a savage manner. When asked his motive for the crime, he said, because he "*loved her so much!*" It is obvious from this, that even love requires sometimes to be controlled and directed in the particular mode of its manifestation. It is true, however, that the tenderest and kindest feelings may exist in the hearts of men towards women, and yet that men may act in a way distinctly prejudicial to women's interests. It is the moving force of direct political responsibility to women that is required in the

House of Commons. Effusive tenderness is seen to most advantage at home, where it never need be hurt by any signs of incredulity.

Now I have no intention of detailing our grievances to you, because you evidently consider it "monstrous" that we should have anything to complain of, and—if I may judge from the tone of your speech—still more monstrous that we should think fit to make our complaints public. You also deny that if cause for complaint existed, it would be a "sufficient argument for asking for a vote." I will only remark that it is one of the main grounds upon which men have hitherto asked for votes, and it is the reason which you have always deemed unanswerable when demanding the enfranchisement of your own sex.

Your main argument against our plea appears in the form of an indignant question why we should not be able to trust ourselves absolutely in the hands of our male relatives. Well, I may say in answer that you yourself consider these male relatives so "fierce and unscrupulous" that you are unwilling even to allow us once in five years to be canvassed by them, lest the "taint" of their social and political corruption should infect us. Do I speak too strongly? I only use your own words, "humiliation," "shame," "disgust," "taint and pollution." If these words are rightly applied to the political doings of our husbands and fathers and sons, we are sorry for them; but we don't understand why, under the circumstances, we should be called upon to give them, unhesitatingly, absolute control over the greatest interests and over the most secret actions of our lives. You cannot, I think, in consistency, tell us that men who would be willing to degrade us in order to obtain our votes, are yet sure to act towards us like chivalrous gentlemen in the House of Commons.

Another inconsistency strikes me—but your speech is so full of them that if it had been spoken by a woman it would have been used by our opponents as a perpetual peg on

which to hang the charge of the logical incapacity of the sex—you give us your theory, that the interests of men and women are identical, and yet you say you “would vote for the measure if you were voting solely in the interests of men.” Surely this throws up the case, for it distinctly implies that men have interests, not only separate from, but antagonistic to those of women.

Although I shall not detail our grievances, I will take one case—the case of the law of primogeniture, because as you have a deep rooted hatred to that system, it will serve as an illustration to bring to your mind the added indignity which women suffer, as women, in connection with it. You ask, “What can be more unjust than that?” And I answer, the position of women in relation to that law is more unjust than the position of the younger sons. In the first place, men have it in their power to alter this law whenever it pleases them so to do; in the second, not all the sons are disinherited, though only one succeeds to the property. There is always a chance for each. But although a woman is the first-born she may never inherit the patrimony. She is ignominiously thrust on one side in favour of her younger brother, or sometimes of the more distant male relation. “What can be more unjust than that?”

You allude to the greater mercy shown to women criminals than to men; but in the cases you have mentioned it is not the law (for women are tried under the same laws in these cases as men), but the administrators of the law who are what you call “merciful.” To avoid a difficulty, however, let us grant that the English law—though, as Judge Coleridge says, “a disgrace to a civilized country” when it deals with the poor toiling mothers of the nation—is soft and lenient to women murderers and other criminals. You shall have all you can get out of that argument. Still I find it a little hard that because your sex is too weak to deal impartially with criminals who are women, that this should be given as a reason for refusing the small measure of justice

we ask for your wives, your sisters, your mothers, and your daughters. Is it not truly astounding that husbands and brothers and fathers and sons should be so terribly afraid of giving votes to duly qualified relatives so “near to their hearts and sympathies?”

But who are the women who are asking this boon? It appears that an Hon. Member has told you that “wherever he goes all the best women seem to be against this measure.” Did you inform him that your own daughter, Helen Bright Clarke, is working and speaking before large audiences on behalf of the enfranchisement of her sex?—or that you own sisters, Mrs. McLaren, wife of the Member for Edinburgh, and Mrs. Lucas, have given it their constant and hearty support?—or that the daughter of your old friend, Charles Sturge, is a strenuous advocate of this measure. If there are any better women than these, they have not happened to cross my path.

You might have told that Hon. Member that there is hardly a woman engaged in any work for the good of her sex or mankind, from Frances Power Cobbe and Mary Carpenter to Josephine Butler, who does not believe that this measure is necessary. It has received also the warm approval of such women as Harriet Martineau, Mrs. Somerville, Mrs. Grote, and Florence Nightingale. Who and where are the “best women” who oppose it?

You say “the country has a right to decide how it will be governed.” How is it deciding? I appeal to public opinion out of doors shown by the yearly increased mass of petitions in favour of the “Bill to Remove the Electoral Disabilities of Women.” I appeal to the hundreds of crowded meetings that have been held in every part of the country, which have passed resolutions affirming the equal electoral rights of men and women, on grounds even of political expediency. I appeal to the Reform Union Conference lately held in Manchester, which has adopted an equal Suffrage as a part of its platform. This Union, I

believe, represents over seventy towns. I appeal, lastly, to the decision—the unanimous decision—of the “Council of Four Hundred” at Birmingham—your own constituency—which you do not represent in this matter, as it has repeatedly, in public meeting, pronounced its verdict in favour of our cause.

Do not say that we wish “to arm the women of this country to defend themselves against their husbands, their brothers, and their sons.” Rather say, We wish to send true men, armed through the ballot box, with power and right to speak authoritatively in our behalf to the House of Commons, and so to put an end to the unseemly differences of Members, who, judging each by the gossip of his own little coterie, presume now to speak in our name without having received our authority.

In conclusion, here is the criticism of a Birmingham paper on your doctrine of physical force :—

“Mr. Bright says, ‘If all men and women voted, the general result must be the same, for by an unalterable natural law strength was stronger than weakness, and in the end, by an absolute necessity, men must prevail.’ Here is the open and undisguised advocacy of the law of force as opposed to the law of right. It is not a new argument, but one which has been used as long as we have had any political history. The only new feature is the promulgation of the worst principles of Toryism in the name of Liberalism. It would, however, be unfair to call such a principle Toryism—it is barbarism. The vital principle of civilised life is the admission of right irrespective of power.”

I am, Sir,

A LADY IN THE GALLERY of the House of Commons on the 26th of April, and a devoted adherent of the principles for which you have suffered and toiled for forty years.

THE
ENFRANCHISEMENT OF WOMEN
THE LAW OF THE LAND.

By SIDNEY SMITH.

PRICE THREEPENCE.

MANCHESTER: A. IRELAND & CO., PALL MALL.
LONDON: TRÜBNER & CO., LUDGATE HILL.

1879.