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OF

WOMEN

BY

MRS. STUART MILL

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ENFRANCHISEMENT

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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; numerously 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 coextensive. 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 rivalities 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 kindliness, 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 divinior* 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.

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THE RIGHT OF WOMEN

TO EXERCISE

THE ELECTIVE FRANCHISE.

BY

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THE RIGHT OF WOMEN TO EXERCISE THE ELECTIVE FRANCHISE.

ON looking abroad into society as it is at present constituted, one is very much struck with the inconsistency exhibited between the theoretical maintenance and approbation of certain fundamental political principles and the cool *insouciance* with which their applicability is denied to the numerically larger section of the subjects of the Empire. I allude to the indiscriminate civil disfranchisement of all women, under all circumstances, without their consent; and in defiance of the recognition and adoption of principles of government which legitimately include their civil rights as subjects, in common with those of all other subjects. Now it is of no use expecting women to be angels before their time; and equally futile is the expectation that they will voluntarily submit to be regarded and treated as amiable ciphers in a world full of stirring interests, and as much designed for their self-development as for that of the other great branch of the human family. It is a common and very popular fallacy, that women have nothing to do with politics: but—as Madame de Staël said to Napoleon, on his telling her abruptly, he "*hated* women who meddled in politics,"—"Still, if we are to lose our heads, it is very natural to ask the reason why." In like manner we may say,—If laws are made, affecting our persons, property, and children; if taxes are imposed which we have to pay; if other classes enjoy certain privileges which we do not; it *is* very natural to take some interest in such matters, and ask the reason why.

It seems to be expected by some, that women should be an order of beings very much above feeling such trifles as political, civil, or educational disabilities; that they should be above needing any stimulus to develop their faculties; that it should be natural and pleasant to them to have their ambition mortified from their youth upwards; and that by taking refuge in a certain elevated moral purity, and superiority to external circumstances, they should show to the world how much true greatness can afford to dispense with its privileges, honours, and distinctions,—forgetting that this superiority is only the result of a lifetime of active

development and virtuous discipline. By others women are considered to be so much beneath the capability of taking any interest in matters affecting the condition of large masses on a comprehensive scale, and to be so absorbed in minute details, frivolous pursuits, and narrow-minded prejudices, as to be unworthy of having their just claims as citizens considered. That there are individuals of both these classes is true; but, on the one hand, we are not justified in expecting such a high state of sustained superiority from the masses, in the present imperfect state of human nature; nor, on the other, are we justified in limiting the feminine development to so low a stage. If public opinion dictate the disabilities and restrictions under which we labour, it is high time that it should be stemmed, and directed into other channels; if legal enactments have this restrictive tendency, the bases on which they rest should be re-examined, to see if they be instituted in accordance with the fundamental principles of human nature in the feminine organization, and its progressive character. If found defective, they should be abolished, or altered to suit existing or future circumstances. Law is either an embodiment of public opinion, or it is not. If it is, the endeavour must be made to influence public opinion in favour of a reform. If not, a direct application to the Legislature is all that will be necessary to ensure the removal of those disqualifications which appear so glaringly unjust, and so injurious in their results to the welfare and happiness of that section of the human race, which has hitherto been subjected to their influence.

It would be hard indeed to show why the political and civil rights of the one sex should be considered of more importance than those of the other. To both was committed the dominion of the world; both require the same means for their development, and possess the same capabilities of judging what is conducive to it. Man has no faculties which are not also possessed by women; and although his physical strength is undoubtedly greater, there is no reason to conclude that this gives rise to moral and intellectual superiority. Rather the contrary, indeed; for we rarely find the highest manifestations of mind or the most sublime conceptions of God and human destiny, combined with the greatest amount of muscular development. It has been said that this superior physical strength does give a certain degree of power to the one sex over the other, which might be used for the purpose of intimidation, and that as women would thus vote under influence it would not be safe to entrust them with the elective franchise. This looks like substituting a positive evil for a probable one. In an age of barbarism there might be some show of reason in such an argument: surely, however, in a Christian country like this, which makes pretensions to a high civilisation, such

a justification cannot be valid to any great extent. At any rate there is this circumstance attending the concession of political rights to a class, from whom they have been hitherto unjustly, in my opinion, withheld, viz., that there is no obligation on individuals to exercise them, if they really think it advisable not to do so; or if they should be afraid of the ill effects which might ensue to themselves, from the resentment of their male relations, in consequence of a line of conduct being pursued which the latter might deem adverse to their supposed interests. It would be very hard, however, if a whole class, comprising the majority of the inhabitants of the kingdom, should be conventionally disqualified for the exercise of *all* political privileges, because some individuals might not be in a position to avail themselves of such privileges. As some writer aptly observes, "a victim may be necessary occasionally;" but when the number of victims amounts to hundreds of thousands, we may well doubt the necessity of such victimisation."

There is a great diversity among political writers as to what constitutes "rights," and there appears to be no fixed standard of estimating them. With respect to the right of representation, some contend that it is inherent or natural; and others, that it is only properly exercised when consistent with the interests of the community to which we belong.

The first of these positions would close our case, for if the right of representation be inherent, it is as much so in women as men; unless it can be proved that women are not human beings in the same sense that men are,—a position, I presume, that no one will now hold. I know it has been argued that women have, properly speaking, no rights—on the ground that they have no power to enforce them. If might constitute right, this position would be tenable. As however in the moral world it is generally considered that the law of justice takes precedence of the law of force, I need not waste time in combating the arguments of the upholder of such an opinion. One can only wonder, what peculiar combination of circumstances could produce an idiosyncrasy capable of seriously advocating a position involving such manifest absurdities; and with the "humanity" which he would kindly show to beings who had no rights, wish him a clearer insight into the nature and conditions of our common existence.

We come then to the consideration of how far the extension of the franchise to women is consistent with the interests of the community.

The argument *à priori*, as it presents itself to my mind, may be stated as follows; premising that the first clause is an extract from a work of the elder Humboldt's, and that the others are to be found in any work on political economy.

"Government is an agent for the production of effects relating

essentially to individuals; *not indeed to special selected or favoured individuals*, but to all alike, whether as the case of each arises for the action of government, or as the general effect is equally partaken by all."

The true end of government is the happiness of all the individuals subject to its control, the aggregation of whom is included in the term "subjects."

The British Constitution is acknowledged to have this end in view, viz, the happiness of its subjects.

Civil liberty is necessary to happiness; therefore all subjects are entitled to civil liberty.

Women are a class of individuals comprised in the term subjects. As such, therefore, the British Government is bound to consult their happiness and grant them civil liberty.

The question then arises—What is civil liberty? and also, Why is its application different with respect to men and women, both of whom are equally subjects? The definition given by Paley is as follows:—

"*Civil Liberty is the not being restrained by any law but what conduces in a greater degree to the public welfare.*"

Now it does not lie within my province to determine the *amount* of civil liberty proper to be enjoyed by subjects; but it *does* lie within that province to inquire if Government is justified in fixing the amount in a manner so arbitrary, as to exclude one-half (or at present the majority) of its subjects, from the same liberty as that enjoyed by the other and more favoured half; and *that on no other grounds* than a mere physical difference, upon the existence of which no human being was ever consulted, and which no human being can ever alter. If Government be an agent for the production of effects relating equally to all classes, and not to "special, selected, or favoured" classes, how comes it that the exercise of one of the most important rights of civil liberty, that of representation in municipal councils and legislative assemblies, is accorded to one-half its subjects, on certain specified conditions, and denied to the other half *in toto*, though both are capable of attaining to the possession of the requisite qualifications—except, indeed, that impossible one to the aggrieved party, viz., change of sex? The assumption is, I presume, that women are incapable of using the elective franchise to their own or the public advantage. But I object to such an *ex cathedrâ* assumption. I ask, who are the judges of that incapability? and has it been proved, to the satisfaction of all parties, that their interests *are* best consulted by the present arrangement? It seems to me a case no better than this:—Self-constituted, interested, and partial judges have given a decision against us without trial; have acted upon that decision without our consent; and continue to justify it without sufficient evidence of its beneficial results.

Paley proceeds to say, that the above definition of civil liberty intimates, 1st, That restraint itself is an evil; 2ndly, That this evil ought to be overbalanced by some public advantage; 3rdly, That the proof of this advantage lies upon the legislature; 4thly, That a law being found to produce no sensible good effects, is a sufficient reason for repealing it, as adverse and injurious to the rights of a free citizen, without demanding specific evidence of its bad effects.

If this reasoning be correct—and it obviously is so—then I am warranted in saying: 1st, that the restriction to which women are subjected in being deprived of their representative rights is an evil; 2ndly, That this evil ought to be overbalanced by some public advantage; 3rdly, That the Legislature is bound to prove this advantage; 4thly, That if the present law on this subject is such as to produce no sensible good effects, we are justified in demanding its repeal, as adverse and injurious to the rights of free women, without being required to give specific evidence of its bad effects.

If the feminine public choose to wait while the Legislature proves satisfactorily to their minds the advantages attending their exclusion from political privileges, it is my belief that they will have to wait until the end of time. I have in vain endeavoured to discern any valid argument, adduced either by the Legislature or the general public, against the exercise of these rights by women. Ridicule is a very powerful weapon, and when backed by powerful argument, is apt to prove irresistible; but when satire alone is directed against any cause, one is tolerably safe in inferring the absence of more convincing methods of action. Unfortunately many minds, as far as the argumentative faculties are concerned, are quenched by the *reductio ad absurdum* process to which the advocacy of woman's political rights is usually subjected in this country; and as what is not advocated is commonly confounded with what IS, a curious amalgam is thereby often cleverly formed, which really *does* afford scope for wit and satire. One cannot therefore wonder that many shrink from exposing their sensitiveness to such rude blasts, and prefer to take refuge in quiet submission to things as they are; though still retaining an under current of embittered feeling, which betides no good to their own happiness or the public welfare. I no longer belong to this class; and will therefore make the endeavour, although not bound to do so by the terms of the above argument, to show:—

1st, That positive evils result to women, and to society at large, from the restrictive policy in question, in addition to the negative evil of unnecessary deprivation of right.

2ndly, That the vague objections floating in the public mind against a more equitable arrangement of civil rights are unfounded, inconsiderate, and puerile.

The first evil of a restrictive civil policy applied to women, as such, is that it introduces into the Constitution an absurd principle, and one which furnishes *a precedent* injurious to the interests of women in other respects. The principle to which I allude is that of *a physical condition being applied as a test of moral fitness.* Here we have a Government—professing to consult the happiness of all its subjects indifferently—annexing to the full enjoyment of certain important rights a condition which is totally unattainable by one-half its subjects, owing to the very laws of their organisation,—no amount of talent, wisdom, virtue, knowledge, genius, or even property! entitling an individual of this unfortunate section to the full exercise of representative rights. Now, it is plain that Government here shows a preference to a select, special, and favoured class; not professedly on the ground of superior capabilities, but on a purely physical condition, to the possession of which no merit can be attached, or to the want of which no blame can be due. Now, if this principle of class legislation be admitted, where are we to stop? What guarantee have we that this is to be the only instance? How do we know but that in course of time, another or half-a-dozen other classes may have their interests preferred on grounds just as arbitrary? Why stop at the physical distinction of sex? Why not insist on red hair as a necessary qualification? or a particular tint of complexion, or a certain style of nose, or some unattainable number of arms and legs? for it is obvious that Government might just as well expect its present disqualified subjects to become centipedes as males. If a physical test be admissible *(which I humbly suggest it is not)*, I would recommend a particular size and shape of *brow*, as the most sensible one, and appoint national phrenological tribunals to determine hard cases. Human institutions are necessarily imperfect; still it is probably of some importance that they should be adapted to existing, and not to impossible, conditions of human nature.

Government at present affixes the exercise of important civil rights to the possession of a certain amount of property, presupposing a certain degree of intelligence in the possessors thereof. Now, these conditions are fulfilled, both with respect to property and intelligence; for no one will deny that there are large classes of women in this country equal, and often far superior, to many classes of men who are in the enjoyment of their civil rights; and yet these privileges are withheld on account of a physical condition which it is utterly impossible to remove. Ay! and not only that, but they would continue to be withheld, under the present system, were the property and the intelligence possessed by women ten times greater than the amount possessed by the favoured sex.

If the only evil arising from the institution of a disqualifying

physical test were the exclusion of women from the enjoyment of special civil rights, there might not be such an urgent necessity for its removal; but unfortunately it forms a dangerous precedent, injurious to the interests of women in other respects. It leads to men being considered generally of more importance than women in every scale of the social fabric; it has its influence on education, on division of property, and on social advancement. It forms part of a restrictive system, the tendency of which is to deny to women the exercise of their noblest faculties; to exclude them from equal facility of access to the means of intellectual cultivation; and to consign them to such a state of passive stagnation as the social duties required of them will allow. To any individual who, by natural vigour of character, succeeds in overstepping the boundaries of contented ignorance, it interposes an almost impenetrable barrier to the efforts made by the imprisoned mind to attain a region where its operations can be made to tell, and produce results—instead of wasting itself on idle fancies, fruitless conjectures, and weary dullness. If a human being be sensible of the greatest amount of happiness on attaining the highest reach of the faculties, that is assuredly a happiness to which woman has not yet attained; nor will she be in a favourable position to attain it until the present state of public opinion is so much changed as to induce external circumstances more favourable to her development. Society, while it requires the expansion of man's faculties, dictates the suppression of woman's in all directions save one, and that one totally inadequate to satisfy the wants of her nature. Exertion is inculcated on the one hand, to be rewarded by honour; self-sacrificing *inertia* on the other, to be rewarded by contempt; which, however lacquered over by gallantry, has been, and still is, the lot to which we must submit in bitter resignation, or with whatever other feeling of martyrdom we can summon to our aid.

Another injurious influence created by this tacit assumption of feminine incapability to use the elective franchise with advantage is, that it degrades us in our own eyes; and whatever lowers the self-respect of the women of any country is prejudicial to the highest interests of that country. It causes US to think our own time and talents of less importance to the State than those of the other sex, and conduces to frivolity of mind and habits. We often really BECOME inferior by thinking ourselves so; and lose the ambition to exercise and develope those faculties of the mind, the absence of which is taken for granted, and the legitimate sphere for which is withdrawn. Treat women as if they were incapable of using the elective franchise with advantage to the community, and they speedily become so, and suffer at the same time a diminution of those qualities which would enable them to use it rightly,

and the possession of which would be so advantageous to the public in other respects. Besides, whatever degrades us in our own eyes lowers that self-respect which is one of the most powerful auxiliaries on the side of virtue, and the absence of which inevitably offers a wide field for the operation of the most vicious influences which can be brought to bear upon the strength and stability of a nation.

Women are in a position widely different from that of the present unqualified classes of men. The latter may by exertion attain to the fixed qualifications. The impediments indeed to what is called *universal* suffrage arise from defective education and a low state of intelligence and morality among the excluded classes. Were these evils removed, it appears to be a universally recognised principle, that every man would be equally entitled to the right of representation. But the case is different with us. Here Government *assumes* that wherever its subjects happen to be of the feminine gender, that THEREFORE they are incapable of attaining to the requisite amount of intelligence. In this belief children of both sexes are brought up: the one sex naturally concluding that it has rights beyond the other; and that other, if it consider the subject at all, doing so with a feeling of depreciation and under-estimation which, while it materially affects happiness, also lessens that vigour of character which is so essential to the performance of a great and noble part in the world. This civil inequality, in conjunction with some others which may probably be enlarged upon at some future time, causes us to consider our SEX the greatest misfortune that could have happened to us, and leads us to upbraid Nature for evils which are really produced by the past and present defective arrangements of society.

Besides its more immediate effect on ourselves, another evil of the present system is that it tends to bring women into *general* contempt; and this, by its reaction on man, contributes to lessen maternal influence at a period of life when it ought to be of essential service. It cannot but be obvious that on that sex to whom is committed by nature the formation and guidance of the young, the supposed collective wisdom of the country has stamped the broad seal of incompetency to use the elective franchise not only with advantage to the interests of the public—but without positive injury to them. This of itself is a great and national insult to us, and seriously calculated to impair those feelings of patriotism which it should be the object, as it is most certainly to the advantage, of the State to foster in the minds of all its subjects and especially in the minds of those who are liable at any time to assume such a relation to the State as shall determine, to a very considerable extent, the principles and conduct, both of the individuals subject to its control, and also of those to whom the

administration of its affairs will be committed. Again: how can our youth respect that maternal judgment which they see publicly despised and rated below par? what importance can they attach to the influence of a mother, however wise and enlightened she may be, when they see the contempt in which her sex is held in all matters relating to the higher faculties of our common nature; affection may not decline, but respect must, especially after a course of instruction in history and the classics, where the sex is represented in every stage of insignificance, degradation, and slavery in which it has been our hard lot to exist. The inculcation of a higher-toned morality, either in public or private life, than that which usually prevails is constantly met with such expressions as, "Pshaw! what do women know about such things?" and treated in the light of a Quixotic impossibility. We get credit for *meaning* well, but for lacking judgment and not understanding what we are talking about. This is especially the case with that class of youths who think it manly to show themselves out of "leading strings" at an age when they probably most require them. I am far, however, from deprecating independence in action and principle, even at a *very* early age, where the education has been judicious; but at *no* age ought sons to have the opportunity for believing that the influence which has been exercised over them in childhood and youth is one, the memory of which in manhood they may learn to despise, and which they may think it a weakness in themselves to have ever allowed.

The very terms used to express our disenfranchisement are tolerably significant of the estimation in which we are held. As stated by M'Culloch, who is not at all singular in his expressions, they stand thus:—"Certain persons are altogether disqualified from being electors; some for ever, as *women and idiots;* and others during the existence of the disability only. In the latter class are to be ranked persons attainted of treason or felony, or convicted of bribery, perjury or subornation of perjury, minors, and aliens." We have verily every reason to be proud of our company. Womanhood then is to be classed with idiocy, immaturity, treason, perjury, bribery, lunacy, and alienation!! We hope the feminine public like the connection, and will show their appreciation of its fitness by their usual silent acquiescence.

Another evil attending the exclusion of women from all participation in the affairs of their country is that it tends to narrow their views by condemning them to the exclusive contemplation of things on a small scale, without reference to the relative proportion such a scale may bear to one of a wider and more general range. This narrow-mindedness interferes with their happiness in many ways: by withdrawing from their perception many of its sources; by leading them to magnify trifling evils, to attach un-

due importance to their own private concerns, and also to trifling details and conventional customs, not in themselves of the slightest consequence. It cuts off the appreciation of talent developed in pursuits highly important to the general interests of humanity, but which meets with no encouragement from one large class,—because it never comes under the actual notice of that class. It is a fact that however great the pleasure enjoyed by the possessor of any talent in exercising and developing it, and in contemplating the beautiful and valuable results attained by its exercise, the pleasure and benefit is not confined to the possessor alone, but is shared by all who can appreciate such talent and results. Any influence therefore which tends to limit that appreciation is injurious to happiness. This remark of course applies to art, science, and literature, as well as to political economy.

Narrow-mindedness also leads to the exclusion of women from general conversation in society, and imposes many weary hours of restraint and *ennui* upon them, which might otherwise be spent in that attrition of mind which is attended with such beneficial results to individuals of both sexes. I do not know how it may be in the higher classes, but in the manufacturing and mercantile society in which it has been my lot to mingle the usual practice is, after a few preliminary personal inquiries, for the men to congregate in knots on one side of the room and commence animated discussions on all the questions of the day; taking for granted the incapacity of the women to add anything to the general stock of ideas, and leaving them expensively, and sometimes elegantly, dressed, in a row, looking very imposing, until some repast providentially occurs. On this there is a general rush to give them plenty to eat, and then a recurrence to the same oblivious disregard of the possibility of enjoyment or advantage in any mutual interchange of ideas and thoughts. What could women want more, than fine clothes and good eating and drinking? What indeed!

It appears however to me, notwithstanding the existing prejudice against the study of political economy by women, that the feminine element is as necessary in politics as it is in domestic life, in education, in conversation, and in religious efforts. The higher tone of morality which obtains among women would nowhere tell with better effect than on questions of a political nature; and women would easily and naturally gain comprehensiveness of mind by being mixed up with comprehensive questions. Society would then be a very different thing to what it is now, at least, with reference to our sex—who, be it remembered, are the majority. When people seek society, the rational conclusion is that they wish to interchange ideas with others who, having varieties of tastes, talents, pursuits, and opportunities of acquiring knowledge, are

fitted to convey information in ways which are not otherwise available; to awaken emotions which would else lie dormant or have no suitable sphere of action; and to sharpen and develop the faculties generally, by that exercitation of mind and emulative competition which are found so effective in stimulating the powers to their full activity. I utterly disclaim the notion that some people have, that the two sexes should never come into competition. Whatever is good for human nature, is good for both sexes of it; and in the strivings for that good there must be competition.

Another evil is the defective education which the exclusion of women from politics superinduces. If women, instead of being disheartened and discouraged in their youth by constantly hearing such expressions as, "Oh, a woman will not want this;" or, "A woman need not study that," were encouraged to employ their minds upon any branch of knowledge that came in their way, the beneficial results would soon be very apparent. Perhaps mathematics, political economy, and the sciences in general, may not be of so much practical use, in the daily business of life, to women as to men, though even this is doubtful; but as a means of discipline for the mental powers they are undoubtedly as essential, and as efficient, in the one case as in the other. When a man practises the sword or fencing exercise, the instruments which he uses may never be required again. The benefit lies in the strengthening and exercising of powers whose action may be called for at any time; and which action is necessary, both to the healthy development of the individual, and the production of desired results. By a strange social inconsistency, the mental powers of women, assumed to be already weak, are treated, on the Sangrado principle, with relaxatives; while those of man are treated vigorously with tonics. We are carefully and protectively guarded from the contamination of art, science, and philosophy, and then told that "woman has not yet contributed any new form to art, any discovery in science, any deep-searching inquiry in philosophy." Strange indeed if she had! when her education has been limited, as it has been, to the mere collection of a few isolated facts, jumbled together in the mind without order or method, and scarcely calling into action any of the faculties excepting that of memory. Besides, the advancement of any branch of human knowledge beyond its present boundaries, entails a concentration of the mind in that one direction, and the necessity of mastering all that had been previously known on the subject. This usually tasks the energies of a lifetime. Now, the social profession of the majority of women, for a considerable portion of their lives, has hitherto been exclusively considered as that of the wife and mother. Indeed, I may say ALL are taught to consider this as the great end of their being, and are trained, or rather left untrained,

accordingly. They have also been restricted to a very limited sphere of action in these departments. If an enlarged view had been taken of even these duties, feminine contributions to the stock of human knowledge would probably not have been wanting. Society has hitherto however made this fatal mistake with regard to our sex. It has aimed at the production of good (that is, obedient and economical) wives and mothers, at the cost of the subversion of all the other capacities of woman, viewed as a human being. It has been forgotten that the development of her nature towards perfection is the true end of her existence; and that the duties of wife and mother, as far as she herself is concerned, are only accessories, so to speak, of this great fact. I maintain, that in the exact degree to which GENERAL perfection is attained by woman, to that degree will she be competent to discharge the social duties incident to her humanity. Depend upon it, well-developed humanity is all-sufficing for the requirements made upon it; and that the best way of securing good wives and mothers is to call into action *all* the collateral faculties, and so produce enlightened, energetic, and mentally healthy women.

We may justly complain that society has hitherto not only restricted us to one section of our nature, but has formed a narrow estimate of the scope of that section. The absurdity of such a system is seen at once when applied to the other sex. We do not teach our sons that the sole object of their existence is to get married, and prove good husbands and fathers, according to a narrow conventional standard. We aim rather at the harmonious development of all their faculties, so as to produce the greatest number of strong, well-informed, enlightened men, having full confidence that what secures *general* efficiency will also secure *particular* efficiency in two of the leading relations of life. We also secure to them the means of independent existence, leaving them to choose their own business, profession, or pursuit, and giving them the option of marriage or not, according to inclination. Marriage with them puts no stop to the career previously marked out, and offers no check to the concentration of mind necessary to the advancement of knowledge. The study, the laboratory, and the facilities of locomotion are as available to them after marriage as before it. Indeed, it appears to be considered quite legitimate for a man to *neglect* his conjugal and parental duties to advance art, science, or philosophy, should their discharge interfere with the success of his darling project. All this is very different with women. They are kept dependent upon their parents; their tastes are seldom evolved, and still more rarely developed; they have scarcely any alternative but to marry, and when married, all previous pursuits must be given up which do not chime in with the matrimonial standard then prevailing. If they do not marry,

they must either continue dependants, or gain a precarious livelihood by any unremunerative employment they can get. I do not here pass any opinion as to this state of things. I merely mention it as a matter of fact, and as furnishing a sufficient reason why man has hitherto taken the initiative in original contributions to art, science, and philosophy. When, in addition to this, it is considered that learning and skill have not generally been considered honourable to women—that they have had no stimulus to intellectual exertion—that they are not admitted as students at universities and colleges—that owing to the influx of needy ignorance into the scholastic profession, they have rarely efficient schools and competent teachers, man will be ashamed of indulging, as he has done in all ages, his sarcastic superiority at our expense,—a superiority, be it observed, not owing to his manhood, but to his greater facilities of cultivation. Society, in effect, has reasoned thus:—woman's sphere of duty lies in one direction, man's in another; but because woman, after fulfilling the duties of the sphere assigned to her, has not yet successfully competed with man in the sphere he claims for himself, therefore woman is his inferior. Such is the logic of nine-tenths of those who discuss the relative capacities of the sexes.

The social profession of the majority of women is, as I have said before, that of the wife and mother; but besides these temporary relations to society, they sustain others, to which even the duties of these important relations must be subservient. They are human beings, standing in a certain relation to God and Eternity; coming into this world with their faculties in a state of embryo, and subject to the influence of external circumstances for their development. It is only by the use and development of these faculties that they can attain to the knowledge of what constitutes happiness and what are the true ends of their existence. How inconsistent then is it to make external circumstances such as to restrict instead of develope them, and to exclude women from all pursuits which have for their object the invigoration of some of the noblest powers of our nature! It is just as reasonable to limit man's education to the knowledge of his worldly business or profession, as to limit woman's education to a few branches of domestic and maternal duty—especially when a large minority is never called upon to undertake these duties. Now, I maintain that a knowledge of the science of government and the principles on which it is founded is highly important, nay necessary, to woman, whether viewed as simply a human being, as a wife, or as a mother. The first of these conditions implies self-government, subjection to the general laws of a community, and the laws of nature, all of which it is important to understand; the second, domestic government, as having the control and management of

household concerns and the training of servants; and the third, educational government. It is obvious, however, that the exclusion of women from politics causes the neglect of their political education, and the study of the science of government on which it is founded. It deters them from acquiring that knowledge of the affairs of their country which is so necessary to qualify them for understanding their own position in it, and for forming the minds of its citizens. It also follows that they are considered out of their place, when, in accordance with the impulses which nature has placed within them, they are led to take interest or part in those progressive movements which characterise the development of our race. It surely is important that the head of a house, and the mother of a family, should have the advantage and experience of the most enlightened views and systems of all ages with reference to the science of government, and the truest appreciation of human rights in all their different gradations. To use a technical term, she should understand the nature of the material on which she has to work, the best tools with which to work it, and the most efficient manner of using those tools. She should be able to make wise regulations, give just and impartial decisions, trace evils and defects to their sources, and remove them with judicious and uncompromising firmness. Above all, she herself should possess a well-disciplined, well-balanced mind. This knowledge, and these acquirements, can only be attained by the use of means; but if the neglect of these means be inculcated, either directly, or, as is more frequently the case, indirectly, we cannot wonder that the duties should be often inefficiently performed. I would not *withdraw* women from the domestic sphere, but I would bring a wider experience of life, more extensive knowledge, and more comprehensive views, to bear upon it; and as defects and beauties are much more perceptible on a large scale than on a small one, I would incite them to the study of public life, institutions, and governments, in every possible manner. I would make unmarried women eligible to any official appointment to which they might be duly elected or chosen. Nor need the male part of the community be alarmed at what will be considered feminine encroachments. If women *are* so much inferior, why dread their competition? If they are not, the community at large will be the gainer by the access of talent.

The extension of the franchise would give more social importance to women; would cause more deference to their opinions; and give a higher direction to their education. It was not thought beneath the dignity of the Spartan State to make the education of its feminine subjects a matter of State legislation. That education was indeed chiefly a physical one,—still, a physical education was accounted honourable in its day and generation, and was infinitely better than none at all.

All national schemes of education, however good in themselves, will be neutralised to a great extent, if the better and more enlightened education of women be not made of paramount importance. The educational reform must begin here, at the root of the matter, if it would be thoroughly efficient. It is here that the radical mischief at present lurks unestimated. Ignorant, weak-minded, and frivolous mothers will never turn out the best raw material for the action of State educational machinery, and however perfect that may be, the products will be far inferior to what they might have been, had the most strenuous efforts been directed in the first instance to the improvement of the soil, as it were, from which the raw material is produced. Instead of *excluding* women from public meetings, universities, colleges, and scientific and literary societies and institutions, an enlightened self-interest would rather dictate their compulsory attendance. If it be legitimate to interfere with the liberty of the subject, such an interference is due rather on the side of progression and improvement than on that of retrogression or compulsory ignorance.

I maintain then, that one of the best means of securing domestic and maternal efficiency is to give to women sound views of the sciences of government and political economy; and as means and incitement to this end, I would advocate such an extension of the franchise and such an opportunity of acquiring political distinction as would not be inconsistent with the discharge of their social duties.

Another evil of the present system is, that it leads to the interests of men being preferred to those of women, when they come into collision, or where the interests of the one are not identified with those of the other. This is the case in such instances as the law of entail, the law of divorce, and the distribution of intestate property.

Whatever may be thought of the law of entail, and I am not going to discuss its merits here, it is surely a relic of barbarism, that a son should be entitled by the laws of the country to turn his widowed mother out of her home—that home sanctified to her by the memory of her husband, the birth of her children, and all the endearing associations of her married life. It is surely more consonant with the honour due to that generation which is passing away, and above all to parents, to allow them the undisturbed possession of their homes and property until death severs the claim of both. The partiality in favour of a special class runs very high in this case. How would our wealthy and aristocratic peers and gentlemen feel, if on the death of their cherished partners they were compelled by a law passed without their consent, to resign their homes and the bulk of their property to their eldest daughters, or even sons, and retire upon some small remnant,

totally inadequate to support their style and rank? The hardship is aggravated in the present case by the fact that scarcely any other path to distinction is open to women, than that secured by wealth and beauty, while many honourable positions are open to men. It were surely more seemly to wait while the grass grew over the graves of *both* parents, before taking possession of that which belongs by conjugal right to the survivor, and one would think especially to that survivor who has borne the burden and heat of married life, who has had to surrender the most personal liberty, and who has had to undergo the sharpest pangs and agony of anguish to give her children bare existence, not to speak of the care and anxiety of maternal solicitude in after-life. A mother is quite as likely to care for the interests of her children, and provide suitably for the maintenance of their rank and condition, as a father is; but there is a vast difference between the enforced surrender of property which our present laws require from the mother, and the voluntary offerings of maternal affection which nature would suggest as appropriate to the requirements of her offspring.

With respect to divorce, on whatever terms it is granted, the terms should be the same to both parties. The injury is as great to the wife when the husband is unfaithful or adulterous as it is to the husband when the wife is so. The case is the same with all those injuries which legalise a plea of divorce. I am aware that this is often denied. It is said that when a wife commits adultery the husband becomes liable for the maintenance of children not his own. It is hence inferred that his injury exceeds hers, in a parallel case, by the pecuniary sacrifice which it involves. That however appears a very short-sighted view of the matter. A wife garners up her whole nature and stakes her *all* on the affection of her husband. If this fail her, life is a blank. Now, in the case of the husband, marriage fills only one department of his nature, and if his wife's affections become alienated he only suffers to a much more partial extent. The wife, therefore, suffers far more in loss of happiness than the husband in a parallel case, and the additional injury to her feelings may surely be allowed to outweigh his pecuniary liability. But, if this be disputed, it is clear that the maintenance of the HUSBAND'S mistress and illegitimate children must come from funds which would otherwise remain in the conjugal stock; therefore, as a matter of fact, the pecuniary loss is about equalised. Nothing, however, can be more partial than the law on this subject. It is easy to see which sex has had the making of it. If a woman commit adultery, her husband can turn her out of her home, deprive her of all share in their common property and all access to her children. Society shuts its doors upon her. Here she is left utterly penniless, without a ray

of love, hope, or compassion, to penetrate the darkness of her despair, and scarcely any course open to her but to plunge deeper into degradation and sin. For the very same sin in the husband the wife can obtain no redress whatever, except in extreme cases, that of a qualified divorce, which will entitle her only to such a maintenance as the Judge may deem suitable to her rank, leaving the guilty husband in possession of their home, their children, and the rest of their property. No comment is needed upon so glaring an injustice as this. Even the Jewish law, though rigorous, was impartial; both offenders were stoned to death.

In the distribution of intestate property we find the same favouritism exhibited. We should naturally and in fairness expect that the wife would be left in the same position, with reference to her family, on her husband dying intestate, as the latter is on his wife's death. She is the only surviving head of the family; it has been by the consecration of her time to the domestic duties entailed upon her by marriage, that her husband has been set at liberty to pursue more immediately the acquisition of property, for their mutual benefit: she has forfeited in his favour her right to exercise her own productive talents, and usually gives up into his hands all property accruing to her from other sources; her exertions are also fully as necessary as his are, to the proper fulfilment of the duties of their relation. Now, as long as both parties equally enjoy the property and the social comfort acquired by this division of labour, no injustice is sustained by either. In the event of the death of one of the parties, however, I would apply the mathematical axiom,—when equals are taken from equals, the results should be equal; whereas nothing can in fact be much more unequal than the distribution of intestate property, as actually determined by law. If the wife dies, the husband as before, with scarcely any exception, retains the whole of their mutual property in his hands; if she survives him, all that she is entitled to by law is one-third of the personal property, the whole of the real property going to the heir-at-law. Nor is this all the injustice; even in the disposal of the latter, no daughter can inherit while there is a single son alive, or any of his issue; and in like manner, brothers are preferred before sisters, uncles before aunts, relations on the father's side before those on the mother's; in fact, a preference is shown to the male over the female relation in every possible way. Now it strikes me, that had feminine interests been all along properly represented, no member of Parliament holding his position to any extent through the suffrages of women, would ever have given his consent to measures in which their interests are so unfairly sacrificed. This unfairness is again aggravated by the fact that in general every business or profession by which property can be acquired is monopolised by men,

to the exclusion of women. The result is such an accumulation of property on the one side as to keep the other in a state of dependence, which often renders their present life hardly worth the having. Individuals holding their necessaries, comforts, or luxuries only at the caprice of others, are compelled to forfeit their personal independence; they cannot make their outer life a correct index to their real character or principles, excepting in so far as those principles happen to coincide with the views of the party to whom they are indebted; therefore, whatever varieties of character really exist among women—and their characters are naturally as varied as man's—they must make an outward conventional approximation to the standard of feminine excellence fixed upon by man. That standard, I must confess, I consider a low one. It consists chiefly of personal beauty, amiability of disposition, and a good knowledge of domestic economy; all excellent things, be it observed, as far as they go, but totally insufficient for the happiness of the party most concerned. Men, however, usually make their stand at what they themselves most like, and not at what is best for the happiness and welfare of woman in the abstract: therefore they usually prefer thoughtless innocence to disciplined virtue; blind submissiveness, to enlightened self-control; and confiding ignorance, to comprehensive knowledge. Accordingly, as long as men constitute themselves the only channels by which social distinction can even be partially acquired by women, the latter will be apt to remain outwardly fixed at the standard of feminine excellence fixed by the former. Men have no right to complain of match-making mammas, or husband-hunting daughters, as long as the present system lasts; neither can they justly complain if they are sometimes married from other motives than those of affection.

Another evil of withholding the elective franchise from women is, that it is an undue interference with the rights of property. It is admitted that a given amount of property should entitle the possessor to certain rights and privileges. To one class of the community the acquisition of property is comparatively easy; and when acquired, the possessor is entitled to its full rights and privileges. To another class it is made as difficult as is consistent with the right of an individual to will his property to whomsoever he likes; and when it is acquired, this class may *not* enjoy its full rights and privileges. Their property goes unrepresented as long as it remains in their possession; yet it continues to be taxed up to the full amount to which it is liable.

I will now conclude my present imperfect list of grievances by a few remarks from the "Westminster Review," which, although applied by the writer to man in relation to a different subject, I will quote almost *verbatim*, as supplying, in the most concise

terms, a vehicle for the vague and floating ideas which have long been fermenting in my mind with respect to the condition of woman; of course altering the terms and application, to suit my own case, and using the word *woman* instead of *man*.

The happiness of *woman* lies not in possession, but in activity; for it is activity and not possession which strengthens and elevates the faculties. It follows from this, that *women* require a sphere in which they can freely choose where and how to exercise their faculties; and moreover, that a vast variety of situations should exist, so that each *woman* should find a sphere suited to the specialities of *her* own individual case. But dependence and submission imply authoritative direction, and lead to uniformity of situations and results. Authoritative direction suppresses the delightsome exercise of the faculties which is necessary to the growth of the individual *woman*, and deprives *her* of the choice of situation and circumstances for the exercise of *her* faculties which would otherwise naturally exist; and want of a harmonious situation enfeebles the faculties themselves. The suppression of the spontaneous action of an individual is followed by the decline of active energy and the deterioration of the moral character. Reliance on the care and provision of another is substituted for the vigour of personal interest and resolution, while essential right and wrong are confounded with mere external obedience to the governing power. To think and cater for *women* may make them easy and quiet, the great object of social arrangements, but it is not to make them substantially happy. *Women* so treated are helpless; they are overwhelmed when inevitable emergencies happen; they do not rise under the pressure, which should stimulate and strengthen them; they are dwarfed in spirit; they accomplish nothing great.

Having enumerated some of the evils arising from the exclusion of women from the exercise of their civil rights, I will proceed to examine the objections usually urged against that exercise. They are as follows:—1st. The danger of producing dissensions in married life. 2nd. The inability of women to take up arms in defence of their country. 3rd. The impropriety of women being mixed up with the riot and bustle of elections, and the more extensive machinery necessary to the registration and collection of their votes. 4th. Their ignorance of public life and public characters. 5th. The universality of the custom of excluding their suffrages.

It is often urged that the extension of the franchise to women would cause dissension in the married state, in all those cases where the vote of the wife did not merely double the vote of the husband; and that it would cause a division of interests between the two heads of a family, which would be inconsistent with their

private happiness and the public welfare. I answer, that whatever evils might arise from this source (and I believe them to be purely imaginary) the source itself is *at present* cut off by the fact that a woman by marriage loses the stipulated property qualification, her property becoming vested in the husband by law, excepting in certain cases of private settlement. Now in these comparatively few cases, if a man has so little confidence in the justice and temper of his own mind, or so little in the discretion of his intended wife, as to lead him to think that the conscientious discharge on her part of a public duty would lead to a private quarrel, no one restricts him from making an agreement with her before marriage, to the effect that her right to vote shall lie in abeyance during his life. It does however seem strange that it should be so constantly the interests of the *wife* which must be sacrificed to conjugal unity. No one ever thinks of advancing such a plea as a reason why the husband should not enjoy his full rights as a man. It seems to me that the present vast inequality of their condition furnishes far more grounds of dissension than the gradual equalisation of that condition could possibly engender. Where there is irresponsible power it is the very tritest of truisms that it will be abused; and equally true that when abused it will be resisted, as long as the wife retains any force of character at all. I must however do my countrymen the justice to say that they wield the irresponsible power with which they have been legally endowed by the wisdom (?) of our ancestors far within the limits which the laws allow them. There are many great and good men who would scorn to use the legal power to which they are entitled. Others again, who are not great and good, but mere average specimens of humanity, are restrained by public opinion from any notorious exhibition of despotism. In consequence of this the laws become to a great extent inoperative, and the enormities which they involve are lost sight of. It is only the most vicious and depraved class of husbands who exert their full legal sway. There is no species of cruelty or oppression, short of violent injury to life or limb, which they may not legally practise on their victims. So that precisely where women most need protection are they deserted by the laws of their country. I do contend, moreover, that if public opinion is strong enough to render the present laws inoperative with respect to the best part of the community, it ought to be strong enough to cause their abolition. What can be more absurd than the regulation which renders the bulk of the married women of this country legally incapable of possessing one single atom in God's universe? Divine law entrusts to a mother the moulding of a soul for immortality: human law denies her the disposal of her own wardrobe! I look forward however to a period in the world's history when marriage will no longer deprive woman of

either her individuality, property, or representative rights, when man will consider it even a degradation to himself to have ever demanded such sacrifices, and when conjugal unity will be of a spiritual and not of a despotic character. Meanwhile, the present laws, vicious as they are, afford a safe and easy opportunity for gradually extending to woman the elective franchise, without the necessity of alarming any *vested interest*. I deprecate sudden and extensive changes and domestic disunion as much as any one. If *some* changes be not made, the latter evil will inevitably occur,—if not on one side, a revulsion of human nature, the effects of which would be alarming to society as to ourselves. The present advocated extension of the franchise to all women enjoying *in their own right* the property qualification would be a moderate concession, attended with these advantages:—it would remove the insulting disqualification of sex; it would be an important, though tardy, recognition of rights which rest precisely on the same foundation as those of men; and it would *not* involve the complicated analysis of the conjugal relation in the present somewhat unfavourable conjuncture of affairs.

With respect to the denial of representative rights to women on the ground of their alleged inability to defend their country, I answer that this objection will be found singularly superficial and puerile. The only aspect under which it appears to have even a shadow of validity is the following, and it amounts to nothing more than this:—that the combined physical strength of the *feminine* population of Great Britain, in its present untrained, unprepared state, would be insufficient to repel the attacks of the united *masculine* physical force of any other country. That this is a fair statement of the argument must be allowed, for no one will deny that, if it should be deemed universally expedient to entrust the defence of all countries to the feminine section of the human race, the women of Great Britain would be able to defend their country against the women of any other country. There are many instances on record where, in cases of emergency, womanhood has shown itself fully equal to the demand for warlike exertion made upon it. There are, however, other and higher ways of contributing to the defence of our country than the mere fostering of military efficiency. The daily and hourly inculcation by woman of the sterling qualities of humanity on the rising generation, the cultivation of patriotism, self-denial, magnanimity, and vigour of character, in short, of all the constituent elements of manly and national dignity, these constitute the true duties of woman. Success in this direction stengthens the bulwarks of the country quite as much as mere physical force. Even where the latter recommends itself to the conscience as an imperative duty, it does not follow that success can be best achieved by superiority

of bodily strength. Science, skill, sagacity, forethought, and presence of mind are found to be more than a match for it. The physical weakness or strength of Archimedes was of comparatively small importance to the Syracusans so long as he could invoke in their cause the occult forces of nature; and if women were to set their inventive faculties to work in the same direction, and it were possible to convince them that killing any given number of their inimical fellow-creatures was the highest and noblest way of serving their country, I have little doubt that they would meet with fair average success, especially after an aggregated experience of some six thousand years. Be that as it may, however, (and I only adduce this as my own opinion *quantum valeat*) if it can be shown that women perform a class of duties as important to the community as those in question, the validity of the objection obviously ceases. The feminine majority of the inhabitants of this country would then be equally justified in reasoning in the same logical manner:—that because the masculine minority could not perform the duties of the division of labour assigned to women, in addition to their own, therefore *they* are not entitled to representative rights. In this way the two sexes might go on demolishing each other's rights, until, worse than the celebrated feline battle on record, there would not be even a scrap left on either side to dispute about. Now I maintain that many branches of the social duties which specially devolve on women, are of equal importance to the community with those involved in its defence, and if women were to refuse to discharge these duties there would very soon be nothing worth defending. Society virtually recognizes their importance by the fear which it exhibits lest feminine efforts should not only tend in the special direction in which they have hitherto done, but lest they should not be absolutely restricted to it. I allude more particularly to the class of duties comprised in the maternal relation, which extend far beyond the limits of the corresponding paternal duties, as they are usually discharged at least. Women could far better defend their country than men could perform paternal duties; therefore the former have quite as much right as the latter, to demand special privileges in virtue of special services.

Besides, our military operations are not conducted by the voluntary exertions of all the male inhabitants of the kingdom, but by a sectional paid force, who resort to the military profession as a means of subsistence, and who are remunerated for their labour out of the common fund. To raise this fund, women are equally taxed with men. They therefore contribute in the same way to the defence of their country as all the male inhabitants who are not connected with the military profession; nay more, they suffer the direct loss of the services of those engaged in active war, who

would otherwise fulfil to them the duties of husbands, sons, fathers or brothers, in the division of labour assigned to these relations in the social economy. Though some partial compensation is made in a few instances, yet the number of women who have to provide for their families as well as rear them, is sufficiently large to have drawn public attention to, and sympathy with, their condition; and the extent of the voluntary assistance so readily and generously tendered by the public is a sufficient indication of the estimation in which this loss is now held. On these grounds alone therefore women are entitled to share in any collateral rights.

After all, it must be admitted that war itself is an almost unmitigated evil, and that however inevitable it may be after a previous course of events has led the way to its necessity, any influence which should eradicate the *causes* of war would be an inestimable boon to the human race. Now the unaided masculine intellect has hitherto been found singularly inefficient,—both in preventing the causes of war, and also, after they have been permitted to arise, in finding any better way of settling international disputes than the barbarous custom of setting up as many men as can be conveniently got together on each side, and then bidding them kill and maim each other *ad libitum*; a leading feature of the arrangement being that the individuals actually engaged in the strife have nothing to do with the quarrel or its causes, but merely act as so much machinery, at the disposal of those who have (mis)managed affairs so as to render hostile collision in some way inevitable. Now surely this is not intended to be the normal state of things; and as the masculine intellect has not been able hitherto to solve the problem of either the prevention or satisfactory collision of the antagonistic forces of humanity, it might be as well to call into action the unexplored wastes of the feminine intellect. As union is strength, the conjunction of the two, in equal or definite proportions, might enable the State to steer clear both of Scylla and Charybdis, and so either abolish the necessity to defend the country at all, or else defend it in a more civilised and dignified manner.

As to the impropriety of women being mixed up with the riot and bustle of election scenes, and the inconvenience attending the collection of their votes, I answer, that very likely it is owing to the exclusion of woman's influence from elections, that such scenes of violence and tumult take place. Men are always less dignified when feminine influence is withdrawn and they are left to themselves; and it would certainly be a novel reason, that a class who know how to behave themselves should suffer deprivation of right, because another class did not know how to behave themselves in the excitement attending the exercise of such right. And as to the plea of the additional trouble incurred, it comes with

a very bad grace, to say the least of it, when we consider that it is not thought too much trouble to collect the taxes imposed upon this class, in common with those who enjoy the full exercise of their civil rights. Their property is taxed to the full extent of the law by the very government which denies to them its corresponding rights. If it be unfeminine to vote, it is equally unfeminine to pay taxes; therefore if the former be withheld, I claim, on their behalf, exemption from the payment of the latter.

It is often pleaded that women are ignorant of public life and character. I answer that this ignorance does not necessarily exist, but arises simply from their exclusion from all participation in public affairs. Ignorance is not the cause of their exclusion; but the exclusion is the cause of their ignorance; and besides, as I said before, however enlightened and wise they might be, the prohibition remains the same. I am far from being an advocate of universal suffrage, at least until certain necessary conditions have been complied with by the present unqualified masses; but I do maintain that those conditions should be such as are attainable by human effort. Every subject of the realm ought to have the *possibility* of acquiring the representative right, and wherever this is withheld, civil liberty is infringed.

With respect to the universality of the custom which excludes the suffrages of women; to render such a plea valid, it must first be proved that all bygone universal customs are unimpeachable. It seems to me very much like the argument used by Billy Noakes, when urged to adopt any modern improvement whatever: "Noa! noa! th' owd fashion sarved my faather and my grandfaather, and it 'll e'en do for the likes of I." Honest John Bull is nowhere more impenetrable and impracticable than when some vague, indistinct gleams of woman's rights impinge upon the hereditary and time-honoured prejudices which he deems so essential a part of his character. Like honest John of the Maypole, he will have to stare very hard and very long at the boiler, before his ideas will get clear on this point. On the bare mention of it, he sees such an array of uncomfortable homes, neglected children, henpecked husbands, buttonless shirts, and disreputable hose, that his intense bewilderment appears to unsettle his reason for the time being; and he becomes quite incapable of properly estimating the true bearings of the case. One would think that women performed their domestic duties solely in consequence of being conventionally deprived of the full exercise of their civil rights; and that directly this is accorded they must inevitably become inflated platform orators, or wrangling conceited demagogues. However, honest John aforesaid is not on the whole systematically unkind to his fairer half, or even intentionally unjust as far as his light goes; but he prefers that she should owe the present ameliorations of

her former condition to his personal gallantry or kindness rather than to higher recognised principles of justice. He would rather be an indulgent husband than a just one; forgetting that there is no place for gallantry or generosity until the claims of justice are first satisfied; and that to be properly appreciated they must be supplementary to, and not complementary of, justice.

To return, however, to the starting-point. I ask what has hitherto been the fate of all those nations who have so *universally* ignored the political rights and capabilities of woman? Why, as every schoolboy knows, they have all progressed up to a certain culminating point, and then gradually declined almost into the nothingness from whence they sprang. No one has been able to account satisfactorily for the rise and fall of nations, although several theories have been volunteered. Amongst the number, I now offer one which is as likely to be true as any other.

As it is the Divine will that the two sexes *together* shall constitute humanity, so I believe it to be the Divine intention that the influence and exertions of the two sexes *combined* shall be necessary to the complete success of any human institution, or any branch of such institution. I maintain, in consequence, that in the adoption of means to any desired end, the co-operation of both sexes is essential to success; and that in the exact degree to which the influence and exertions of the one sex are weakened or excluded to make way for the ambition or presumed advantage of the other, to that extent is a law of nature infringed, and the consequences of such infringement incurred. Woman, in the abstract, can suffer no injury in her person, influence, or rights which in the concrete does not tell upon society, and draw down upon it disastrous consequences and dire retribution. When we examine the histories of ancient nations, such as Greece or Rome, we find the combination of the sexes signally defective; the one, while itself progressive, compelling the other to submit to external circumstances, which precluded progress by cutting off the means of development. In the earlier stages of a nation, when each individual is of consequence, there is so much work to be done that the exertions of both sexes are indispensably necessary to the organisation of the state, and although a vast deal of drudgery has to be submitted to by the weaker, which may be detrimental in some degree to happiness, yet activity of any description is much more favourable to strength of mind and development of character than the luxurious indolence and passive vacuity to which women are subjected when the necessity subsides for real hard work. As long as this necessity lasts, or even as long as its influence is transmitted to posterity, a nation is not incapacitated for progress; but in process of time, as the means of subsistence accumulate, large numbers of both sexes are released from the imme-

diate necessity for exertion to supply the more urgent wants of humanity. At this stage the injury to woman begins, and the seeds of future decline in the nation are sown. Man, being physically the stronger, seizes upon the accumulated property belonging to both (for I consider that each sex properly fulfilling the division of labour assigned to it is entitled to share equally the combined results of such labour), continues to employ his faculties in commerce, art, science, or philosophy; retains the means of development in his own possession, and condemns woman to such a state of dependence upon him as shall paralyse her efforts, cripple her energies, and destroy the very *stamina* of her character. If the race of women could die out, and the population be kept up, the bad effects might vanish with the sufferers. As that is not the case, however, the enervation sustained by so large a portion of the subjects of a state, and that portion upon whom depend in so great a measure the strength and character of successive generations, in time re-acts upon the vital energy of the nation, enervating the whole population and rendering it an easy prey to those nations which are in an earlier stage of the evil, or which possess a larger proportion of productive over unproductive members. A nation is progressing, if the former preponderate over the latter; stationary, when they are pretty evenly balanced; but on the wane, when they are the minority.

Accordingly I maintain that if such a course be pursued in England, if women are to be excluded from exercising their powers in any legitimate way to which their desires or their ambition may prompt them, if their intellects are to be systematically wasted,—nay, if every advantage and every encouragement be not given to them to develop the rich but unexplored resources of their nature,—they will become a dead weight to the nation in her onward progress, and finally be the means of sinking it into that nothingness into which all those nations have fallen, which have allowed this fatal and infectious enervation to fester in their very heart of hearts. Woman should be a mine of strength to her country; a reserved force from which to replenish the ranks of those who have fallen torn and bleeding by the wayside in their conflicts with sin and error; an inexhaustible fund, from which to recruit the spent forces of continued aggression upon the kingdom of darkness and ignorance; and a stronghold of virtue, to which the vanquished may return to arm himself anew for the conflict, with higher resolves, more determined perseverance, more dauntless energy, and more indomitable will.

In conclusion, I challenge the Legislature, or the public, to show what public advantages overbalance the evils of the present restrictive policy applied to women. If there are any solid advantages gained by it, the knowledge of them will at any rate be

some solace to us in our deprivation of right; if there are none or if they do not overbalance the existing evils, the "coming Reform Bill" ought to carry the advocated extension of the suffrage to all women enjoying the stipulated amount of property, or paying the stipulated amount of taxes, in their own right.

To prevent any misconception of the objects which I have in view in thus attempting to test public opinion, and to prevent unnecessary arguments upon reforms not advocated, it may be advisable to recapitulate briefly some of the leading points of this essay.

What is claimed then for women is:—1st, The right to vote in the election of Members of Parliament, on the same conditions as the other sex. As a clause to this may be subjoined the right to have proper accommodation afforded them in both Houses of Parliament, to see how public business is actually carried on; for, if they waive their claim to share immediately in its transaction, on the ground of inexpediency, surely no one will deny their right to see that the duties *are* efficiently performed by someone, when we consider that their interests are equally involved with those of the other sex.

2nd. That mere sex shall be considered no barrier in the recognition of talent, or its advancement in the social scale; whether by means of honorary distinction, substantial reward, or official appointment.

3rd. I maintain that these concessions, so far from introducing any new principles into the Constitution, would be merely carrying out the spirit of the original formation of all government.

The evils of the present system, with the corresponding benefits of the advocated reform, may be shortly summed up as follows:—

Evils of the present system.	*Benefits of the advocated Reform.*
1st. The introduction of an absurd principle into the Constitution; viz., the recognition of a physical condition as a test of moral and intellectual fitness, and its injurious effect as a precedent.	The abolition of this absurd, unjustifiable, and injurious principle, and the withdrawal of the legislative sanction from the precedent which it affords.
2nd. The depreciation of feminine intellect in the estimation of the general public; and the deterioration of self-respect and self-reliance which it engenders in the feminine sex.	The opportunity afforded to the feminine intellect of finding its true level, and vindicating itself from the charges of inferiority daily urged against it.

3rd. The tendency which it has to produce contraction of mind by condemning women to the exclusive contemplation of things on a small scale, without reference to the relative proportion such a scale may bear to those of greater magnitude.

4th. The defective education which it superinduces.

5th. The partiality shown to one sex over the other, when the interests of the two sexes come into collision, or are not identified; and the feeling of insecurity and injustice to which this partiality gives rise.

6th. The present arrangement is an undue interference with the rights of property; the hardships being aggravated by the difficulties which women meet with in its acquisition.

The opening out of new fields of action and thought; the greater chance of forming more correct, enlightened, and tolerant opinions; from having more general data to reason upon, and more comprehensive modes of action to study.

The more liberal and enlightened education which would be rendered necessary.

The greater likelihood of all interests being fairly considered and represented; and the greater confidence which will be felt by all classes of subjects on being assured of the strict impartiality of Government.

In the proposed reform unrepresented property would become represented, irrespective of all considerations of sex in its possessor, and without interference with conjugal rights.

Another advantage, which I have not before had the opportunity of introducing, is the natural and healthy excitement which the study of politics and the recurrence of elections is calculated to promote. Woman's life in the middle classes is, and has been rendered, essentially a dull one. The necessity she is thought to be under of confining herself almost exclusively to one spot; the little variety she sees, whether of scene or character; the small number of her Creator's works upon which she is permitted to exercise her perceptive faculties; her entire withdrawal from the investigation of her Creator's laws; the necessity she is under of conforming to a stereotyped conventional standard of character; and the dedication of so considerable a portion of her time to a mere series of mechanical details of the humblest class (I call them humble and mechanical, because they merely take time, and leave the faculties unexercised); all combine to produce what may be emphatically designated a dull life. There are two classes of beings who can be happy, or rather not altogether unsatisfied, in it. One is composed of those individuals who are raised by religion into such a state of semi-perfection as human nature seems capable of in this its first stage. They rise *through* the narrow, sordid, or vulgar circumstances by which they may be

surrounded into the region of motive, and so hallow the meanest and most commonplace duty. Their whole life becomes like some beautiful poem, some abstract ideality, no longer liable to be contaminated by the contact of a gross materiality. Indeed, it seems as if they were sent expressly to prove to mankind that women have souls, a truth which appears periodically in danger of being lost sight of. The other class comprises those who, by a long course of mental inaction, have become absolutely torpid, lost in materiality; and who would feel as utterly miserable when taken out of the mechanical routine which has encrusted over their higher nature as a tortoise would on being dislodged piecemeal from his shell. The great bulk of the sex, however, may be found between these two extremes. To this large class the life which is imposed upon them is unsatisfactory; it is not in harmony with their natures; it does not afford legitimate scope for the faculties which they have a RIGHT to exercise; it does not contain sufficient elements of freedom, variety, or healthy excitement. I believe that numbers are driven, by the uninteresting monotony of their lives, into the private use of artificial stimulants. Anyone skilled in interpreting the spirit of the age may discern unmistakably that the Anglo-Saxon women generally, both on this side the Atlantic and the other, are more or less in a chronic state of uneasiness and dissatisfaction. They do not always reason upon it; they do not always shape it to their own minds. We are, in fact, as a sex, too little accustomed to analyse our own condition and wants, and speculate upon or trace the causes which help to produce our inferior chances of happiness; and we are far too much disposed to accept unfavourable conditions as our share of existence, without question and almost as a matter of course. We are apt to let the stream of events pass on without making strenuous efforts to stem the current which sets so strongly, and apparently, alas! so hopelessly, against us. Every effort which we do strive to make with the view of raising ourselves and attaining a position more favourable to health of mind and happiness, is met with such taunting ridicule and cutting sarcasm, we have so to isolate ourselves from the sympathy of our kind, that it is no wonder so few are found capable of bearing the double load of insult added to injury. It is the misfortune of our sex, that while the intellect is condemned to a greater or less degree of "*passivity*," the feelings are unduly called into exercise, and sharpened to a painful degree of sensitiveness. This artificial disproportion, by overthrowing the balance of power in the character, becomes a chief agent in causing our social subjection. It is one of the chief sources of our weakness, and goes far to incapacitate us for the great struggle which however must be made, sooner or later, before woman can rise to her true level. The only remedy for it is a

better and more enlightened and comprehensive education. "A little knowledge" is so dangerous a thing, that no time ought to be lost in increasing the amount. Men MUST be content with clever, well-informed, wise, and even intellectual wives, when no others are to be had. We must not always consider what men most like, but what is best for them. Above all, we must not depend upon the other sex too exclusively for assistance and co-operation in our efforts to raise our condition. We have very few real friends among them. There are plenty who will help us to trifle; many who would make us the mere ministers of their pleasure; many who would keep us down to a low state of existence; many who would flatter, spoil, and caress us; many even who would shelter and protect us from the very breezes of heaven, lest they should visit our forms too roughly. There are very few however who examine our real wants; who would establish and respect our just claims; who would deal as kindly with our failings and failures as we do with theirs; who would encourage our efforts at improvement, and rejoice to see us elevated into a truer and nobler life, even if it should involve a little sacrifice to themselves. Among our own sex we want fewer "Marthas" and more "Marys;" less attention to, or rather, less absorption in, the details and appliances of life, and more in its principles and spirit. Pure and unmixed Martha-*ism* is what is generally inculcated on our sex, it is indeed apparently considered the *ultima Thule* of womanhood; and until society is disabused of this idea, Woman can make no progress.

THE END.

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EXTRACTS

FROM

MR MILL'S SUBJECTION OF WOMEN.

WITH PERMISSION OF MESSRS LONGMAN & CO.

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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 expediencies, 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.

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SPEECH

OF

JOHN STUART MILL, M.P.

ON

THE ADMISSION OF WOMEN

TO THE

ELECTORAL FRANCHISE.

SPOKEN IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS,

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I RISE, Sir, to propose an extension of the suffrage which can excite no party or class feeling in this House; which can give no umbrage to the keenest assertor of the claims either of property or of numbers; an extension which has not the smallest tendency to disturb what we have heard so much about lately, the balance of political power; which cannot afflict the most timid alarmist with revolutionary terrors, or offend the most jealous democrat as an infringement of popular rights, or a privilege granted to one class of society at the expense of another. There is nothing to distract our attention from the simple question, whether there is any adequate justification for continuing to exclude an entire half of the community, not only from admission, but from the capability of being ever admitted within the pale of the Constitution, though they may fulfil all the conditions legally and constitutionally sufficient in every case but theirs. Sir, within the limits of our Constitution this is a solitary case. There is no other example of an exclusion which is absolute. If the law denied a vote to all but the possessors of £5000 a year, the poorest man in the nation

might—and now and then would—acquire the suffrage; but neither birth, nor fortune, nor merit, nor exertion, nor intellect, nor even that great disposer of human affairs, accident, can ever enable any woman to have her voice counted in those national affairs which touch her and hers as nearly as any other person in the nation.

Now, Sir, before going any further, allow me to say, that a *primâ facie* case is already made out. It is not just to make distinctions, in rights and privileges, without a positive reason. I do not mean that the electoral franchise, or any other public function, is an abstract right, and that to withhold it from any one, on sufficient grounds of expediency, is a personal wrong; it is a complete misunderstanding of the principle I maintain, to confound this with it; my argument is entirely one of expediency. But there are different orders of expediency; all expediencies are not exactly on the same level; there is an important branch of expediency called justice; and justice, though it does not necessarily require that we should confer political functions on every one, does require that we should not, capriciously and without cause, withhold from one what we give to another. As was most truly said by my right honourable friend the Member for South Lancashire, in the most misunderstood and misrepresented speech I ever remember; to lay a ground for refusing the suffrage to any one, it is necessary to allege either personal unfitness or public danger. Now, can either of these be alleged in the present case? Can it be pretended that women who manage an estate or conduct a business,—who pay rates and taxes, often to a large amount, and frequently from their own earnings,—many of whom are responsible heads of families, and some of whom, in the capacity of schoolmistresses, teach much more than a great number of the male electors have ever learnt,—are not capable of a function of which every male householder is capable? Or is

it feared that if they were admitted to the suffrage they would revolutionize the State,—would deprive us of any of our valued institutions, or that we should have worse laws, or be in any way whatever worse governed, through the effect of their suffrages? No one, Sir, believes anything of the kind.

And it is not only the general principles of justice that are infringed, or at least set aside, by the exclusion of women, merely as women, from any share in the representation; that exclusion is also repugnant to the particular principles of the British Constitution. It violates one of the oldest of our constitutional maxims—a doctrine dear to reformers, and theoretically acknowledged by most Conservatives—that taxation and representation should be co-extensive. Do not women pay taxes? Does not every woman who is *sui juris* contribute exactly as much to the revenue as a man who has the same electoral qualification? If a stake in the country means anything, the owner of freehold or leasehold property has the same stake, whether it is owned by a man or a woman. There is evidence in our constitutional records that women have voted, in counties and in some boroughs, at former, though certainly distant, periods of our history.

The House, however, will doubtless expect that I should not rest my case solely on the general principles either of justice or of the Constitution, but should produce what are called practical arguments. Now, there is one practical argument of great weight, which, I frankly confess, is entirely wanting in the case of women; they do not hold great meetings in the parks, or demonstrations at Islington. How far this omission may be considered to invalidate their claim, I will not undertake to decide; but other practical arguments, practical in the most restricted meaning of the term, are not wanting; and I am prepared to state them, if I may

be permitted first to ask, what are the practical objections? The difficulty which most people feel on this subject, is not a practical objection; there is nothing practical about it; it is a mere feeling—a feeling of strangeness; the proposal is so new; at least they think so, though this is a mistake; it is a very old proposal. Well, Sir, strangeness is a thing which wears off; some things were strange enough to many of us three months ago which are not at all so now; and many are strange now, which will not be strange to the same persons a few years hence, or even, perhaps, a few months. And as for novelty, we live in a world of novelties; the despotism of custom is on the wane; we are not now satisfied with knowing what a thing is, we ask whether it ought to be; and in this House at least, I am bound to believe that an appeal lies from custom to a higher tribunal, in which reason is judge. Now, the reasons which custom is in the habit of giving for itself on this subject are usually very brief. That, indeed, is one of my difficulties; it is not easy to refute an interjection; interjections, however, are the only arguments among those we usually hear on this subject, which it seems to me at all difficult to refute. The others mostly present themselves in such aphorisms as these: Politics are not women's business, and would distract them from their proper duties: Women do not desire the suffrage, but would rather be without it: Women are sufficiently represented by the representation of their male relatives and connexions: Women have power enough already. I shall probably be thought to have done enough in the way of answering, if I answer all this; and it may, perhaps, instigate any honourable gentleman who takes the trouble of replying to me, to produce something more recondite.

Politics, it is said, are not a woman's business. Well, Sir, I rather think that politics are not a man's business either; unless he is one of the few who are selected and

paid to devote their time to the public service, or is a member of this or of the other House. The vast majority of male electors have each his own business, which absorbs nearly the whole of his time; but I have not heard that the few hours occupied, once in a few years, in attending at a polling booth, even if we throw in the time spent in reading newspapers and political treatises, ever causes them to neglect their shops or their counting-houses. I have never understood that those who have votes are worse merchants, or worse lawyers, or worse physicians, or even worse clergymen than other people. One would almost suppose that the British Constitution denied a vote to every one who could not give the greater part of his time to politics: if this were the case, we should have a very limited constituency. But allow me to ask, what is the meaning of political freedom? Is it anything but the control of those who do make their business of politics, by those who do not? Is it not the very essence of constitutional liberty, that men come from their looms and their forges to decide, and decide well, whether they are properly governed, and whom they will be governed by? And the nations which prize this privilege the most, and exercise it most fully, are invariably those who excel the most in the common concerns of life. The ordinary occupations of most women are, and are likely to remain, principally domestic; but the notion that these occupations are incompatible with the keenest interest in national affairs, and in all the great interests of humanity, is as utterly futile as the apprehension, once sincerely entertained, that artisans would desert their workshops and their factories if they were taught to read. I know there is an obscure feeling—a feeling which is ashamed to express itself openly—as if women had no right to care about anything, except how they may be the most useful and devoted servants of some man. But as I am convinced that there is not a single member of this

House, whose conscience accuses him of so mean a feeling, I may say without offence, that this claim to confiscate the whole existence of one half of the species for the supposed convenience of the other, appears to me, independently of its injustice, particularly silly. For who that has had ordinary experience of human affairs, and ordinary capacity of profiting by that experience, fancies that those do their own work best who understand nothing else? A man has lived to little purpose who has not learnt that without general mental cultivation, no particular work that requires understanding is ever done in the best manner. It requires brains to use practical experience; and brains, even without practical experience, go further than any amount of practical experience without brains. But perhaps it is thought that the ordinary occupations of women are more antagonistic than those of men are to the comprehension of public affairs. It is thought, perhaps, that those who are principally charged with the moral education of the future generations of men, cannot be fit to form an opinion about the moral and educational interests of a people: and that those whose chief daily business is the judicious laying-out of money, so as to produce the greatest results with the smallest means, cannot possibly give any lessons to right honourable gentlemen on the other side of the House or on this, who contrive to produce such singularly small results with such vast means.

I feel a degree of confidence, Sir, on this subject, which I could not feel, if the political change, in itself not great or formidable, which I advocate, were not grounded, as beneficent and salutary political changes almost always are, upon a previous social change. The notion of a hard and fast line of separation between women's occupations and men's—of forbidding women to take interest in the things which interest men—belongs to a gone-by state of society, which is receding further and further into the past. We talk of political

revolutions, but we do not sufficiently attend to the fact that there has taken place around us a silent domestic revolution: women and men are, for the first time in history, really each other's companions. Our traditions respecting the proper relations between them have descended from a time when their lives were apart—when they were separate in their thoughts, because they were separate equally in their amusements and in their serious occupations. In former days a man passed his life among men; all his friendships, all his real intimacies, were with men; with men alone did he consult on any serious business; the wife was either a plaything, or an upper servant. All this, among the educated classes, is now changed. The man no longer gives his spare hours to violent outdoor exercises and boisterous conviviality with male associates: the two sexes now pass their lives together; the women of a man's family are his habitual society; the wife is his chief associate, his most confidential friend, and often his most trusted adviser. Now, does a man wish to have for his nearest companion, so closely linked with him, and whose wishes and preferences have so strong a claim on him, one whose thoughts are alien to those which occupy his own mind—one who can neither be a help, a comfort, nor a support, to his noblest feelings and purposes? Is this close and almost exclusive companionship compatible with women's being warned off all large subjects—being taught that they ought not to care for what it is men's duty to care for, and that to have any serious interests outside the household is stepping beyond their province? Is it good for a man to live in complete communion of thoughts and feelings with one who is studiously kept inferior to himself, whose earthly interests are forcibly confined within four walls, and who cultivates, as a grace of character, ignorance and indifference about the most inspiring subjects, those among which his highest duties are cast? Does any one suppose

that this can happen without detriment to the man's own character? Sir, the time is now come when, unless women are raised to the level of men, men will be pulled down to theirs. The women of a man's family are either a stimulus and a support to his highest aspirations, or a drag upon them. You may keep them ignorant of politics, but you cannot prevent them from concerning themselves with the least respectable part of politics—its personalities; if they do not understand and cannot enter into the man's feelings of public duty, they do care about his personal interest, and that is the scale into which their weight will certainly be thrown. They will be an influence always at hand, co-operating with the man's selfish promptings, lying in wait for his moments of moral irresolution, and doubling the strength of every temptation. Even if they maintain a modest forbearance, the mere absence of their sympathy will hang a dead-weight on his moral energies, making him unwilling to make sacrifices which they will feel, and to forego social advantages and successes in which they would share, for objects which they cannot appreciate. Supposing him fortunate enough to escape any actual sacrifice of conscience, the indirect effect on the higher parts of his own character is still deplorable. Under an idle notion that the beauties of character of the two sexes are mutually incompatible, men are afraid of manly women; but those who have considered the nature and power of social influences well know, that unless there are manly women, there will not much longer be manly men. When men and women are really companions, if women are frivolous, men will be frivolous; if women care for nothing but personal interest and idle vanities, men in general will care for little else: the two sexes must now rise or sink together. It may be said that women may take interest in great public questions without having votes; they may, certainly; but how many of them will? Education

and society have exhausted their power in inculcating on women that their proper rule of conduct is what society expects from them; and the denial of the vote is a proclamation intelligible to every one, that whatever else society may expect, it does not expect that they should concern themselves with public interests. Why, the whole of a girl's thoughts and feelings are toned down by it from her school-days; she does not take the interest even in national history which her brothers do, because it is to be no business of hers when she grows up. If there are women—and now happily there are many—who do interest themselves in these subjects, and do study them, it is because the force within is strong enough to bear up against the worst kind of discouragement, that which acts not by interposing obstacles, which may be struggled against, but by deadening the spirit which faces and conquers obstacles.

We are told, Sir, that women do not wish for the suffrage. If the fact were so, it would only prove that all women are still under this deadening influence; that the opiate still benumbs their mind and conscience. But great numbers of women do desire the suffrage, and have asked for it by petitions to this House. How do we know how many more thousands there may be, who have not asked for what they do not hope to get; or for fear of what may be thought of them by men, or by other women; or from the feeling, so sedulously cultivated in them by their education—aversion to make themselves conspicuous? Men must have a rare power of self-delusion, if they suppose that leading questions put to the ladies of their family or of their acquaintance will elicit their real sentiments, or will be answered with complete sincerity by one woman in ten thousand. No one is so well schooled as most women are in making a virtue of necessity; it costs little to disclaim caring for what is not offered; and frankness in the expres-

sion of sentiments which may be unpleasing and may be thought uncomplimentary to their nearest connections, is not one of the virtues which a woman's education tends to cultivate, and is, moreover, a virtue attended with sufficient risk, to induce prudent women usually to reserve its exercise for cases in which there is a nearer and a more personal interest at stake. However this may be, those who do not care for the suffrage will not use it; either they will not register, or if they do, they will vote as their male relatives advise: by which, as the advantage will probably be about equally shared among all classes, no harm will be done. Those, be they few or many, who do value the privilege, will exercise it, and will receive that stimulus to their faculties, and that widening and liberalizing influence over their feelings and sympathies, which the suffrage seldom fails to produce on those who are admitted to it. Meanwhile an unworthy stigma would be removed from the whole sex. The law would cease to declare them incapable of serious things; would cease to proclaim that their opinions and wishes are unworthy of regard, on things which concern them equally with men, and on many things which concern them much more than men. They would no longer be classed with children, idiots, and lunatics, as incapable of taking care of either themselves or others, and needing that everything should be done for them, without asking their consent. If only one woman in twenty thousand used the suffrage, to be declared capable of it would be a boon to all women. Even that theoretical enfranchisement would remove a weight from the expansion of their faculties, the real mischief of which is much greater than the apparent.

Then it is said, that women do not need direct power, having so much indirect, through their influence over their male relatives and connections. I should like to carry this argument a little further. Rich people have a great deal of

indirect influence. Is this a reason for refusing them votes? Does any one propose a rating qualification the wrong way, or bring in a Reform Bill to disfranchise all who live in a £500 house, or pay £100 a year in direct taxes? Unless this rule for distributing the franchise is to be reserved for the exclusive benefit of women, it would follow that persons of more than a certain fortune should be allowed to bribe, but should not be allowed to vote. Sir, it is true that women have great power. It is part of my case that they have great power; but they have it under the worst possible conditions, because it is indirect, and therefore irresponsible. I want to make this great power a responsible power. I want to make the woman feel her conscience interested in its honest exercise. I want her to feel that it is not given to her as a mere means of personal ascendency. I want to make her influence work by a manly interchange of opinion, and not by cajolery. I want to awaken in her the political point of honour. Many a woman already influences greatly the political conduct of the men connected with her, and sometimes, by force of will, actually governs it; but she is never supposed to have anything to do with it; the man whom she influences, and perhaps misleads, is alone responsible; her power is like the back-stairs influence of a favourite. Sir, I demand that all who exercise power should have the burthen laid on them of knowing something about the things they have power over. With the acknowledged right to a voice, would come a sense of the corresponding duty. Women are not usually inferior in tenderness of conscience to men. Make the woman a moral agent in these matters: show that you expect from her a political conscience: and when she has learnt to understand the transcendent importance of these things, she will know why it is wrong to sacrifice political convictions to personal interest or vanity; she will understand that political integrity is not

a foolish personal crotchet, which a man is bound, for the sake of his family, to give up, but a solemn duty: and the men whom she can influence will be better men in all public matters, and not, as they often are now, worse men by the whole amount of her influence.

But at least, it will be said, women do not suffer any practical inconvenience, as women, by not having a vote. The interests of all women are safe in the hands of their fathers, husbands, and brothers, who have the same interest with them, and not only know, far better than they do, what is good for them, but care much more for them than they care for themselves. Sir, this is exactly what is said of all unrepresented classes. The operatives, for instance: are they not virtually represented by the representation of their employers? Are not the interest of the employers and that of the employed, when properly understood, the same? To insinuate the contrary, is it not the horrible crime of setting class against class? Is not the farmer equally interested with the labourer in the prosperity of agriculture, — the cotton manufacturer equally with his workmen in the high price of calicoes? Are they not both interested alike in taking off taxes? And, generally, have not employers and employed a common interest against all outsiders, just as husband and wife have against all outside the family? And what is more, are not all employers good, kind, benevolent men, who love their workpeople, and always desire to do what is most for their good? All these assertions are as true, and as much to the purpose, as the corresponding assertions respecting men and women. Sir, we do not live in Arcadia, but, as we were lately reminded, *in fœce Romuli:* and in that region workmen need other protection than that of their employers, and women other protection than that of their men. I should like to have a return laid before this House of the number of women who are annually beaten to

death, kicked to death, or trampled to death by their male protectors: and, in an opposite column, the amount of the sentences passed, in those cases in which the dastardly criminals did not get off altogether. I should also like to have, in a third column, the amount of property, the unlawful taking of which was, at the same sessions or assizes, by the same judge, thought worthy of the same amount of punishment. We should then have an arithmetical estimate of the value set by a male legislature and male tribunals on the murder of a woman, often by torture continued through years, which, if there is any shame in us, would make us hang our heads. Sir, before it is affirmed that women do not suffer in their interests, as women, by the denial of a vote, it should be considered whether women have no grievances; whether the laws, and those practices which laws can reach, are in every way as favourable to women as to men. Now, how stands the fact? In the matter of education, for instance. We continually hear that the most important part of national education is that of mothers, because they educate the future men. Is this importance really attached to it? Are there many fathers who care as much, or are willing to expend as much, for the education of their daughters as of their sons? Where are the Universities, where the High Schools, or the schools of any high description, for them? If it be said that girls are better educated at home, where are the training-schools for governesses? What has become of the endowments which the bounty of our ancestors destined for the education, not of one sex only, but of both indiscriminately? I am told by one of the highest authorities on the subject, that in the majority of the endowments the provision made is not for boys, but for education generally; in one great endowment, Christ's Hospital, it is expressly for both: that institution now maintains and educates 1100 boys, and exactly 26 girls.

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And when they attain womanhood, how does it fare with that great and increasing portion of the sex, who, sprung from the educated classes, have not inherited a provision, and not having obtained one by marriage, or disdaining to marry merely for a provision, depend on their exertions for subsistence? Hardly any decent educated occupation, save one, is open to them. They are either governesses or nothing. A fact has recently occurred, well worthy of commemoration in connection with this subject. A young lady, Miss Garrett, from no pressure of necessity, but from an honourable desire to employ her activity in alleviating human suffering, studied the medical profession. Having duly qualified herself, she, with an energy and perseverance which cannot be too highly praised, knocked successively at all the doors through which, by law, access is obtained into the medical profession. Having found all other doors fast shut, she fortunately discovered one which had accidentally been left ajar. The Society of Apothecaries, it seems, had forgotten to shut out those who they never thought would attempt to come in, and through this narrow entrance this young lady found her way into this profession. But so objectionable did it appear to this learned body that women should be the medical attendants even of women, that the narrow wicket through which Miss Garrett entered has been closed after her, and no second Miss Garrett will be allowed to pass through it. And this is *instar omnium*. No sooner do women show themselves capable of competing with men in any career, than that career, if it be lucrative or honourable, is closed to them. A short time ago, women might be Associates of the Royal Academy; but they were so distinguishing themselves, they were assuming so honourable a place in their art, that this privilege also has been withdrawn. This is the sort of care taken of women's interests by the men who so faithfully represent them. This is the way we treat unmarried women. And how is it

with the married? They, it may be said, are not interested in this motion; and they are not directly interested; but it interests, even directly, many who have been married, as well as others who will be. Now, by the common law of England, all that a wife has, belongs absolutely to the husband; he may tear it all from her, squander every penny of it in debauchery, leave her to support by her labour herself and her children, and if by heroic exertion and self-sacrifice she is able to put by something for their future wants, unless she is judicially separated from him he can pounce down upon her savings, and leave her penniless. And such cases are of quite common occurrence. Sir, if we were besotted enough to think these things right, there would be more excuse for us; but we know better. The richer classes take care to exempt their own daughters from the consequences of this abominable state of the law. By the contrivance of marriage settlements, they are able in each case to make a private law for themselves, and they invariably do so. Why do we not provide that justice for the daughters of the poor, which we take care to provide for our own daughters? Why is not that which is done in every case that we personally care for, made the law of the land, so that a poor man's child, whose parents could not afford the expense of a settlement, may retain a right to any little property that may devolve on her, and may have a voice in the disposal of her own earnings, which, in the case of many husbands, are the best and only reliable part of the incomings of the family? I am sometimes asked what practical grievances I propose to remedy by giving women a vote. I propose, for one thing, to remedy this. I give these instances to prove that women are not the petted children of society which many people seem to think they are—that they have not the over-abundance, the superfluity of power that is ascribed to them, and are not sufficiently

represented by the representation of the men who have not had the heart to do for them this simple and obvious piece of justice. Sir, grievances of less magnitude than the law of the property of married women, when suffered by parties less inured to passive submission, have provoked revolutions. We ought not to take advantage of the security we feel against any such consequence in the present case, to withhold from a limited number of women that moderate amount of participation in the enactment and improvement of our laws, which this motion solicits for them, and which would enable the general feelings of women to be heard in this House through a few male representatives. We ought not to deny to them, what we are conceding to everybody else—a right to be consulted; the ordinary chance of placing in the great Council of the nation a few organs of their sentiments—of having, what every petty trade or profession has, a few members who feel specially called on to attend to their interests, and to point out how those interests are affected by the law, or by any proposed changes in it. No more is asked by this motion; and when the time comes, as it certainly will come, when this will be granted, I feel the firmest conviction that you will never repent of the concession.

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THE FRANCHISE FOR WOMEN.

1868.

A PUBLIC meeting, in connection with the National Society for Woman's Suffrage, was held on April 14th, in the Assembly Room of the Free Trade Hall, the Mayor of Salford (Mr. H. D. Pochin), presiding. The meeting was well attended by both ladies and gentlemen, and on the platform were a number of ladies, whose appearance was the signal for loud and repeated applause. Several of the most prominent leaders of the reform party were similarly welcomed. Mr. Jacob Bright, M.P., and Mr. T. B. Potter, M.P., each receiving a special cheer on taking their places. Among the other occupants of the platform were Mr. B. Whitworth, M.P., the Ven. Archdeacon Sandford, Mr. Chisholm Anstey, Dr. Borchardt, Messrs. W. Warburton, J. Hicks (Leeds), Dr. Pankhurst, D. Chadwick, Professor Greenbank, R. D. Rusden, Mark Price, J. C. Edwards, Durnford, Fox Turner, T. H. Barker, H. Raper, H. Simon, Revs. T. L. Kennedy, E. Hooson, S. A. Steinthal, Rev. W. H. Herford, Thomas Ashton Potter, Miss A. I. Robertson, Miss C. Robertson, Mrs. Pochin, Mrs. Jacob Bright, Mrs. E. Kyllmann, Mrs. Max Kyllmann, Miss S. Miall, Miss Alice Wilson, Miss Mary Wilson, Mrs. R. R. Moore, Miss Becker, Miss Estlin, Miss Borchardt, Mrs. Rusden, Mrs. Green, Mrs. Herford, Miss E. Becker, and Miss Wolstenholme.

Miss BECKER read a number of letters, containing expressions of regret at the inability of the writers to attend the above meeting, and of sympathy with its objects, which have been received from Mr. J. S. Mill, M.P., Lord and Lady Amberley, the Dean of Canterbury, the Rev. Dr. Temple, the Right Hon. Russell Gurney, M.P., the Right Hon. H. A. Bruce, M.P., Professor Fawcett, M.P., Mr. J. D. Coleridge, M.P., Sir G. Bowyer, M.P., Mr. E. Baines, M.P., Mr. W. Ewart, M.P., Mr. W. H. Leatham, M.P., Mr. Labouchere, M.P., Mr. T. Hughes, M.P., the Hon. Percy Wyndham, M.P., Sir John Gray, M.P., Mr. Stansfeld, M.P., Colonel Sykes, M.P., Professor Francis Newman, Miss Emily Davies, Miss Elizabeth Garrett, L.S.A., Miss Helen Taylor, Professor Huxley, Mr. John Westlake, Miss Frances Power Cobbe, Mr. Thomas Hare, and the Rev. C. Kingsley.

The CHAIRMAN said it was with great pleasure that he took the chair on this occasion, and endeavoured, in his humble way, to assist those who were disposed to be the pioneers in a movement which he believed was destined ere long to be one of considerable magnitude and irresistible power. (Applause.) So far as he understood the object of the meeting, they were prepared to advocate that to women should be extended the right to exercise the franchise in all cases where they had the qualification that would confer that franchise on the male part of the com

munity—(applause)—that they should not be excluded from it simply on the ground that they were women. (Applause.) For his own part, he cared but little about the exercise of the franchise for any particular class of the community, as the exercise of a mere abstract right, but he saw very definite objects to be accomplished, by extending the franchise to women. What he sought in asking for such an extension, was the removal from the statute-book of some very bad laws—laws which, while they are quite out of harmony with the constant daily practice of good men, enable bad unscrupulous men to oppress women with impunity; and the substitution for them of laws more just and honest towards those who were so largely mixed up with our enjoyments in every relation of life. (Applause.) Every person there must know hundreds of women who were far more competent to exercise the franchise, than thousands of those already on the register. They were constantly told that women had no interest in these subjects. If women were not interested for themselves, was it nothing to them that their children should be under the guidance or control of just and fair laws? But he contended that women were interested in the subject for themselves. Were they not interested in the law of debtor and creditor? (Applause.) Were not they interested in the law of husband and wife? Was it nothing to them that on the day of their marriage they gave up everything they possessed to their husbands? (Hear.) There was no greater mistake than to suppose that settlements would overcome this difficulty. A settlement only prevented the husband from spending the principal of his wife's property, and the moment the interest or income from it was paid over to her, that interest or income became absolutely the property of the husband. (Hear, hear.) The laws under which these things were allowed were neither just nor equal, and no fair and honest mind could advocate their perpetuation. (Applause.) Then the distribution of intestate property was another injustice; many women were made beggars by the operation of this law, or made dependent for the remainder of their existence. So far from women not having an interest in this question, he would say that women would be deeply criminal if they did not take an interest in it. The past had established this fact, that women could not with advantage allow men to be lawmakers, without active interference on their own part. The law, from beginning to end, seemed to him to bear strongly the impress of man's hand, for man's benefit. (Hear, hear.) He did not see that women had been in the past treated in any respect as fair and equal subjects under the law with men. This condition of things must, and he felt sure would, be removed. He trusted before very long women would have many representatives in Parliament, whose object and whose purpose it would be to carefully scrutinise every bill laid on the table of the House of Commons, to see that it was just, and fair, and equal towards women. That was not the case at the present time. The last great measure passed—the Reform Bill—was not just and fair to women; for while it prevented them from having the benefit of the compounder clause, it at the same time excluded them from the franchise. (Hear, hear.) When one man in the House of Commons, Mr. J. S. Mill—(cheers)—rose to ask the House to give some three hours' consideration to the question whether they were acting fairly and justly towards women, what was the result? What a fine target he made for

the arrows of *Punch* and all the London laughing fry! How the *Saturday Review* sneered at the bare idea that women should have any other place in an act of Parliament, than that in the clause at the end which classed them with the children! Was that just or fair? Let them laugh on in their ignorant imbecility, and their perverted sense of what was just and fair to a large portion of the community; but let this meeting decree that there should be an end to this condition of things, and let everyone do his best to secure just and equal laws for the women of our community. (Hear, hear, and cheers.)

Miss BECKER, who was loudly cheered on rising, moved the first resolution:—

> That the exclusion of women from the exercise of the franchise in the election of members of Parliament, being unjust in principle and inexpedient in practice, this meeting is of opinion that the right of voting should be granted to them on the same condition as it is or may be to men.

She said it had been alleged that women were content under the deprivation of political rights. This allegation was false. They were not content. Many women, who had been suffering for years under a sense of the injustice of their position sufficiently strong to be a serious drawback to their happiness, had not made any display of their sentiments, because there appeared not the slightest prospect of an amelioration of their condition. They had been too wise to keep perpetually brooding over an injury which, until lately, seemed utterly hopeless of redress, and too proud and sensitive to betray the existence of a feeling through which they could be so easily wounded, by the attacks or the ridicule of unthinking persons. (Hear, hear.) But because women had concealed their discontent with modest reticence, had tried to make the best of their position as it was, and had been patient and cheerful in the endurance of an evil which seemed inevitable, men mistaking submission for acquiescence, had too hastily assumed that they were contented. But as soon as a streak of light appeared on the horizon—as soon as one member of the House of Commons had shown that he intended to make a serious effort for the redress of this grievous wrong—the women of Great Britain began to prove that they were by no means content with their enforced exclusion from the pale of the constitution. (Cheers.) Committees were formed in various places, and numerous petitions to Parliament were presented last session. The ladies who worked on the committees during the past year—those who would move the resolutions to-night, and those who by their presence supported them in their efforts—formed a demonstration which ought to convince the most sceptical that women did care, and cared very much, for the suffrage. (Hear, hear.) Still, it had been said that these women were in a minority, and that the vast majority did not as yet ask the franchise to be extended to their class. Perhaps they did not; but in the few weeks during which their committee was in operation last year, 3,000 women of Manchester and the surrounding districts signed a petition for it; and if they might take the women whose opinions they had had an opportunity of testing as a sample of Englishwomen generally, she was in a position to state that if not an actual majority, a minority which nearly approached to one did ask for the franchise. The majority of male householders under £10 rental did not ask for the suffrage—(hear, hear)—but an energetic and

earnest minority asked it on behalf of their class, and the demand was supported by others not of their number, who thought that, as a matter of justice, the claim ought to be allowed. Nobody believed that any influence was used to prevent that class of men from asking for votes if they wanted them. The contrary was notoriously the case with respect to women. (Hear, hear.) Such an overwhelming pressure had been used to restrain them from the manifestation of any desire for political power that it had required no small amount of moral courage in any woman to confess that she would like to have a vote. (Hear, hear.) Then, men said with a remarkable simplicity, that women did not ask for the suffrage. It had been said that women were not fit to have votes; but if this assertion meant that womanhood itself would render them untrustworthy electors, she replied that the sex which furnished a sovereign for the British empire could not be unfit to exercise political power. (Cheers.) If it is meant that at present, as a matter of fact, all women, or most of them, were too ignorant or careless to be fit for votes, she replied that, judged by the standard of fitness demanded from the other sex, the charge was not true; and if it were, she would say, "Give them the vote, and they would soon learn to use it as well as the majority of men." (Hear, hear.) Considering how long and how sedulously men had been inculcating on women the duty of political ignorance, it seemed very hard to turn round on them now, and allege this induced ignorance as an excuse for refusing them political rights. But surely, the race could never progress as a whole, unless one half kept up with the other. A gentleman whom she had hoped to see present in support of a cause which had his entire sympathy, the Rev. Dr. Temple, had personified the human race under the figure of a colossal man, whose infancy, education, and growth, represented the development of religious and political civilization throughout the period of authentic history. If they could imagine this man determining that his right leg alone must bear the burden of exercise, and that the left should be regarded as an ornamental appendage, it would not inaptly figure the attempt of humanity to make progress by cultivating only one sex. (Hear, hear, and cheers.) All who had turned their energies to public affairs felt how lame and imperfect seemed the advance of opinion on great questions; and the cause she had indicated was a sufficient explanation. It was this drag on the progress of our country which they were trying to remove; and they did not intend to cease from their labours till the object was accomplished, and the British people was a nation of free women, as well as of free men. (Cheers.)

The Ven. Archdeacon SANDFORD seconded the resolution, and spoke of the influence and power of women in society, and said he had responded to the invitation to be present at the meeting, with respectful and grateful alacrity. In the review of his life and the sense of the benefits, multiform and multitudinous, which had been conferred upon him by women, he had no alternative but to do so. To women he owed his noblest and best impulses for good, and any success which he or his sons might have achieved in the battle of life. He had outlived the age of chivalry; but he should feel himself the most ungrateful of men, if he had not taken a long journey that he might bear his testimony in favour of this movement. He said nothing of the incivility of the restriction against the suffrage being extended to women, but he contended for its injustice and impolicy.

He pitied the husband who had not found his fondest and fastest friend and choicest companion in a woman; and he pitied the son whose best lessons had not been conveyed by a mother's lips, and endeared by a mother's example. The domains of religion and philanthropy, and a thousand humanizing influences, were attributable to the degrees in which woman's mission was understood and discharged. The direst scenes of distress, and the foulest abodes of misery, had been penetrated by a woman's footsteps and a woman's love; and at times she could forget the gentleness of her sex that she might do her duty as a citizen, in the cause of her country and of humanity. She had been known to point the sword, to grasp the gun, and to brave the raging seas, to rescue shipwrecked mariners from impending death. As long as noble deeds and lives were cherished in the human heart, the names of women would be remembered. They had, blessed be God, opened the portals of the constitution to the industrial classes. Did they mean to close them against the sex of which Florence Nightingale, Elizabeth Fry, and their own gracious Queen formed a part, and in which were included the names of Somerville, Martineau, Chisholm, Carpenter, and Whiteman? (Cheers.) He was sure a voice would go up from this centre of industry, that they meant to redress this foul injustice, and to abolish this monstrous infatuation. Those who would close any sphere of usefulness, or any instrumentality of good, against a woman, were not merely guilty of felony, but of a crime; it was not merely an act of fatuity, but of self-immolation. He believed, if women possessed a vote, their influence would be felt in many useful social improvements. (Applause.)

Mr. T. B. POTTER, M.P., supported the resolution, believing, as he did, that women had a right to the franchise. (Cheers.) Great changes were now in progress. The old feudal *régime* was passing away, and all men were called on to exercise public duties. Unless women were to have an interest in those public duties, he was sure that there would be little chance of their being well exercised. (Hear.) The admiration of women in former days was given to the successful soldier; often, and wisely, to the cultivated clergyman; but how seldom had it been given to the young man who took a part in politics, and who gave his leisure hours in his own locality to the performance of public duties. All that must be changed—(hear)—and if we were to succeed with thoroughly free institutions, we required not merely the men, but the women, to be thoroughly interested in the enactment and carrying out of just and fair laws. (Applause.) He did not think there was any one who had been long engaged in public life, who had not received his greatest support at the hands of women; and he believed that the happiest inspirations and the most benevolent efforts were suggested by women. (Applause.) For himself he could only say that, ill as he might have performed his duty, that duty was learnt at his mother's knee—(applause); and he believed that the more women took up political matters and studied the history of past and present times, the better would it be for all of them. (Applause.) It was urged against giving votes to women that elections were conducted with turmoil and violence. All that would pass away. (Applause.) It would not be long before the ballot, which was the best machinery for taking the vote, would enable us to have our polling days as orderly as our Sundays. (Hear.) Then, from what they had heard from Archdeacon

Sandford, he was sure that the influence of women's votes would be beneficial. Women, being impulsive, might possibly judge more from their hearts than men, but in all probability they would be right; their instincts would be true and always generous. (Hear, hear.) He had no doubt of the ultimate success of this movement, or of the absolute necessity of urging it forward. (Applause.)

Dr. PANKHURST also supported the resolution. He described this movement as an appeal to simple justice—the strength of nations and the majesty of peoples. In that lay its power and hope of success. The position of women in modern civilization, and particularly in England, had not been determined by a regard to their qualities as individuals, as human beings. The doctrines which had settled their position had emerged from certain characteristics of ancient society, of which the form had passed away but the ideas remained. The true type of ancient society was the family, of which the members were united, in fact or in theory, by a blood tie, and were placed in complete subjection to the highest living ascendant. The essential of the family thus constituted was the supremacy of the father over the person and property of the descendants. The passage from ancient to modern society had been effected through the gradual limitation of the *patria potestas*, the power of the head of the family. Step by step the son was emancipated, as to his person and property, from the paternal authority, in virtue of his capacity to become the head of a new family; but the daughter, from her incapacity in that regard, was condemned to perpetual tutelage. That, historically, was the ground of the difference of position, but the practice and ideas had continued to operate though the reasons for them had long ceased to exist. In ancient times society was an aggregation of families, its unit being a family. But modern society consisted of a collection of individuals, its unit being the individual. Therefore, every individual, whether man or woman, was *prima facie* entitled to the rights and franchises of freedom. The most important maxim of political freedom, the base of modern society, was the equality of all men, or, as it might be stated, the equality of humanity before the law. It was perfectly untrue in history and in jurisprudence, that the maxim was ever in principle and in truth, primarily and necessarily applied to man alone. The only reason which could justly exclude women from the franchise was that they were not capable of understanding and obeying the law, and no such ground of exclusion could be maintained. If then it was just to admit women to equal political rights, it was certainly expedient. In the result it would enrich the national life by giving larger opportunities for public zeal and activity, and by calling forth new types of character and higher aspects of individuality.

The resolution was passed unanimously.

Mrs. POCHIN rose, amidst loud applause, to move the second resolution :—

That this meeting expresses its cordial approval of the objects of the National Society for Women's Suffrage, and of the course it has hitherto pursued, and pledges itself to support its future efforts by all practical and constitutional methods, especially by urging women possessing legal qualifications to claim to be put on the parliamentary register.

Mrs. POCHIN proceeded to read the following address, which was

frequently interrupted by applause: With regard to the latter clause of this resolution, you are probably aware that the investigations of Mr. Chisholm Anstey into old Parliamentary documents have shown that women had anciently a right to vote for members of Parliament, and frequently exercised that right. It does not appear that any act has been passed repealing the right, until the Reform Bill of 1832, which restricted the new franchises then conferred to male persons only. It is the opinion however, of several learned barristers, that the common law right of women freeholders and burgesses to vote for members of Parliament has always remained, and does still remain in force to this day. Should this be the case, it is evident that in striving to establish our claim to be represented in Parliament we are attempting no innovation, but only a return to the ancient constitutional practice of Great Britain. If therefore, a number of women possessing the requisite qualifications, claim their place on the register, the question can be fairly tried and settled on this point by our established courts of law. It may turn out that the first returning officer who declined to receive women's votes was guilty of an illegal act, and that all other returning officers since that time have been following an illegal precedent.

It is said however that women have not cared in the past, and do not now care, to have votes. Have they ever been consulted? Some women have always cared for the right. Large numbers care for it now, as our presence here to-day abundantly testifies. No one proposes to compel women to go to the poll whether they like it or not. Make registration possible, and it will then be conclusively ascertained how many do care to avail themselves of their ancient right. Many women moreover, who do not see the connection between one evil and another, complain bitterly of the injustice and neglect of the legislature where their interests are concerned. They resent the results of an exclusively masculine administration, although it may not have occurred to them to question its validity. Now it is admitted by Mr. Shaw Lefevre, that a large portion of the minority who had the moral courage (that rare quality in public men) to vote for Mr. Mill's motion, did so on the ground that the great hardship of the law, as it affected women, could only be remedied by introducing into the House of Commons an element of representation for women. It seems to me a truism too obvious to offer to an English audience—that in a representative government all classes are entitled to be represented. Is it creditable to English justice that women should be classed for electoral purposes with idiots, lunatics, criminals and felons? Nay, we are placed lower than the latter; for the House of Commons, last year, deliberately resolved not to disfranchise felons whose sentence had expired, on the ground that it was cruel to inflict on them so severe a stigma, Mr. Gladstone saying that a citizen ought not to bear for life the brand of electoral disqualification. One of the current political principles of the day, which I do not advance for more than it is worth, but which is nevertheless believed in by a large number of British politicians, who enunciate it in the epigrammatic form "that taxation and representation should be co-extensive," logically covers the claim of women to be represented. Mr. Disraeli's argument in the recent debates, that those who bear the burdens of the state are entitled to a share in the representation, has formed one of the main

principles on which the recent Reform Bill has been based. On what grounds then, are women debarred from the common rights of citizenship in this country? In this matter Austria has shown herself to be as much in advance of England, as she has recently shown herself in the public assertion of spiritual freedom, for in that country "not only do unmarried women and widows enjoy the right of voting to this day, but married women who possess property of their own;" nor is the right in either case a dead letter, but is freely and generally exercised, and without any of the evils which are supposed to be the necessary consequence in this country, by those who have had no experience of its operation.

Further, it is the grave, deliberate opinion of many thoughtful Englishwomen, that very serious evils result from the absolute exclusion of the whole number of their sex from having a voice in the making of laws which daily affect their interests, and the interests of those dear to them. We do not accuse our present legislators of active injustice or ill-will towards women. We do however charge them with neglect, indifference, preference for the interests of men to those of women, and the treatment of our occasional modest claims to share in the advantages of an increasing civilization with a jocular levity, which is alike unseemly, insulting, and unstatesmanlike. They may care more for our interests than they think fit publicly to acknowledge, but the smiles and shrugs and loud laughter which ensue, when questions relating to us come before them, are not calculated to inspire *us* with any such belief. We are quite willing to admit; that owing to the recent formation of a powerful middle class, many new social problems have to be taken into consideration, towards the solution of which the wisdom of our ancestors affords no clue. I believe it to be quite true that "the middle ranks have not yet sufficiently consolidated their position to admit of their finer elements arranging themselves in the cosmic order into which they will doubtless settle down." But in the meantime, is it wise to keep a large section of the feminine population of Great Britain in a state of chronic effervescence?—soured by injustice, fretted by the possession of energies which they are required either to repress, or employ unproductively, and galled by the taunts of able writers, who owe their very superiority to those educational advantages, from which they unjustly exclude the classes they attack in so dastardly a manner. Is the British nation really so sunk in Philistinism that the condition of thousands—nay, I may say millions—of human beings born on its soil, (once said to be free,) is a matter of so little moment—that it can be dismissed with an impatient smile? righteously adjusted by a superficial sneer from the *Saturday Review*? or quietly shelved by the determination of a jocular House of Commons to look into it this day six months? Is it fair to throw upon these vast numbers of women, already heavily weighted by nature, all the responsibilities of freedom, without securing to them also its full privileges; and leave their fate to be settled by the fitful breezes of a cruel caprice? I think there are few amongst us who would dare to answer these questions (once fairly set before them) in the affirmative.

Well, but the *Saturday Review* says, all sensible women know that if they have a just and enlightened object to gain, or any real grievance to redress, there are other ways of gaining the desired objects than

by voting, or entering the vortex of political life. Whether we are sensible women or not is a little difficult to settle, for we have been so long the victims of those hasty generalisations to which according to Mr. Lowe, the British mind is prone, that whether we be very wise or very foolish we know not. But we do know, that the influence which is the only means suggested to us by our unsympathetic censor to gain our objects, has never yet been found sufficient to secure for our sex equal laws, in any country or in any age. Moreover, we are born into a community which has agreed to settle its laws, not by a tariff of influence in the abstract, but by a majority of votes. Men have influence also, *plus* the power of voting, which enables them to bring that influence to a focus, and utilise it in the prescribed way. Women are restricted to mere talk, of which we are all heartily tired, and to which no one is bound either legally or officially to pay any attention. If members of Parliament owed their seats in any fair degree to our suffrages, they would hardly venture to treat our opinions with disrespect, or polite inattention, as they undoubtedly do at present.

But we are told on the same authority, the worst evils from which women suffer cannot be cured by legislation. Government can certainly give us the equal heritage, protection, and bequest of property; it can give us a Christian marriage law; it can throw open to us the existing universities, or endow others for our benefit; it can restore to our use the schools and institutions endowed by our ancestors for boys and girls, which are now reserved for boys only; it can abolish the confiscation of our property on marriage; it can distribute the public funds equally for the good of men and women; it can make restrictions on the productiveness of our labour illegal. Of the evils which legislation cannot cure, we make no public complaint.

Well, but it is often alleged against us, as an argument by men who at this time ought to know better, that "Might is right" all the world over, and that it always has been so; moreover, that all the lower animals are subject to this great law of nature; and that in consequence, it is a fair deduction that man, being endowed with greater physical strength than woman, has a right to superior advantages over her, and so on. If by might being right is meant that physical might is right, I deny it most emphatically. It is very often utterly wrong, and admittedly so. For my own part, it commands neither my reverence nor assent. I yield to it for the moment, if there is no other alternative, knowing that it is only temporarily in the position of a master when it should be in that of a slave. When a man uses it as an argument to me, he proves to my entire satisfaction that he has not yet attained the full stature of his manhood; that he is in the uncomfortable position of Schiller's lion, with head free and mane flowing, but otherwise not yet shaken loose from his mother clay. He has declined on to a lower range of laws, when the far higher ranges of spiritual dominion are possible to him. He has not yet risen to the royalty of his nature. A glance into the "long ungracious past," no doubt shows to us, that physical force has been the rule for the lower animals, and for man himself in his rough preliminary stages, though not invariably so; but a keen, far-seeing glance into a bright and gracious future—when the great and god-like head of humanity shall be "crowned with spriritual fire, and touching other worlds"—will shew

us that man can wield far finer and subtler powers than that of brute force. Nay even at this present time, the finer and diviner natures among us are daily detecting powers, both in the outer and inner world, which we can consciously use, and which all tend ultimately to give us the victory.

And now a word to our leading journalists. If they really aspire to earn the respect and mould the opinions of their countrywomen, they must give some proof that they are competent to deal with important questions largely affecting our interests, in a very different spirit from that which they have for the most part manifested. They would do well to acquire some real knowledge of the wants, opinions, and aims, of a large and increasing class of the community, important from its intelligence as well as its numbers, and neither to be frightened nor influenced by the stock platitudes, vulgar exaggerations, and pointless, because inapplicable, sarcasms of even guinea-a-liners. Satire is a weapon that requires to be handled with the fine, delicate, discriminating touch of a master hand; its force should fall with keen, exact precision on a sensitive point, to produce its adequate effect. Above all, it should never miss the mark; inaccuracy is vitally fatal. Coarse weapons, rudely and clumsily wielded against some unknown monstrosity, living if anywhere, in the inmost recesses of London society, or as is most probable, evolved by the *Saturday Review* out of its own consciousness (a kind of mental Aunt Sally, on which to practise the careless skill of its leisure hours), are not calculated to produce much effect on us. Immature and unskilled gymnastics indeed, are not interesting.

Nevertheless we know, and we wish all who join our ranks to know, that there are in our path what Mr. Bright has happily termed, "hobgoblins," many and various, and undoubtedly got to be faced. They assume many shapes—some formidable, others repulsive, all intensely disagreeable to beings not naturally aggressive. They are the most dreadful, and behave the worst to those who are the most frightened of them; and they have this peculiarity, that if you set your face as a flint against them, they vanish into thin air, until you have touched the goal of success, when they immediately resume their old shapes, and turn round upon your previous opponents, distributing among them, with the utmost impartiality the forces which they had previously arrayed against you. Everything fresh worth striving for, is defended by these spectres, satyrs, and dragons of the pit; and only the brave, or those who possess the "secret of fern seed, and walk invisible," have the chance to go safely by, and secure the treasure. We may be well assured however, that a principle which has drawn the philosopher from his honoured seclusion, the grave student from his closet, and shrinking women (the spiritual Godivas of this later age) from their retirement; which has forced them into an abnormal position (not to each other, for woman has always had much in common with the oft-times sad and solitary thinkers of the world), but to the public at large; which has united them in a common bond of union, for a practical purpose, in an age when, and in a country where, these classes are laughed at as impracticable dreamers, or ridiculed as visionary enthusiasts, has a significance of its own, which possibly only the future can measure, and is one which cannot be shaken by any number of the spectres and hobgoblins of the period. It is the people who can only tread the delicate ground of expediency alone who are timorous, looking

this way and that, ascertaining what this authority thinks, or that, before they dare crush the tiny eggshell under their feet, not daring to face the majesty of their own natures, or the "echoes of the clubs." It is the wedding of principle to expediency that constitutes the strength of a position, and it is our firm determination, avowed not for the first time, that this England of ours which we have received in trust, and which has to go down to our posterity endorsed with our notions of right and wrong, shall not at any rate receive our signature to its title deeds, until steps are taken to abolish the aristocracy of sex, to introduce the sweeter manners, purer laws of the younger day into which we are sweeping, and to free all, as far as may be, from the chains of ignorance, poverty, and crime.

In conclusion, I would that Truth would make use of my poor words as she does of those of the poet,

> Her right hand whirl'd
> But one poor poet's scroll, but with his word
> She shook the world.

This is not to be expected. Nevertheless, we see our visions, and dream our dreams; and the visions that now haunt us, are the chaining up of physical force within due limits, the gradual unveiling of that divinity in woman which has already been revealed in man; and with eyes purified still further with spiritual euphrasy and rue, we faintly discern in the far distant future, right no longer struggling hand to hand with might, but right transfigured into Righteousness; and might transmuted and stilled into Peace; and the glorious prediction of the royal seer verified at last, for behold in that vision, "Righteousness and Peace have kissed each other!"

Mr. Chisholm Anstey supported the resolution

Mr. Jacob Bright, M.P., reviewed the signs of political progress during the present century, in proof of the position that the well-being of any class of people had a close connection with their possession of political power; in other words, that the interests of legislation simply covered the area of voting. An allusion by Mr. Bright to the probability of justice being done to Ireland, called forth loud cheers. Mr. Bright argued that woman needed a power of self-protection, because the injustice with which she was treated only found a parallel in the Southern States of America before the war of emancipation. One disadvantage to women in obtaining the franchise was that there was so little real opposition to them. It had been said that elections were too rough for them, but we were not always going to have these scandalous scenes at elections. (Cheers.) If nothing that had yet been suggested could abolish these scenes, the presence of women voters might overawe them into decency. (Hear, hear.) As to the argument that women's duties were at home, the attendance at an election once in three or four years would not take them much from home, and the acquirement of a political education would not involve their absence from home so much as learning music or dancing, for they could be taught by the penny newspaper, and become as wise as Solomon on political matters, without leaving home at all. (Cheers.) But women's interests were not narrowed to the sphere of home. A great many of the political changes that had taken place in our own generation, would not have taken place so soon but for the assistance of women. George Thompson, the eloquent advocate of negro

freedom, would tell them that the enthusiasm for that change was as great with women as with men, and that, if it had only depended upon men, and if women had never left home to attend public meetings, his success would have been of a very different character. (Hear, hear.) What would not Mr. Cobden say, if he were here, as to the assistance women gave in freeing the bread of the people from that infamous tax! It seemed to him that they ignored the history of their own country, and absolutely denied patent facts, when they maintained that women had no duties except at home. Considering how their relatives were scattered over every clime, and consequently, of what importance to them was the question of peace or war, it must be admitted that they were interested in questions of foreign policy. The *Saturday Review* must not suppose that the vanity fair of London was England. They were not interesting themselves for the fancy portion of their species, but were considering the condition of the great majority of English women who were performing the honourable duties of life. (Cheers.) He concluded by saying that he would like to see women have the franchise, because, if they had it, our laws would be more just, and because it was our interest to invite women to allow their thoughts to enter more largely into those great concerns of life which elevate and dignify the character. (Cheers.)

The resolution was passed *nem. con.*

Miss Annie Robertson (Dublin) proposed the next resolution—

That the thanks of the meeting be recorded, to Mr. Mill, and the eighty-two members of Parliament who supported him by their votes and speeches, in his advocacy of women's claims to the suffrage, on the 20th May, 1867.

She said: I feel very much honoured by having been invited to be present at this most important and most interesting meeting, and by being afforded an opportunity of speaking on behalf of great numbers of women, whom I know to feel the deepest gratitude to Mr. Mill, for his noble exertions to procure justice for them. Although the National Society for Women's Suffrage has been but recently formed, it has already effected infinite benefit by enabling many thousands of women to become aware of the sentiments held by each other, at the same time that it has afforded the means of co-operation, which, in the case of women where their own special interests are concerned, has hitherto been so much wanting. A very general feeling exists among those women who have been spoken to on the subject, that the admission to the franchise of such women as are by property qualified for it, would be a very requisite measure, and an act of obvious justice. Very many women feel it keenly, that such an act of justice has been so long delayed, but though thousands of women have signed petitions praying for the franchise, the numbers who have done so cannot give a correct estimate of the numbers who wish for it. Some of the women who feel it the most, have declined to sign any petition to Parliament on the subject, as they labour under the impression that women cannot expect justice under any circumstances, and that it is useless to ask for it. Others who desire the franchise, and who consider it a great insult to be excluded from it, have declared to me that they look upon it as a right which should be granted to women without having to petition for it; and there are others equally aware of the injustice of being excluded from it, yet who think they would bring down upon them the animosity of men if they stated their wishes openly. Now I cannot say

that I agree with the sentiments of any of these three classes of women. The number of eminent men who stand foremost in politics, science, and literature, who support the cause of women's suffrage, should be a sufficient proof that all men would not wish to deny women their just rights. In fact, during the last few months the opinions of great numbers of men have been distinctly ascertained with reference to the enfranchisement of women, and a large proportion of them unhesitatingly declared it to be their belief, that it was most unjust to continue to exclude women from the franchise, when possessing the necessary property qualifications. These men are no dreamers; they are in general practical men of business who have good powers of observation, and who judge of the mental capabilities of women by the women they see around them, and are not led away by abstract or fanciful theories as to whether women possess greater powers of instinct and less judgment than men, or whether men possess deeper reasoning powers than women, and similar imaginary distinctions. It seems to have been assumed hitherto that this question of women's suffrage is one only between women and men; but as far as I can see, such men as would persistently refuse the electoral franchise to all women, will have to settle the matter, not only with women, but with a considerable body of men also. There are women, no doubt, who really do feel indifferent to being granted the suffrage, and who are perfectly sincere in saying that they cannot see what advantage there could be in it; but there are also men who feel equally careless on the subject of the franchise for men. I have met with many men who said they did not know what the good of a vote was. But I am sure that this would not be considered a good reason for disfranchising, not only them, but all other men, including those who have understanding enough to comprehend the value of the suffrage. Some women there are who are capable of energetically objecting to female suffrage, and some men say they observe this disposition chiefly in those women who are inclined to be jealous of their own sex; but of course, these anti-female franchise ladies, will be the first to disclaim being actuated by so mean a feeling. In some instances probably they are not jealous of other women, but there is one trait in these energetic ladies which close observers have noted as very general, namely, that they are the very women who hesitate the least in criticising or expressing dissatisfaction with the individual men around them. The fact is however that generally speaking, where men or women speak against female enfranchisement, or laugh at the idea, we may give them credit, not for an unkind disposition, but merely for knowing very little of what they are talking about. It could not be expected that the political disabilities of women, should have existed so long, without giving some women an under-valuing opinion of their own sex. Such an under-valuing opinion is only what a system of the kind might be expected to produce, in either men or women. I may instance a case to show how political disabilities, even of a religious nature, can produce, if not a certain feeling of servility, at least the outward expression of it. In a history of Irish Rebellions, written by Sir Richard Musgrave about sixty-seven years ago, an Irish Roman Catholic nobleman is stated to have said that he would be very sorry to see the members of his own church put on an equal footing with those of the established religion. This, be it remembered, was some thirty years before the

emancipation of the Catholics. The historian evidently highly respected this Irish Catholic nobleman, for making such a disinterested and unselfish remark; the nobleman's name however I refrain from mentioning, as probably his family at the present day might not appreciate the full value of the sentiment he uttered. And this may naturally remind us that it would be well if persons of mark would weigh their words, when speaking or writing about any movement which may affect great numbers of the population, and of which a history may be left for the perusal of future generations. It is not pleasant for man or woman to leave a memory to stand out in history for condemnation or ridicule, as the upholder of a system of oppression; for experience tells us that, though there will be always some persons to justify a system of oppression so long as it exists, and to call it good government, yet that, after it has passed away, it will find none to palliate or to excuse it. Persons who are interested as to what the future may say of them, ought to be careful of speaking or writing at random on a subject like the present, concerning a great body of the people, and which subject they have never deeply studied. It requires no spirit of prophecy, but merely ordinary human foresight, to predict that the spirit which has been aroused among some women in the United Kingdom, and in another hemisphere, and which finds an echo already in some parts of the European continent, is not likely to die out, but will spread until it has extended to the whole of the civilized world. As to the question of a representative government, the idea seems to be highly lauded by some persons as long as the representation is confined to men. It is a very good idea then, and the safeguard of freedom; but as soon as the question arises of the suffrage for women, we only hear of how dreadful it is to descend into the arena of public strife, and of the hardening and corrupting influences of politics. Until however the men resign their political privileges, in order to escape such great evils, the women will doubt the sincerity and consistency of such arguments. Besides, if it really be the case that politics have the effect of hardening men and corrupting them, the less ought the interests of women to be left entirely in their hands. There are many plans devised and being carried out, for the elevation of women's position, but surely they must all fall short of what they are intended to effect, so long as women feel that a slight is cast upon their dignity, their strength of principle, their judgment, their common sense, their integrity; in short by withholding from them, under all circumstances, the right to vote in the election of the members of a parliament, which is supposed to represent the wishes of the people of the nation. I may repeat that women feel this very deeply, and have been feeling it for a very long time. There may be some women who do not see the connection between possessing the franchise and the removal of their degradation, but I have hardly met with any woman who considered that women as a body were dealt with justly by the law. We all know that it is not many years since, the idea of educating any woman as well as the most commonplace lady is educated now, was thought uncalled for, if not ridiculous. Men sneered, and then women thought they must in duty bound sneer also; but now ideas upon this subject are changed, and few men or women who have any regard for public opinion could venture to laugh at the thought of a woman receiving a superior education. We see what errors our ancestors laboured under. Several old-

fashioned and pernicious prejudices are now giving way. We know of deplorable mistakes made in old times upon the most important subjects. Truth has been withheld or perverted; darkness and childish ignorance have led to terrible results, which we must look back to with wonder and pity. Fearful cruelties and oppression have been carried on under the name of sacred duties. These things of the past, lasting for centuries, but now exploded, should warn us in these days to be careful of making, or continuing to make, mistakes of quite as lamentable a description, and of quite as old a date; and let us trust that there will soon be found no one to oppose the enfranchisement of women, more than there could be found in these days, persons who would uphold the burning of human beings for witchcraft, or the torturing of an astronomer for saying that the earth moved round the sun. Some even who are indifferent upon the subject, say, that the question of the franchise for women, is only a question of time. As to this matter of time, those who oppose or neglect to forward the movement, ought to be aware that the responsibility of the delay rests with them; and I think we must all agree with the sentiment expressed recently by a distinguished member of the House of Commons, that "Justice delayed is justice denied." Taking this into consideration, the women of the nation feel doubly grateful to those members of Parliament, who have been the foremost to recognise their claims to political privileges.

Mr. F. W. R. Myers, Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, in seconding the resolution, said:—

Mr. Chairman, Ladies, and Gentlemen,—I rise with great pleasure to second the resolution which has been so clearly and gracefully moved by Miss Robertson. One thing at least there is proved, which no one who has been present here to-night can doubt, that it is possible for a lady to speak in public, and to speak remarkably well, without losing one single particle of womanly dignity and grace. It is late, and I will not detain you for five minutes, but I feel that it is in one sense appropriate that I, as a Cambridge man, should say a few words of thanks to Mr. Mill and the members who voted with him, because among those members I notice an unusually large proportion of Cambridge men, while Mr. Mill's main supporters in the debate were Mr. Fawcett, one of the most active of our professors, and Mr. Denman, an old hero of the Cam. These men deserve the thanks of Cambridge, for they represented their university. Yes, for I must beg you here in Manchester to believe, that the University of Cambridge, is not quite so retrograde a body as some of the penny papers would tell you. Among its resident members there may not be much enthusiasm, but there is a great deal of good sense; and this good sense is shown I think, in the strong feeling which exists at Cambridge in favour of the extension of the suffrage to women. With some of us, the sight of the injustice done at the universities to dissenters and unbelievers, quickens our sense of the injustice done to women elsewhere. For disabilities of sex are parallel to disabilities of creed, except that disabilities of sex have, for the most part, been imposed by passions less respectable than theological bigotry. But the spirit which maintains both classes of disabilities is the same, for some men are afraid to do justice to unbelievers, for fear the truth should collapse. That is their infidelity to God. And some men are afraid to do justice to women, for fear the attributes of the

sexes should become confounded. That is their infidelity to Nature. But there are some of us who want no iniquities to bolster up either our manhood, or our faith. I have spoken of injustice to women. There are men who cannot recognise an injustice till they see it in pounds, shillings, and pence. Let the dispossession of women-farmers in England, and the dismissal of women-officials in France, teach such men that false theories make cruel practice, and that there is no injustice which is not liable to become an injury. Some say that women should not vote because elections are riotous. Is this a question of politics or of police? What! are the principles of our constitution to hang upon the accidents of our polling booths? By parity of reasoning we might disfranchise Ireland because room is wanted in the House of Commons. No! If room is wanted, let us make room, and if order is wanted, let us make order; but let us never deprive others of a right, because we have neglected a duty. But I believe that if women were admitted to elections they would bring order with them, for it seems to me that election riots are only one instance of a universal principle, that wherever, by man's desire, the two sexes have been separated in the performance of any function which they ought to have performed together, Nature avenges herself by degrading both. For I believe that there is an equal place for women side by side with men, in all the great pathways of human thought and energy, except the unnatural energy of war. Nay, and Miss Nightingale and a thousand others have shown us, that when war is humanized by mercy, war has its place for women too. When Jesus Christ spoke of the divinely-instituted union of the sexes, which was from the beginning, He was not speaking of a union in one physical function alone. He spoke, as I reverently believe, of a union of man and woman in *all* that makes life honourable or sweet, and not of the marriage of bodies only, whose fruit is children, but likewise of the marriage of mind, whereof the fruit is in duties done together. Of this also would Jesus Christ have said, "What God hath joined let not man put asunder."

Mr. J. W. EDWARDS supported the resolution, which was carried.

The meeting closed with a vote of thanks to the Chairman.

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REASONS

FOR AND AGAINST

THE ENFRANCHISEMENT OF WOMEN.

BY

MRS. BODICHON.

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REASONS FOR AND AGAINST THE ENFRANCHISEMENT OF WOMEN.

THAT a respectable, orderly, independent body in the State should have no voice, and no influence recognised 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. Many people are unable to conceive that women can care about voting. That some women do care, has been proved by the Petitions presented to Parliament. 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 case of women farmers is stronger, but not much stronger, than that of 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. Obvious it may not 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 and increasing class, might in a civilised 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 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 benefiting 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 enquiry, 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. Now, let us calmly consider all the arguments we have heard against giving the franchise to women.

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 40*s.* 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 they ought to 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 court 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 act; we only wish to see them free to exercise or not, according as they themselves desire, 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 determines upon changing 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?

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 con-

sequences 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.

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

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WOMEN AND POLITICS.

BY THE

REV. CANON KINGSLEY.

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WOMEN AND POLITICS.*

SOMEWHAT more than 300 years ago, John Knox, who did more than any man to mould the thoughts of his nation—and indeed of our English Puritans likewise—was writing a little book on the 'Regiment of Women,' in which he proved woman, on account of her natural inferiority to man, unfit to rule.

And but the other day, Mr. John Stuart Mill, who has done more than any man to mould the thought of the rising generation of Englishmen, has written a little book, in the exactly opposite sense, on the 'Subjection of Women,' in which he proves woman, on account of her natural equality with man, to be fit to rule.

Truly 'the whirligig of Time brings round its revenges.' To this point the reason of civilised nations has come, or at least is coming fast, after some fifteen hundred years of unreason, and of a literature of unreason, which discoursed gravely and learnedly of nuns and witches, hysteria and madness, persecution and torture, and, like a madman in his dreams, built up by irrefragable logic a whole inverted pyramid of seeming truth upon a single false premiss. To this it has come, after long centuries in which woman was regarded by celibate theologians as the 'noxious animal,'

* 'The Subjection of Women.' By John Stuart Mill.—'Woman's Work and Woman's Culture.' Edited by Josephine Butler.—'Education of Girls, and Employment of Women.' By W. B. Hodgson, LD.D.—'On the Study of Science by Women.' By Lydia Ernestine Becker. (*Contemporary Review*, March 1869.)

the temptress, the source of earthly misery, which derived—at least in one case—'femina' from 'fe' faith, and 'minus' less, because women had less faith than men; which represented them as of more violent and unbridled animal passions; which explained learnedly why they were more tempted than men to heresy and witchcraft, and more subject (those especially who had beautiful hair) to the attacks of demons; and, in a word, regarded them as a necessary evil, to be tolerated, despised, repressed, and if possible shut up in nunneries.

Of this literature of celibate unreason, those who have no time to read for themselves the pages of Sprenger, Nider, or Delrio the Jesuit, may find notices enough in Michelet, and in both Mr. Lecky's excellent works. They may find enough of it, and to spare also, in Burton's 'Anatomy of Melancholy.' He, like Knox, and many another scholar of the 16th and of the first half of the 17th century, was unable to free his brain altogether from the *idola specûs* which haunted the cell of the bookworm. The poor student, knowing nothing of women, save from books or from contact with the most debased, repeated, with the pruriency of a boy, the falsehoods about women which, armed with the authority of learned doctors, had grown reverend and incontestable with age; and even after the Reformation more than one witch-mania proved that the corrupt tree had vitality enough left to bring forth evil fruit.

But the axe had been laid to the root thereof. The later witch prosecutions were not to be compared for extent and atrocity to the mediæval ones; and first, as it would seem, in France, and gradually in other Euro-

pean countries, the old contempt of women was being replaced by admiration and trust. Such examples as that of Marguerite d'Angoulême did much, especially in the South of France, where science, as well as the Bible, was opening men's eyes more and more to nature and to fact. Good little Rondelet, or any of his pupils, would have as soon thought of burning a woman for a witch as they would have of immuring her in a nunnery.

In Scotland, John Knox's book came, happily for the nation, too late. The woes of Mary Stuart called out for her a feeling of chivalry which has done much, even to the present day, to elevate the Scotch character. Meanwhile, the same influences which raised the position of women among the Reformed in France raised it likewise in Scotland; and there is no country on earth in which wives and mothers have been more honoured, and more justly honoured, for two centuries and more. In England, the passionate loyalty with which Elizabeth was regarded, at least during the latter part of her reign, scattered to the winds all John Knox's arguments against the 'Regiment of Women;' and a literature sprang up in which woman was set forth no longer as the weakling and the temptress, but as the guide and the inspirer of man. Whatever traces of the old foul leaven may be found in Beaumont and Fletcher, Massinger, or Ben Jonson, such books as Sidney's 'Arcadia,' Lyly's 'Euphues,' Spenser's 'Fairy Queen,' and last, but not least, Shakespeare's Plays, place the conception of woman and of the rights of woman on a vantage-ground from which I believe it can never permanently fall again—at least until (which God forbid) true manhood has died out of England. To a boy whose notions of his duty to woman had been

formed, not on Horace and Juvenal, but on Spenser and Shakespeare,—as I trust they will be some day in every public school,—Mr. John Stuart Mill's new book would seem little more than a text-book of truths which had been familiar and natural to him ever since he first stood by his mother's knee.

I say this not in depreciation of Mr. Mill's book. I mean it for the very highest praise. M. Agassiz says somewhere that every great scientific truth must go through three stages of public opinion. Men will say of it, first, that it is not true; next, that it is contrary to religion; and lastly, that every one knew it already. The last assertion of the three is often more than half true. In many cases every one ought to have known the truth already, if they had but used their common sense. The great antiquity of the earth is a case in point. Forty years ago it was still untrue; five-and-twenty years ago it was still contrary to religion. Now every child who uses his common sense can see, from looking at the rocks and stones about him, that the earth is many thousand, it may be many hundreds of thousands of years old; and there is no difficulty now in making him convince himself, by his own eyes and his own reason, of the most prodigious facts of the glacial epoch.

And so it ought to be with the truths which Mr. Mill has set forth. If the minds of lads can but be kept clear of Pagan brutalities and mediæval superstitions, and fed instead on the soundest and noblest of our English literature, Mr. Mill's creed about women will, I verily believe, seem to them as one which they have always held by instinct; as a natural deduction from their own intercourse with their mothers, their aunts,

their sisters: and thus Mr. Mill's book may achieve the highest triumph of which such a book is capable; namely—that years hence young men will not care to read it, because they take it all for granted.

There are those who for years past have held opinions concerning women identical with those of Mr. Mill. They thought it best, however, to keep them to themselves; trusting to the truth of the old saying, 'Run not round after the world. If you stand still long enough, the world will come round to you.' And the world seems now to be coming round very fast towards their standing-point; and that not from theory, but from experience. As to the intellectual capacity of girls when competing with boys (and I may add as to the prudence of educating boys and girls together), the experience of those who for twenty years past have kept up mixed schools, in which the farmer's daughter has sat on the same bench with the labourer's son, has been corroborated by all who have tried mixed classes, or have, like the Cambridge local examiners, applied to the powers of girls the same tests as they applied to boys; and still more strikingly by the results of admitting women to the Royal College of Science in Ireland, where young ladies have repeatedly carried off prizes for scientific knowledge against young men who have proved themselves, by subsequent success in life, to have been formidable rivals. On every side the conviction seems growing (a conviction which any man might have arrived at for himself long ago, if he would have taken the trouble to compare the powers of his own daughters with those of his sons), that there is no difference in kind, and probably none in degree, between the intellect of a woman and that of a man;

and those who will not as yet assent to this are growing more willing to allow fresh experiments on the question, and to confess that, after all (as Mr. Fitch well says in his report to the Schools Inquiry Commission), 'The true measure of a woman's right to knowledge is her capacity for receiving it, and not any theories of ours as to what she is fit for, or what use she is likely to make of it.'

This is, doubtless, a most important concession. For if it be allowed to be true of woman's capacity for learning, it ought to be—and I believe will be—allowed to be true of all her other capacities whatsoever. From which fresh concession results will follow, startling no doubt to those who fancy that the world always was, and always will be, what it was yesterday and to-day: but results which some who have contemplated them steadily and silently for years past, have learnt to look at not with fear and confusion, but with earnest longing and high hope.

However startling these results may be, it is certain from the books, the names whereof head this article, that some who desire their fulfilment are no mere fanatics or dreamers. They evince, without exception, that moderation which is a proof of true earnestness. Mr. Mill's book it is almost an impertinence in me to praise. I shall not review it in detail. It is known, I presume, to every reader of this Magazine, either by itself or reviews: but let me remind those who only know the book through reviews, that those reviews (however able or fair) are most probably written by men of inferior intellect to Mr. Mill, and by men who have not thought over the subject as long and as deeply as he has done; and that, therefore, if

they wish to know what Mr. Mill thinks, it would be wisest for them to read Mr. Mill himself—a truism which (in these days of second-hand knowledge) will apply to a good many books beside. But if they still fancy that the advocates of 'Woman's Rights' in England are of the same temper as certain female clubbists in America, with whose sayings and doings the public has been amused or shocked, then I beg them to peruse the article on the 'Social Position of Women,' by Mr. Boyd Kinnear; to find any fault with it they can; and after that, to show cause why it should not be reprinted (as it ought to be) in the form of a pamphlet, and circulated among the working men of Britain to remind them that their duty toward woman coincides (as to all human duties) with their own palpable interest. I beg also attention to Dr. Hodgson's little book, 'Lectures on the Education of Girls, and Employment of Women;' and not only to the text, but to the valuable notes and references which accompany them. Or if any one wish to ascertain the temper, as well as the intellectual calibre of the ladies who are foremost in this movement, let them read, as specimens of two different styles, the Introduction to 'Woman's Work, and Woman's Culture,' by Mrs. Butler, and the article on 'Female Suffrage,' by Miss Wedgewood, at p. 247. I only ask that these two articles should be judged on their own merits—the fact that they are written by women being ignored meanwhile. After that has been done, it may be but just and right for the man who has read them to ask himself (especially if he has had a mother), whether women who can so think and write, have not a right to speak, and a right to be heard when they speak, of a subject with which

they must be better acquainted than men—woman's capacities, and woman's needs?

If any one who has not as yet looked into this 'Woman's Question' wishes to know how it has risen to the surface just now, let them consider these words of Mrs. Butler. They will prove, at least, that the movement has not had its origin in the study, but in the market; not from sentimental dreams or abstract theories, but from the necessities of physical fact:—

'The census taken eight years ago gave three and a half millions of women in England working for a subsistence; and of these two and a half millions were unmarried. In the interval between the census of 1851 and that of 1861, the number of self-supporting women had increased by more than half a million. This is significant; and still more striking, I believe, on this point, will be the returns of the next census two years hence.'

Thus a demand for employment has led naturally to a demand for improved education, fitting woman for employment; and that again has led, naturally also, to a demand on the part of many thoughtful women for a share in making those laws and those social regulations which have, while made exclusively by men, resulted in leaving women at a disadvantage at every turn. They ask—and they have surely some cause to ask—What greater right have men to dictate to women the rules by which they shall live, than women have to dictate to men? All they demand—all, at least, that is demanded in the volumes noticed in this review—is fair play for women; 'A clear stage and no favour.' Let 'natural selection,' as Miss Wedgwood well says, decide which is the superior, and in what. Let it, by

the laws of supply and demand, draught women as well as men into the employments and positions for which they are most fitted by nature. To those who believe that the laws of nature are the laws of God, the *Vox Dei in rebus revelata*; that to obey them is to prove our real faith in God, to interfere with them (as we did in social relations throughout the Middle Ages, and as we did till lately in commercial relations likewise) by arbitrary restrictions is to show that we have no faith in God, and consider ourselves wise enough to set right an ill-made universe—to them at least this demand must seem both just and modest.

Meanwhile, many women, and some men also, think the social status of women is just now in special peril. The late extension of the franchise has admitted to a share in framing our laws many thousands of men of that class which—whatever be their other virtues, and they are many—is most given to spending their wives' earnings in drink, and personally maltreating them; and least likely—to judge from the actions of certain trades—to admit women to free competition for employment. Further extension of the suffrage will, perhaps, in a very few years, admit many thousands more. And it is no wonder if refined and educated women, in an age which is disposed to see in the possession of a vote the best means of self-defence, should ask for votes, for the defence, not merely of themselves, but of their lowlier sisters, from the tyranny of men who are as yet—to the shame of the State—most of them altogether uneducated.

As for the reasonableness of such a demand, I can only say—what has been said elsewhere—that the present state of things, 'in which the franchise is con-

sidered as something so important and so sacred that the most virtuous, the most pious, the most learned, the most wealthy, the most benevolent, the most justly powerful woman, is refused it, as something too precious for her; and yet it is entrusted, freely and hopefully, to any illiterate, drunken, wife-beating ruffian who can contrive to keep a home over his head,' is equally unjust and absurd.

There may be some sufficient answer to the conclusion which conscience and common sense, left to themselves, would draw from this statement of the case as it now stands: but none has occurred to me which is not contrary to the first principle of a free government.

This I presume to be: that every citizen has a right to share in choosing those who make the laws; in order to prevent, as far as he can, laws being made which are unjust and injurious to him, to his family, or to his class; and that all are to be considered as 'active' citizens, save the criminal, the insane, or those unable to support themselves. The best rough test of a man's being able to support himself is, I doubt not, his being able to keep a house over his head, or, at least, a permanent lodging; and that, I presume, will be in a few years the one and universal test of active citizenship, unless we should meanwhile obtain the boon of a compulsory Government education, and an educational franchise founded thereon. But, it must be asked—and answered also—What is there in such a test, even as it stands now, only partially applied, which is not as fair for women as it is for men? 'Is it just that an educated man, who is able independently to earn his own livelihood, should have a vote: but that an equally

educated woman, equally able independently to earn her own livelihood, should not? Is it just that a man owning a certain quantity of property should have a vote in respect of that property: but that a woman owning the same quantity of property, and perhaps a hundred or a thousand times more, should have no vote?' What difference, founded on Nature and Fact, exists between the two cases?

If it be said that Nature and Fact (arguments grounded on aught else are to be left to monks and mediæval jurists) prove that women are less able than men to keep a house over their head, or to manage their property, the answer is that Fact is the other way. Women are just as capable as men of managing a large estate, a vast wealth. Mr. Mill gives a fact which surprised even him—that the best administered Indian States were those governed by women who could neither read nor write, and were confined all their lives to the privacy of the harem. And any one who knows the English upper classes must know more than one illustrious instance—besides that of Miss Burdett Coutts, or the late Dowager Lady Londonderry—in which a woman has proved herself able to use wealth and power as well, or better, than most men. The woman at least is not likely, by gambling, horseracing, and profligacy, to bring herself and her class to shame. Women, too, in every town keep shops. Is there the slightest evidence that these shops are not as well managed, and as remunerative, as those kept by men? —unless, indeed, as too often happens, poor Madame has her Mantalini and his vices to support, as well as herself and her children. As for the woman's power of supporting herself and keeping up at least a lodging

respectably, can any one have lived past middle age without meeting dozens of single women, or widows, of all ranks, who do that, and do it better and more easily than men, because they do not, like men, require wine, beer, tobacco, and sundry other luxuries? So wise and thrifty are such women, that very many of them are able, out of their own pittance, to support beside themselves others who have no legal claim upon them. Who does not know, if he knows anything of society, the truth of Mr. Butler's words?—'It is a very generally accepted axiom, and one which it seems has been endorsed by thoughtful men, without a sufficiently minute examination into the truth of it, that a man—in the matter of maintenance—means generally a man, a wife and children; while a woman means herself alone, free of dependence. A closer inquiry into the facts of life would prove that conclusions have been too hastily adopted on the latter head. I believe it may be said with truth that there is scarcely a female teacher in England who is not working for another or others besides herself,—that a very large proportion are urged on of necessity in their work by the dependence on them of whole families, in many cases of their own aged parents,—that many hundreds are keeping broken-down relatives, fathers, and brothers, out of the work-house, and that many are widows supporting their own children. A few examples, taken at random from the lists of governesses applying to the Institution in Sackville Street, London, would illustrate this point. And let it be remembered that such cases are the rule, and not the exception. Indeed, if the facts of life were better known, the hollowness of this defence of the inequality of payment would become manifest; for it

is in theory alone that in families man is the only bread-winner, and it is false to suppose that single women have no obligations to make and to save money as sacred as those which are imposed on a man by marriage; while there is this difference, that a man may avoid such obligation if he pleases, by refraining from marriage, while the poverty of parents, or the dependence of brothers and sisters, are circumstances over which a woman obliged to work for others has no control.'

True: and, alas! too true. But what Mr. Butler asserts of governesses may be asserted, with equal truth, of hundreds of maiden aunts and maiden sisters who are not engaged in teaching, but who spend their money, their time, their love, their intellect, upon profligate or broken-down relations, or upon their children; and who exhibit through long years of toil, anxiety, self-sacrifice, a courage, a promptitude, a knowledge of business and of human nature, and a simple but lofty standard of duty and righteousness, which if it does not fit them for the franchise, what can?

It may be, that such women would not care to use the franchise, if they had it. That is their concern, not ours. Voters who do not care to vote may be counted by thousands among men; some of them, perhaps, are wiser than their fellows, and not more foolish; and take that method of showing their wisdom. Be that as it may, we are no more justified in refusing a human being a right, because he may not choose to exercise it, than we are in refusing to pay him his due, because he may probably hoard the money.

The objection that such women are better without a vote, because a vote would interest them in politics, and so interfere with their domestic duties, seems slender enough. What domestic duties have they, of which the State can take cognisance, save their duty to those to whom they may owe money, and their duty to keep the peace? Their other and nobler duties are voluntary and self-imposed; and, most usually, are fulfilled as secretly as possible. The State commits an injustice in debarring a woman from the rights of a citizen because she chooses, over and above them, to perform the good works of a saint.

And, after all, will it be the worse for these women, or for the society in which they live, if they do interest themselves in politics? Might not (as Mr. Boyd Kinnear urges in an article as sober and rational as it is earnest and chivalrous) their purity and earnestness help to make what is now called politics somewhat more pure, somewhat more earnest? Might not the presence of the voting power of a few virtuous, experienced, well-educated women, keep candidates, for very shame, from saying and doing things from which they do not shrink, before a crowd of men who are, on the average, neither virtuous, experienced, or well-educated, by wholesome dread of that most terrible of all earthly punishments—at least in the eyes of a manly man—the fine scorn of a noble woman? Might not the intervention of a few women who are living according to the eternal laws of God, help to infuse some slightly stronger tincture of those eternal laws into our legislators and their legislation? What women have done for the social reforms of the last forty years is known, or ought to be known, to all.

Might not they have done far more, and might not they do far more hereafter, if they, who generally know far more than men do of human suffering, and of the consequences of human folly, were able to ask for further social reforms, not merely as a boon to be begged from the physically stronger sex, but as their will, which they, as citizens, have a right to see fulfilled, if just and possible? Woman has played for too many centuries the part which Lady Godiva plays in the old legend. It is time that she should not be content with mitigating by her entreaties or her charities the cruelty and greed of men, but exercise her right, as a member of the State, and (as I believe) a member of Christ and a child of God, to forbid them.

As for any specific difference between the intellect of women and that of men, which should preclude the former meddling in politics, I must confess that the subtle distinctions drawn, even by those who uphold the intellectual equality of women, have almost, if not altogether, escaped me. The only important difference, I think, is, that men are generally duller and more conceited than women. The dulness is natural enough, on the broad ground that the males of all animals (being more sensual and selfish) are duller than the females. The conceit is easily accounted for. The English boy is told from childhood, as the negro boy is, that men are superior to women. The negro boy shows his assent to the proposition by beating his mother, the English one by talking down his sisters. That is all.

But if there be no specific intellectual difference (as there is actually none), is there any practical and moral difference? I use the two epithets as synonymous;

for practical power may exist without acuteness of intellect: but it cannot exist without sobriety, patience, and courage, and sundry other virtues, which are 'moral' in every sense of that word.

I know of no such difference. There are, doubtless, fields of political action more fitted for men than for women; but are there not again fields more fitted for women than for men?—fields in which certain women, at least, have already shown such practical capacity, that they have established not only their own right, but a general right for the able and educated of their sex, to advise officially about that which they themselves have unofficially mastered. Who will say that Mrs. Fry, or Miss Nightingale, or Miss Burdett Coutts, is not as fit to demand pledges of a candidate at the hustings on important social questions as any male elector; or to give her deliberate opinion thereon in either House of Parliament, as any average M.P. or peer of the realm? And if it be said that these are only brilliant exceptions, the rejoinder is, What proof have you of that? You cannot pronounce on the powers of the average till you have tried them. These exceptions rather prove the existence of unsuspected and unemployed strength below. If a few persons of genius, in any class, succeed in breaking through the barriers of routine and prejudice, their success shows that they have left behind them many more who would follow in their steps if those barriers were but removed. This has been the case in every forward movement, religious, scientific, or social. A daring spirit here and there has shown his fellow-men what could be known, what could be done; and behold, when once awakened to a sense of their own powers, multitudes

have proved themselves as capable, though not as daring, as the leaders of their forlorn hope. Dozens of geologists can now work out problems which would have puzzled Hutton or Werner; dozens of surgeons can perform operations from which John Hunter would have shrunk appalled; and dozens of women, were they allowed, would, I believe, fulfil in political and official posts the hopes which Miss Wedgwood and Mr. Boyd Kinnear entertain.

But, after all, it is hard to say anything on this matter, which has not been said in other words by Mr. Mill himself, in pp. 98—104 of his 'Subjection of Women;' or give us more sound and palpable proof of women's political capacity, than the paragraph with which he ends his argument:—

'Is it reasonable to think that those who are fit for the greater functions of politics are incapable of qualifying themselves for the less? Is there any reason, in the nature of things, that the wives and sisters of princes should, whenever called on, be found as competent as the princes themselves to their business, but that the wives and sisters of statesmen, and administrators, and directors of companies, and managers of public institutions, should be unable to do what is done by their brothers and husbands? The real reason is plain enough; it is that princesses, being more raised above the generality of men by their rank than placed below them by their sex, have never been taught that it was improper for them to concern themselves with politics; but have been allowed to feel the liberal interest natural to any cultivated human being, in the great transactions which took place around them, and in which they might be called on to take a part. The ladies of reigning

families are the only women who are allowed the same range of interests and freedom of development as men; and it is precisely in their case that there is not found to be any inferiority. Exactly where and in proportion as women's capacities for government have been tried, in that proportion have they been found adequate.'

Though the demands of women just now are generally urged in the order of—first, employment, then education, and lastly, the franchise, I have dealt principally with the latter, because I sincerely believe that it, and it only, will lead to their obtaining a just measure of the two former. Had I been treating of an ideal, or even a truly civilised polity, I should have spoken of education first; for education ought to be the necessary and sole qualification for the franchise. But we have not so ordered it in England in the case of men; and in all fairness we ought not to do so in the case of women. We have not so ordered it, and we had no right to order it otherwise than we have done. If we have neglected to give the masses due education, we have no right to withhold the franchise on the strength of that neglect. Like Frankenstein, we may have made our man ill: but we cannot help his being alive; and if he destroys us, it is our own fault.

If any reply, that to add a number of uneducated women-voters to the number of uneducated men-voters will be only to make the danger worse, the answer is: —That women will be always less brutal than men, and will exercise on them (unless they are maddened, as in the first French Revolution, by the hunger and misery of their children) the same softening influence in public life which they now exercise in private; and, moreover, that as things stand now, the average woman is more

educated, in every sense of the word, than the average man; and that to admit women would be to admit a class of voters superior, not inferior, to the average.

Startling as this may sound to some, I assert that it is true.

We must recollect that the just complaints of the insufficient education of girls proceed almost entirely from that 'lower-upper' class which stocks the professions, including the Press; that this class furnishes only a small portion of the whole number of voters; that the vast majority belong (and will belong still more hereafter) to other classes, of whom we may say, that in all of them the girls are better educated than the boys. They stay longer at school—sometimes twice as long. They are more open to the purifying and elevating influences of religion. Their brains are neither muddled away with drink and profligacy, or narrowed by the one absorbing aim of turning a penny into five farthings. They have a far larger share than their brothers of that best of all practical and moral educations, that of family life. Any one who has had experience of the families of farmers and small tradesmen, knows how boorish the lads are, beside the intelligence, and often the refinement, of their sisters. The same rule holds (I am told) in the manufacturing districts. Even in the families of employers, the young ladies are, and have been for a generation or two, far more highly cultivated than their brothers, whose intellects are always early absorbed in business, and too often injured by pleasure. The same, I believe, in spite of all that has been written about the frivolity of the girl of the period, holds true of that class which is, by a strange irony, called 'the ruling class.' I suspect that the average young lady

already learns more worth knowing at home than her brother does at the public school. Those, moreover, who complain that girls are trained now too often merely as articles for the so-called 'marriage market,' must remember this—that the great majority of those who will have votes will be either widows, who have long passed all that, have had experience, bitter and wholesome, of the realities of life, and have most of them given many pledges to the State in the form of children; or women who, by various circumstances, have been early withdrawn from the competition of this same marriage-market, and have settled down into pure and honourable celibacy, with full time, and generally full inclination, to cultivate and employ their own powers. I know not what society those men may have lived in who are in the habit of sneering at 'old maids.' My experience has led me to regard them with deep respect, from the servant retired on her little savings to the unmarried sisters of the rich and the powerful, as a class pure, unselfish, thoughtful, useful, often experienced and able; more fit for the franchise, when they are once awakened to their duties as citizens, than the average men of the corresponding class. I am aware that such a statement will be met with 'laughter, the unripe fruit of wisdom.' But that will not affect its truth.

Let me say a few words more on this point. There are those who, while they pity the two millions and a half, or more, of unmarried women earning their own bread, are tempted to do no more than pity them, from the mistaken notion that after all it is their own fault, or at least the fault of nature. They ought (it is fancied) to have been married: or at least they ought to have been good-looking enough and clever enough to

be married. They are the exceptions, and for exceptions we cannot legislate. We must take care of the average article, and let the refuse take care of itself. I have put plainly, it may be somewhat coarsely, a belief which I believe many men hold, though they are too manly to express it. But the belief itself is false. It is false even of the lower classes. Among them, the cleverest, the most prudent, the most thoughtful, are those who, either in domestic service or a few—very few, alas!—other callings, attain comfortable and responsible posts which they do not care to leave for any marriage, especially when that marriage puts the savings of their life at the mercy of the husband—and they see but too many miserable instances of what that implies. The very refinement which they have acquired in domestic service often keeps them from wedlock. 'I shall never marry,' said an admirable nurse, the daughter of a common agricultural labourer. 'After being so many years among gentlefolk, I could not live with a man who was not a scholar, and did not bathe every day.'

And if this be true of the lower class, it is still more true of some, at least, of the classes above them. Many a 'lady' who remains unmarried does so, not for want of suitors, but simply from nobleness of mind; because others are dependent on her for support; or because she will not degrade herself by marrying for marrying's sake. How often does one see all that can make a woman attractive—talent, wit, education, health, beauty, —possessed by one who never will enter holy wedlock. 'What a loss,' one says, 'that such a woman should not have married, if it were but for the sake of the children she might have borne to the State.' 'Perhaps,' answer wise women of the world, 'she did not see any one whom she could condescend to marry.'

And thus it is that a very large proportion of the spinsters of England, so far from being, as silly boys and wicked old men fancy, the refuse of their sex, are the very *élite* thereof; those who have either sacrificed themselves for their kindred, or have refused to sacrifice themselves to that longing to marry at all risks of which women are so often and so unmanly accused.

Be all this as it may, every man is bound to bear in mind, that over this increasing multitude of 'spinsters,' of women who are either self-supporting or desirous of so being, men have, by mere virtue of their sex, absolutely no rights at all. No human being has such a right over them as the husband has (justly or unjustly) over the wife, or the father over the daughter living in his house. They are independent and self-supporting units of the State, owing to it exactly the same allegiance as, and neither more nor less than, men who have attained their majority. They are favoured by no privilege, indulgence, or exceptional legislation from the State, and they ask none. They expect no protection from the State save that protection for life and property which every man, even the most valiant, expects, since the carrying of side-arms has gone out of fashion. They prove themselves daily, whenever they have simple fair play, just as capable as men of not being a burden to the State. They are in fact in exactly the same relation to the State as men. Why are similar relations, similar powers, and similar duties not to carry with them similar rights? To this question the common sense and justice of England will have soon to find an answer. I have sufficient faith in that common sense and justice, when once awakened, to face any question fairly, to anticipate what that answer will be.

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IS THE EXERCISE OF THE SUFFRAGE UNFEMININE?

BY

MRS. WILLIAM GREY.

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IS THE EXERCISE OF THE SUFFRAGE UNFEMININE?

TO the question at the head of this pamphlet, methinks I hear a chorus of mingled men and women's voices returning an affirmative answer in every tone of disgust, indignation, ridicule, and calm contempt.

'A woman exercising the suffrage!' cries one—a man, of course. 'Horrible! A female politician is the next worst thing to the "female atheist," who "talks you dead;" and if she is not only to talk but to act politics, men of sense will be driven mad.'

'A woman going to the hustings!' exclaims another—a lady this time—'marching up to the polling booth with a rabble of men to give her vote in public. What can be more shockingly unfeminine? I hope every woman who tries it will be pelted by the men for intruding herself where she has no business.'

'Delicious spectacle!' laughs a third, a frequenter of clubs, and mostly acquainted with the women of the *demi monde*. 'Anonyma, who is undoubtedly a householder, driving up to the poll in her exquisite equipage to elect a legislator for Church and State, as a representative of her interests, of course; for if all

interests are to be represented, why not hers? Somebody said the other day that the House of Commons was growing too solemn: this device of female suffrage must have been invented to secure a wholesome infusion of buffoonery.'

'Let them alone,' superciliously pronounces a fourth. 'The best policy with fools is always to give them rope enough. They are sure to use it in hanging themselves. Women want the suffrage. If they wanted the championship of all England, I would let them try for it. The first round would be the last, and there would be an end of their clamour for equality. The logic of facts translated into hard blows is the most irresistible logic in the world, and would convince even a female understanding." And so on, *ad infinitum*, the burden of each speaker being still the same, that the exercise of the suffrage is unfeminine.

The assertion is broadly and boldly made; dinned into our ears with an insistence of repetition, as if the speakers believed that there were an accumulative force of argument in mere iteration. We should like, for a change, to hear some reasons as well as assertions—some proofs that the many reasons given on the other side are invalid. Once upon a time, a monk, discoursing with Erasmus on the heresies of Luther and his adherents, averred that the Church had triumphantly answered them. 'No,' said Erasmus; 'I have heard that you burnt their books. I never heard that you had answered them.' Burning books is gone out of fashion now, as well as burning people, which is, perhaps, fortunate for Mr. Stewart Mill, Mr. Kingsley, Miss Cobbe, and other prominent supporters of Female

Suffrage; but though burning was more effectual and more satisfactory, inasmuch as it silenced an opponent, not for once, but for ever, still the modern fashion of not reading a book or listening to an argument, and then pronouncing it refuted or not worth refutation, has its advantages. The cause that has martyrs excites interest; the cause that is shelved is simply forgotten. The cause of women's political rights will scarcely be suppressed by this method now; but as there is a tendency among a still formidable majority to consider the matter settled the moment they have pronounced the exercise of the suffrage to be unfeminine, I humbly beg to know the reasons why, and listen for the answers.

'Women have nothing to do with politics,' is the first and the most general. 'Their sphere, their kingdom is home; they should leave the interests of the nation to men.'

Are there, then, no political questions which touch home and family and women's special action within them? The laws which deal with marriage, with the guardianship of children, with education, with taxation, have they no concern with home life? Do they not rather touch it at every point; and if that life be woman's special sphere, is it not the more just and needful that she should exercise direct influence over the legislation which so vitally affects it? As to the wider national interests she is desired to leave exclusively to man, is she, then, no part of the nation? Is patriotism an exclusively masculine virtue? Alas, for the patriotism of men in that land where their mothers, wives, and sisters hold the love of country to be unfeminine. If we are told that public spirit in women

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always takes the form of partizanship, that they are incapable of looking beyond questions of party to questions of principle, we answer that the best cure for narrowness of views is to change your stand-point from the house, or street, or parish which shuts you in, to one whence a wider horizon becomes visible. A tea caddy in a window-sill will hide Mont Blanc from the woman by the chimney corner; bring her to the open window, the tea caddy disappears and the mountain is revealed in its true proportions.

But now I hear answer No. 2 issuing from drawing-room and boudoir in every tone of lady-like remonstrance: 'How can a lady exercise the suffrage? How can she appear at a public polling-booth, or mix with men in the arena of politics without losing her greatest charm, her truest grace—the charm of modesty, the grace of dignified reserve?'

Softly, ladies. Surely we are in England, not in Turkey. It is of Englishwomen we are speaking, not of the secluded inhabitants of an Oriental zenana, and it seems strange to hear that Englishwomen are afraid of mingling in crowds in public places, when there is not a show to be seen in Europe, from a Papal procession at Rome to a royal pageant in England, to which they do not flock. It has even been said that no portion of the crowd is so rude, so recklessly pushing as that composed of English ladies, and that the rudeness is very often in proportion to their rank. Is it unfeminine for an Englishwoman to enter a crowd only when she goes to perform a duty, but not in the pursuit of a pleasure? Is it so much greater an abandonment of womanly delicacy to appear among men

at a polling-booth,* than on a hunting field, or so much less modest than acting in private theatricals with men neither their husbands nor brothers? Some years ago, several great ladies in London even acted on a stage which might be called public, since admission was obtained by payment (it was for the benefit of a charity), and not only acted, but danced a ballet, I presume in that dress which may best be described in Talleyrand's two objections to some lady's toilette: '*qu'elle commence trop tard et finit trop tôt.*' Some strictures were made on the dancing, but they applied only to the undue thickness of the patrician legs and ancles thereby exhibited. We heard no man call the dancers unfeminine, or tax them with unsexing themselves by this public appearance. Is it that men are indulgent to the foibles which minister to their amusement, and care not how women lower their dignity by a freak or a folly, but care very much lest they raise it by the serious exercise of a serious privilege?

* We may, however, allay the fears, or, it may be, dash the hopes of those who consider that a woman's appearance at the hustings would be a work of danger, by quoting Mrs. P. A. Taylor's statement made at the meeting of the London National Society for Women's Suffrage, July 17, 1869:—"As far as I can ascertain, at the places where women voted (at the general election, Nov. 1868), not only was there no disturbance, but order and quietude prevailed. At Finsbury, where 15 women went to record their votes, the lady who accompanied them said that not only was there no disturbance, but she did not hear a remark made upon the fact that they were there to give their votes; and the women expressed great surprise that it was so very easy a thing to vote; that it occupied so short a time, and did not interfere with their domestic duties. I took one woman to the poll at Leicester, whose vote was rejected; but no disturbance took place, and no comment was made." It may be added, that probably before women obtain the suffrage, the practice of voting by polling-papers will be sanctioned by Parliament, and will remove every objection to women exercising the suffrage on the score of the publicity of a polling-booth.

'But'—here breaks in another chorus, the chorus of mothers of families, of maiden aunts, of the good women *par excellence*—'we are not speaking of the fashionable world, of the fine or fast ladies of the upper ten thousand. We speak of women in general, and maintain that they should do women's work, and leave that of men alone.'

Agreed, with all my heart; but let us define our terms: What is women's work? Looking at the world as it is, at the two millions and a-half of women in this England of ours who are supporting themselves without masculine help, though not in many cases without masculine burthens, it would appear that woman's work,—exclusive of her functions as wife and mother, which are indeed hers alone, but which she cannot assume at will,—means whatever work is too humble, too distasteful, too frivolous, or too ill-paid to be grudged to her by men. Miss Cobbe somewhere says that if a woman is sweeping a crossing, no man takes the broom out of her hand and says the occupation is unfeminine. I have seen twenty women harnessed to a barge on the Rhine and towing it against the stream. Was that women's work? No doubt the man who sat lazily smoking on the barge thought so, and took good care not to harness his own strong shoulders to the rope. Women and girls in the midland counties do field work in gangs;—the gangs till last year being composed indiscriminately of both sexes,—with what result on their character and habits let the evidence given before the Government Commissioners tell. But the farmers said they could not do without the gangs, and Parliament contented itself

with regulating and reforming the worst evils of the system, which is still allowed to go on as women's work. Within half a century, it was women's work to crawl half-naked through the galleries of a coal mine. It is woman's work to be a nurse in the male wards of a hospital or workhouse; but it is held shockingly unfeminine to practise as a physician in the wards of the women and children. I should like to analyse the idea expressed in that word of awful sound in feminine ears,—unfeminine,—and examine whether its terrors are always real, or are not sometimes mere bugbears used to frighten us off ground where our presence would be inconvenient.

We may observe, in the first place, that it is seldom or never applied to those employments which custom or social arrangements have allotted to women, let their nature be what they may,—coarse or refined, hard or light,—from which we may infer that it is applied without any reference to the essential qualities of women, but to some arbitrary standard adopted by the particular time and country or class in which it is used. Thus, as we have seen above, to be a nurse is feminine, to be a physician is masculine, though the work of the former is harder, coarser, brings a woman into contact with men in ways more offensive to delicacy than the latter. This leads us to the further observation, that 'unfeminine,' in the mouths of most of those who use it, means 'unladylike,' and indicates, not what is unbefitting a woman, but what is, in their view, unbefitting a lady; and if we enquire further what is their view of what a lady should do, we find it very often resolve itself into this:—that she should do

nothing, and do it gracefully. It is beside our present purpose to enquire what is the effect of that ideal of a lady imported into the large class whose highest ambition is to be genteel, and who, not having inherited the aptitude from a long line of patrician ancestors, learn easily enough how to do nothing, but not how to do it gracefully. They are as useless as the butterfly, without its airy elegance. We may remark, however, by the way, that it is this fear of losing caste as ladies which deters both parents and daughters among the poorer gentry and the middle classes from looking to professional employments as a means of support. The tradition of genteel helplessness and dependence keeps hundreds helpless and dependent who might be trained to earn an honourable provision. It will be well for all parties when the ideal of ladyhood changes, and the true lady is recognized, not by what she does, but by the spirit in which she does it.

The question of the suffrage, however, is not a ladies', but a woman's question. It matters little whether its exercise is unfeminine, in the ladylike sense of the word, if it be not unwomanly. Let us try if we can make out what are the essential characteristics of womanhood apart from all conventional ideas ; and as we enumerate them, let us enquire if they are incompatible with the safe and useful exercise of the rights of citizenship.

First, then, woman is physically weaker than man. This would be a reason for giving her the suffrage, which is in politics what fire-arms are in war, a weapon as powerful in a weak hand as a strong one, levelling the inequalities of individual strength, and giving an

even chance to the weakest. Woman might use it to claim justice, the only sure defence of the weak, not for herself only but for all who are oppressed and downtrodden in the struggle of life ; to strengthen the right which ought to be might, against the might which asserts itself right. Is this not woman's work?

Secondly. She has the larger inheritance of grace and beauty, a quicker and more delicate perception of both in outward things, a natural aptitude for refinement. She may use the suffrage to make her influence felt in elevating and refining public taste, in teaching the high utility of beauty, in lessening the hardness and coarseness, the ugliness and vulgarity with which our national life has been reproached. This, too, will surely be woman's work.

Thirdly. She is tender-hearted and pitiful. If political power be given to her she may use it on behalf of those who suffer; her sympathies will widen with her wider sphere of action from house and parish to country and race, and her influence be felt in politics by bringing into them a larger and tenderer humanity. Is this not woman's work?

Fourthly. She has a strong sense of duty. Political rights will bring with them the sense of political duties, and she may carry into political action the moral earnestness, the sense of moral responsibility which are so often weak or deficient in masculine politicians. This also may be classed as woman's work.

Lastly. She is religious. Faith, hope, and love, the three vital principles of religion, are as natural to her as they are hard of attainment to man. Give her the suffrage, and she will bring this element with her

into the national councils, and rescue them from the 'thinly disguised Paganism' which, as has been truly said, 'always seems to emerge into distinctness or transform itself into something unreal on every occasion when religion is in question.' We may then live to see England a state without a church, but never a state without a God. Shall this not be counted woman's work?

Yes, it may be answered, but not work for the women of to-day; they are not educated to do it. Then, in God's name, give them the suffrage quickly, for not till then will men see the necessity of educating them. What has brought Whig, Tory, and Radical to join in the demand for national education? What is inducing the denominationalists to accept the strict conscience clause so bitter to their dogmatic instincts, and the secularists to yield some measure of religious teaching in national schools, in spite of their hatred of clerical influence? What but the Reform Bill, which gave political power to the uneducated. Let another reform bill give it to women, and men will at length feel compelled to educate them, not as graceful playthings or useful drudges, but as the possessors of a power which society must, at its peril, teach them to use for its benefit.

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REPORT

OF A

MEETING OF THE LONDON NATIONAL SOCIETY

FOR

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE,

Held at the Hanover Square Rooms, on Saturday, March 26th, 1870.

The chair was taken by Mrs. P. A. Taylor at 4 o'clock.

The room was densely crowded, and among those present were Lord Houghton, Lady Amberley, Lady Anstruther, Mrs. Jacob Bright, Mons. Louis Blanc, Sir D. Wedderburn, M.P., Professor Fawcett, M.P., Mr. John Morley, Mr. Eastwick, M.P., Mr. McLaren, M.P., and Mrs. McLaren, Mr. Charley, M.P., Capt. Maxse, Mr. P. A. Taylor, M.P., Miss Cobbe, Lady Eleanor Brodie, Mr. W. H. Ashurst, Mr. Bernard Cracroft, Mrs. Stansfeld, Miss C. A. Biggs, Lady Crompton, Countess Beauchamp, Lady Belper, Major and Mrs. Bell, Mrs. Crawshay, Professor S. Amos, Miss Jewsbury, Herr Karl Blind, Syed Ameer Ali, Mr. Jas. Heywood, Mr. F. T. Palgrave, Miss Motley, Mr. and Mrs. Russell-Martineau, Mrs. Lucas, Mr. M. D. Conway, Miss E. Garrett, Lady Lyell, Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, Mrs. Brewer, A. J. E. Russell, Esq., M.P., Miss Betham Edwards, Mr. and Mrs. Pennington, Mr. and Mrs. F. Malleson, Mr. and Mrs. Boyd Kinnear, Mrs. Frank Hill, Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Arnold, Mr. A. Arnold, Mr. Macdonnell, Mrs. Donkin, Mr. W. F. Rae, Miss Sturge, Mr. J. B. Elliott, Mr. C. Frewen, Mr. W. J. Thornton, Professor Cassal, Professor H. Morley, Hon. Dudley Campbell, Mr. C. E. Maurice, Miss Durrant, Mr. W. Shaen, Dr. Symes Thompson.

Mrs. Taylor.—Gentlemen and Ladies, I feel deeply the honour and privilege of presiding over this meeting, but I must say I do not

feel the right person in the right place. At the meeting we held last July, our audience consisted only of the members and friends of our Society, and my task was comparatively an easy one, as I felt I had the sympathy of all present with me, and that any shortcoming on my part would be kindly excused. Looking at this assembly, I cannot hope that this will be the case now; I cannot flatter myself that all present hold right views upon women's suffrage. It was matter of regret with many that we had not occupied a far larger hall last year, that we might have had numbers of our opponents present to listen to, and probably be converted by, the eloquent speeches then delivered. But we women are, perhaps, over-cautious; we dread failure, and the result of failure, ridicule; and we felt that, had our meeting been a failure, our cause would have been injured. But the success of that meeting, and the progress our cause has made since, emboldened us this time to take a room capable of holding more than thrice the number of the one we occupied last year; and I think, looking at this assembly, our boldness is justified. One evidence of progress is the continual addition of members to our Society; and we may infer that, as our ranks increase, the ranks of our opponents decrease; but as their numbers diminish, their fertility in arguments against women's franchise apparently increases. One of the latest is, the danger of this new excitement of politics to women. Our opponents have suddenly become very much alive to the evils of such excitement to us women, and express great anxiety upon the subject; but it seems rather a one-sided anxiety. In one of the morning journals of about six weeks since was an article discussing this point, in which it was said—

'What are likely to be the physical consequences of opening a new source of excitement to women? It is idle to say that the excitements of politics are more wholesome or healthy than the excitements of social or fashionable life. It is not altogether impossible that Mr. Mill, in aiming at the intellectual elevation of the human race, advocates that which would lead to its steady physical degeneration.'

Now I question the perfect accuracy of this statement in regard to this new source of excitement to women. If women had led such secluded lives as never to have heard the word 'politics,' and would be obliged to have recourse to a dictionary to learn the meaning of an election, our opponents might have, with some apparent justice, brought forward this plea; but it is not true that this is a new excitement to women with respect to political questions. The wives, relatives, friends of the candidates, and many others have often

taken a very great personal interest in elections, and not the less exciting because personal; and I have never heard of any injurious results. Women, when they have votes, will, I trust, feel a deep interest in the election of the candidate in their estimation best fitted to be their representative, and the excitement is not likely to be greater because less personal.

I agree with the words of the writer, that it is idle to *say* that the excitements of politics are more healthy than the excitements of social and fashionable life, because it is idle to compare the wholesome excitement which arises from the study and investigation of social and political questions, which affect women equally with men, with the enervating excitements and dissipations of a fashionable season.

The study of politics—that is, of the history of the present—requires some concentration of thought, and is far more likely to strengthen and elevate the mind and widen the sympathies than reading the sensational novels which are a disgrace to the nineteenth century, serving only to pander to a morbid appetite for excitement, and to fill up the vacant hours of the fashionable world. Some of our enlightened opponents have warmly advocated politics being made a branch of education in girls' schools and colleges, maintaining that it is as essential for women as for men to understand the laws of their country, and as desirable for them to take interest in the social and political questions of the day; but having acquired this knowledge, and in its acquisition learned to appreciate the benefits of just legislation, and the privilege of voting for the best legislation, our opponents, with a refinement of cruelty, say, 'Rest satisfied with the knowledge you have acquired; discuss politics in your own homes, but do not seek for any practical application of them.' I do not say it is a parallel case, but I think artists would feel aggrieved, and perhaps rebel, when, having mastered all the difficulties and technicalities of their art, and acquired great skill as painters, they were told, 'Rest satisfied with the knowledge and skill you have acquired, talk about art in your own homes, but do not seek for any practical application.' Some of our Conservative friends have expressed great apprehension at the late extension of the suffrage, fearing that the working-classes are opposed to us; but I think there is no ground for such alarm. There have already been presented the following petitions from the metropolitan boroughs—viz., Finsbury (2,584), Chelsea (2,832), Marylebone (2,363), Tower Hamlets (1,777), Hackney (4,779), Southwark (4,487), Westminster (2,125), Lambeth (2,428). We have now ready for presentation others from these boroughs signed by upwards of 17,000 persons; and

of all these, more than half are signed by the working-classes. Another of the arguments most frequently urged against us is the unfitness of women for the suffrage. Women are, it seems, fitted to pay taxes, fitted to pay all the penalties of being householders, but not fit for any of its privileges. Our opponents say the franchise would unfit us for our domestic duties. Now, in answer to this argument I will read a few words from a letter written by the Rev. Frederick Maurice to the Editor of the *Spectator*, on March 1st:—'I would contend as earnestly as anyone for the domestic duties of a woman. I question whether you do not cripple her in the performance of these duties, and lower her conception of their grandeur, when you teach her not to regard herself as a citizen. The sanctity of the home is the safeguard of the nation: if you decree a separation between the home and the nation, if you affirm that one-half of the nation is to be shut up in the home and excluded from any participation in large interests, take care that the ornaments of the home do not become mere ornaments, pictures to be gazed at and worshipped, not living powers to purify and hallow. I should like to see our legislature proving by their acts that this is not their conception of a woman's function in the world; all the compliments which they pay her are very hollow and contemptible if it is.'

A few years ago, before the abolition of slavery in America, the upholders of negro slavery were loud in their vociferations that the negro was unfit for freedom. Slavery was abolished, and the negro proved himself fit for freedom. Let the electoral disabilities of women be removed, and women will at once prove themselves fit for the franchise.

Mr. John Stuart Mill.—Since the first General Meeting of this Society in July of last year, we have had ample reason to be satisfied with the progress that has been made by our cause. That progress has manifested itself not only by the increased number of our friends, but, still more, by the altered tone of our opponents. During the year which has just elapsed, much has been written in various publications against the equality of the sexes, but it is remarkable how few of the writers have expressed any great disapprobation of that which is the direct object of this Society, the admission of women to the suffrage. Many of them have even said in express terms that to thus much of concession they, perhaps, might not object. A vote at elections is now, with many of them, a small thing, which they can afford to concede; if women wish for it, they may as well have it as not; but what shocks and scandalises them is, that a claim should be made for women to equality of rights in civil life, and

especially in marriage. This is of good augury, and I begin to hope that I may live to see the whole discussion transferred to this point. Those of us who claim for women complete equality of rights have always said that this is a totally different question from the suffrage. The suffrage is a thing apart; no woman, by claiming it, is in the smallest degree committed to the larger demand; if women were, by an inherent and inevitable necessity, subject to the authority of men, they would need the protection of the suffrage all the more. Every plea, either of justice or policy, which speaks for granting the suffrage to any man, applies equally to women.

But there is a side of the question on which I should like to say something: the particular manner in which the addition of women to the electoral body is likely to affect the character of Parliament, and to modify the mode in which public affairs are carried on. I think that the most marked effect, in the immediate future, would be to infuse into the legislature a stronger determination to grapple with the great practical evils of society. Women electors, I think, will be more difficult to persuade than men that those evils must be accepted—cannot be cured, cannot even be much mitigated—and that we may, with an untroubled conscience, avert our eyes from them, with an occasional grumble at what they cost us in rates, taxes, and charities. Women, I think, will find it hard to believe that legislation and administration are powerless to make any impression on these frightful evils, and that the acme of statesmanlike wisdom is to let them alone. I should consequently expect, from the political influence of women, a considerable increase of activity in dealing with the causes of these evils. I know there are many men who regard any increased activity in that direction with alarm, thinking that it means inconsiderate benevolence, injudicious legal regulation, and general increase of meddling. But there is wise as well as unwise meddling; well-directed as well as ill-directed benevolence; and there is a tendency in the present day to confound the two. It is my conviction that, if the State employed all the means it possesses of raising the standard of morality, and even, in some respects, of physical well-being, in the community, it would find that it has much more in its power than it is now the fashion to believe; and that Governments in these days are quite as blameable in neglecting the right means of promoting those objects, as in days yet recent they were in pursuing the wrong. The time has passed away when Governments, speaking generally, were actively tyrannical; their favourite sins in the present time are indolence and indifference. Whatever scruples they have about doing ill, they have, in general, none at all about leaving ill alone, but allow mountains of mischief

to be piled up from age to age, without any serious attempt to check the accumulation. There is something in the nature of government by men alone, which encourages this easy self-satisfaction. Men are more mentally indolent than women, and are far too ready to believe that they have done everything, or that there is nothing to be done. Their consciences and feelings need rousing, and the stronger active impulses of women are wanted to do it. If I am now asked whether, in my opinion, those active impulses can be depended on for prompting the most judicious line of conduct—whether women will discriminate well between good and bad modes of combating evils, and will not be apt to mistake the most direct mode for the most efficacious; I freely confess that the political education of women must be greatly improved, before as much as this can be affirmed with any confidence. But this would only be a real objection, if we were going to disfranchise the men, and turn over the whole power to women. All we want is, that the two should be obliged to take counsel together. We want the ship of the State to have both sail and ballast, and not, as is too often the case now when the navigation is troublesome, all ballast and no sail. There is little danger that the over-zeal of women will not be quite sufficiently tempered by the over-caution of men. In these days we do not fail, in matters of government, for want of a curb, but of a spur; and women, even with the present defects of their education, are well qualified for that office. As their education improves, they will do more; they will not only be a stimulus to others, but will themselves be capable of doing their full share of the work. Women, on the average, have more contriving minds than men; in things they are really interested in, they are readier in finding means for the attainment of an end; especially in undertakings the success of which greatly depends on the details of the execution. Now this is emphatically the case with attempts to correct the great physical and moral evils of society. These are works of detail. Men form great projects, sound in principle perhaps, and rational in their general conception, but which, when applied to practice, break down, from unforeseen failure of efficiency in the execution. Many more of these projects would succeed if women had a share in planning them.

These, I think, are the most marked effects on the general course of government and legislation, which would flow from the admission of women to a share in the functions of citizenship. To this we must add, that the wrongs and grievances which specially affect women would no longer be considered too unimportant to be worth any serious attempt to put an end to them. To take one example among many: if women had votes, there would be a much sterner

repression of those outrages on women, which make the necessity working women are under of going out alone a serious danger to them; outrages which have only reached their present height through the inexcusable leniency with which they are treated by the courts of justice. If women had had votes, we should not have had the 'Contagious Diseases Acts;' under which the wives and daughters of the poor are exposed to insufferable indignities on the suspicion of a police-officer; and must be so, if the Acts are to be so enforced as to have any chance of being effectual for their object. If those Acts are repealed—if they are not extended to the whole country—it will be owing to the public spirit and courage of those ladies, some of them of distinguished eminence, who have associated themselves to obtain the repeal of the Acts; a courage and public spirit which can only be duly appreciated by those who have noticed the impudent and shameless character of some of the attacks which have been made on them in print by anonymous writers. To those worthier and more honourable opponents, who think these ladies mistaken, and the course they have adopted an unfavourable indication of the use they are likely to make of increased political influence, I would say—Suppose the Acts to be as beneficent as I hold them to be pernicious; suppose that the ladies who disapprove of them are not actuated by any reasonable view of their nature and consequences, but by an excess or a misapplication of the particular moral sentiment which men have inculcated on them as their especial and principal virtue. What then? Is it no evil that the laws of a country should be repugnant to the moral feelings of confessedly the most moral half of the population? If the repugnance is grounded on mistake, ought not time to have been given, and explanation and discussion used, to rectify the mistake; instead of leaving them to find out, years afterwards, that laws had been passed, almost in secret, revolting to their strongest feelings? That women's suffrage would put a check upon such proceedings as this; that it would compel legislators to take into account the moral feelings of those in whom such feelings are the strongest, and to carry those moral feelings with them, instead of contemptuously setting them aside—must be counted among the benefits that would result from the grant of the suffrage.

There are men—not a few—liberal and enlightened on general topics, whose own feelings would incline them to be just to women, but who dread the immediate effect of admitting them to the suffrage, because they think it would greatly increase the power of the clergy. I have never denied that if the suffrage were given them to-day or to-morrow, something like this might possibly, for a time, be the

result. And, differing as I do in opinion and feeling on many important topics from the great majority of the clergy, I am not a likely person to undervalue this objection. But it is to me obvious that if the clergy have now too great an ascendancy over the minds of many women, especially in the middle class, it is because the other influences by which the human intelligence is acted on, and opinions formed, have not been allowed to reach them. They have had no encouragement to read the books, or take part in the conversations, which would have shown them that any of the opinions they hear from the clergy are disputed, and disputable. Even if there were no direct discouragement, they have not been so brought up as to take interest in such readings or conversations: while they have been trained in the belief that it is women's part to accept the opinions they find prevalent, and that the thoughtful consideration of great subjects, and the formation of well-considered opinions by hearing both sides, is none of their business. How then is it possible that they should not fall under the influence of those who address them through the only feelings and principles they have been taught to cultivate? And consider another thing. What is it that makes clergymen in general, even where professional prejudices do not directly interfere, such unsafe advisers in politics and the affairs of life? It is because they are too much in the position of women; they are treated too much as women are: under a show of deference, they are shut out from the free and equal discussion of great practical questions, and are taught to think themselves concerned with only one aspect of any subject—the moral and religious aspect, in the narrow sense in which they use those terms; for, in a larger sense, all questions in which there is a right and a wrong are moral and religious. Is not this very like the condition of women? To those who dread the influence of the clergy on women's minds, I would say this: If the clergy have more of such influence than belongs to their character and to the degree of their cultivation, let us be just, and admit that they have fairly earned it. The clergy are the only persons who, as a class, have taken any pains with women's minds; the only persons who have appealed directly to their own principles and convictions; who have addressed them as if they had themselves a moral responsibility—as if their souls and consciences were their own. The clergy are the only men who have seemed to think it of any consequence what women think or feel, on any subject outside the domestic sphere. Those who show this respect to women, deserve to have influence with them: and will continue to have more than enough, until other men employ the same means of acquiring such influence which they have done. If the fathers,

brothers, and husbands of these women took equal pains with their minds—if they invited them to interest themselves in the subjects in which the fathers, brothers, and husbands are interested, as the clergy do in those which interest *them*; and if they were taught, by the responsibility of a vote, that the formation of an intelligent opinion on public questions is as much their right and duty as it is the right and duty of men—they would soon find themselves more competent and better judges of those subjects than the clergy are; and there would be no danger whatever of their surrendering their own judgment into the hands of their clerical instructors. Whatever is excessive or hurtful in the clerical influence over them would be weakened, exactly in proportion as they took part in the affairs of life; and only that which is salutary would remain. Instead, then, of regarding the clerical influence as a hindrance to giving women votes, I look upon the vote as the most effectual means of emancipating them from the too exclusive influence of the clergy. But if this danger were far greater than it is, it would be an unworthy thing, on account of such an apprehension, to refuse to one half of the species that necessary means of self-protection, so highly prized by the other half. Every portion of mankind has its own special liabilities to error; and he who would refuse the suffrage to others because he is afraid of their making mistakes, would find good reasons for disfranchising everybody but himself. Safety does not lie in excluding some, but in admitting all, that contrary errors and excesses may neutralise one another. And of all who ever claimed the suffrage, or for whom it was ever claimed, there are none in whose case there is so little reason for apprehending any evil consequences whatever from their obtaining it—none for whose continued exclusion the excuses are so insignificant, so fanciful, as in the case of women.

Professor Cairnes.—Mrs. Taylor, Ladies and Gentlemen, after the speech we have just heard, the task of seconding this resolution becomes, fortunately for me, a light one. It is the peculiarity of the agitation in which we are engaged, that although formally a political agitation, yet its principal aims, at least as I apprehend them, or at all events the most important objects to be expected from it, are not political, but rather moral and social. I do not at all mean to deny that important legislative results may follow from the extension of the franchise to women—very far from it; but I think that we should not be doing justice to our cause if we allowed the arguments upon this question in any large degree to turn upon that class of considerations, because I believe that the really weighty considerations in this matter—what really determines thoughtful

people whether they will support this movement or oppose it—is not the expectation of political results, whether beneficial or the reverse, but such anticipations as they form of the probable effect of extending the suffrage to women upon the character of woman herself, and through that character upon the various departments of life which she so largely influences. The resolution that has just been read to you declares that it is the tendency of this policy to promote among women a more cogent sense of public duty, and of their responsibilities in reference to the higher moral interests of the community. And this, it seems to me, is just one of those truths which may be said to shine by its own light, for I take it there is no ethical principle clearer than this, that power and responsibility go together, and that it is quite impossible to awaken the sense of responsibility unless in so far as you produce the consciousness of power. In short, the field of morality is necessarily limited by the field of liberty, and the sense of the moral obligation consequently does not arise except where there is the consciousness of freedom. I am quite aware that these sentences which I have been uttering will be regarded by many as the expression of the veriest moral platitudes; and I admit that they are moral platitudes; but, if I may be allowed to say so, I am scarcely responsible for this, because it is of the very nature of this discussion. The rights we claim for women are rights which are directly connected with the most fundamental principles of morals; they spring immediately from the primary axioms of morality; and consequently it is impossible to defend those rights, or to advocate them in argument, without a constant appeal to the simplest and most elementary moral notions. I shall perhaps be told that these plausible generalities are nevertheless not borne out by facts; and I shall be reminded perhaps of the number of women who, although excluded from the franchise, have given the most unequivocal evidence that their interest in political affairs is wide and deep—who have shown that they are competent to enter into the discussion of the most important and difficult political and moral problems. Certainly, standing upon this platform, and in presence of the ladies I see around me, it is not open to me to dispute that statement, and I certainly do not wish to dispute it. But I contend that the fact, as fact it is, so far from militating against the principle I am maintaining, on the contrary affords the most decisive evidence in its favour, for when we come to consider who the women are who have shown this lively interest in political affairs, we find that they are precisely the same women who have found out for themselves the means of exerting influence in political affairs—women who to a very large

extent are independent of the suffrage owing to exceptional talents and qualifications, which enable them to make their opinions felt independently of the power of voting; and I say that this fact, far from militating against the cause I am supporting, on the contrary affords a weighty argument in favour of extending the suffrage to women, in order to awaken in the many, by analogous means, the same strong sense of public duty, and the same honourable desire to promote the well-being of the community, which has already been manifested to such good purpose by the gifted few.

I am not going to be guilty of the presumption of pursuing this theme at any length—I only wonder at my own audacity in venturing upon it thus far after the discourse we have just listened to. But before sitting down, there is another aspect of the truth contained in the resolution to which I will, with your permission, advert for a few moments. I remarked just now, as characteristic of this movement, that its most important objects were rather of an indirect than of a direct character—that is to say, they were connected with its reflex action upon the character of women, and through women upon society in general. Now I am the more anxious to insist upon this point, because it appears to me that some of the most plausible arguments that are advanced against us owe their plausibility entirely to overlooking this circumstance. I lately saw in the public papers a criticism of this movement which took the following form. It was stated, and correctly stated, that already a very large field of activity was open to women, which, nevertheless, they did not occupy; for example, there was nothing to prevent them from entering into commercial or industrial life to any extent they pleased; literature was open to them, and it was admitted that in literature at least they had done something; journalism was open to them, and now medicine was open to them; but it was said, with few and rare exceptions, no advantage was taken of these opportunities; why, it was asked, instead of talking, do not they descend into the arena and act? Their not doing so is a conclusive proof, so these reasoners urge, that they feel they are not suited for these occupations. And then we were reminded of all that might be done by even one woman who, 'taking her life in her hand'—that was the expression used—should proceed to work out for herself the problem of self-help by the means that are open to her. Now, in reply to this argument, I think I may say in the first place, that if this cause has not already triumphed, it has not been for want of women who have been ready 'to take their lives in their hands,' and not merely to descend into arenas that were open to receive them, but to force their way into arenas that were closed

against them—women who were ready to lead, and are now leading, what, however, I must not call the 'forlorn hope' of this cause. I say that if this cause has not triumphed, it has not been for want of women of that stamp. But then, it is said, they are so few in number. Well, certainly they are not very numerous; it must be admitted that the whole female sex is not composed of heroines; if they were, there would probably be little need for this agitation; but they are not, and we are quite aware there is much that women might do if they had only the pluck to do it, which they do not do. But we ask, what is it that holds them back? In the expression that I quoted just now, I think we may find the answer to that question. The criticism spoke of women 'taking their lives in their hands.' Now, for what purpose are they obliged to take their lives in their hands? Why, to earn an honest livelihood. Why? We do not regard it as a great act of heroism if a man starts as a merchant or a doctor; why is it that in the case of women we form a different judgment? Of course the answer is very obvious; it is not law, at least in the cases to which I have referred, but public opinion that holds them back, that public opinion which pronounces it to be unwomanly to engage in any occupation outside a certain narrow conventional range. Now we desire to remove this obstacle from woman's path—we wish to break down this public opinion, and to erect another and a better public opinion, under which not merely a few heroines here and there, but women of ordinary abilities and average character, may not be deterred, through fear of 'Mrs. Grundy' or anybody else, from employing their faculties in whatever way, on whatever field, she finds most useful to the public, and most profitable and satisfactory to herself. That, it seems to me, is a sufficient justification for our being here to-day; for we believe that the most effectual means of accomplishing this end is to extend political rights to women; for once let it be generally recognised that women have public as well as private duties, that they owe something to the commonwealth as well as to themselves and their families, that life is open to them, to make the best of it, as it is to men—let this once be fully recognised, and it becomes quite inevitable that a complete and fundamental change will take place in their whole education and training. We shall thus produce the conditions under which alone it is possible that the experiment of women's capacity for commercial and professional life can be fairly tried. What the result of that experiment will be, I do not see that it is very necessary for us now to enquire. It is sufficient that the experiment should be made. We desire that it may be made; and we think that it cannot be fairly and

effectively made until the movement which this meeting has met to promote shall have issued in triumph.

Mrs. Grote.—Mrs. Taylor, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is an act that savours more of temerity than of courage when a person of advanced age and infirm health appears to offer a few observations; but the cause is worthy of an effort. I have always supported the movement to advance which we are now assembled here, but even to support the movement I don't know that I should have found it in myself to have made this struggle but that I have come here in discharge of a duty, a duty imposed upon me by an obligation conferred on us, one and all, by the untiring, zealous, and effective management of this movement on the part of our respected committee. It is to express that sentiment, and the feeling of respect and gratitude towards those ladies, that I have ventured to present myself to you to-day; at the same time, that I may congratulate you on the progress which we have made towards the object we have in view. I may call it a hopeful position that we occupy on the present occasion; but we should never, I am obliged to confess, have arrived at the stage we have now reached had it not been for the gallant assistance of members of the other sex. The stronger sex have come to our help, and they have given us such support that really I begin to think we see daylight. We have navigated—our committee, I ought to say, rather, and our general managers, have navigated, and by their untiring zeal and excellent and well-directed efforts have conducted the ship into the channel; and now the pilots must take her in charge, the parliamentary pilots who must conduct us into port.

I never was engaged in any cause in which my feelings were more completely seconded by my reason than in this. I have always felt that the arguments against women's franchise have been so feeble and limited, and so ineffective, that the wonder is that they were ever put forth; but we have had a counsel, I must observe—an advocate, not a Q.C., although our advocate wears a silk gown—who has pleaded our cause, not before the Court of Nisi Prius or the Common Pleas, but before the court of common sense, in the pages of the *Westminster Review*; and in that pleading the arguments derived from the constitutional theory have been developed with a clearness, a force, and a completeness which appears to me to leave nothing unsaid. As far as that argument goes—and I confess it is an immensely powerful one with me—the constitutional argument, it is sufficient for our purpose, since it has never been overthrown: the onus lies on those who would gainsay it, and who pretend it is not applicable. I say our thanks are due to our excellent advocate in

the silk gown, and although I do not dare to allude more particularly to her, I am sure what I say meets with a response from you all.

There is a branch of the argument, nevertheless, which I think has not been touched upon even in those excellent pleadings to which I allude; but that is no wonder, because the occasion has arisen since. It has arisen in consequence of the late Reform Bill. By that Reform Bill you have invested with a large measure of representative power the classes who do not possess property, or at least in very small proportions, but who live by their labour; that is to say, you have augmented the weight of the representation of numbers: then is it not fair that at least the property side should be in possession of all its legitimate power? Why, when you have augmented one side of the representation, are you not to give the full measure of its power to the other? I think that is an additional reason for giving the franchise to women; that is, to women who occupy the position of citizens, bearing the burdens to which their position is subject, contributing to the support of the State, and having the liabilities which attach to property.

It has been thought that this point of view may savour of a Conservative tendency; that is to say, a partiality towards throwing greater importance into the balance of the Constitution depending upon property; but I should say that if that is so, it might possibly attract to our side persons who differ from us in politics, and if it does, I am sure we shall welcome them as auxiliaries, for, after all, equity and common sense belong to no party. The possession of the municipal franchise I consider to have been a very great help to the acquisition of the larger privilege. I may mention, in reference to that, an incident that came within my own knowledge. In a borough town in one of the southern counties, the election for the municipal officers lately took place. Meeting a friend on the road, a staunch Liberal who always voted steadily on that side, he said to me, 'The elections for our borough are all gone on the Conservative side.' 'Indeed!' I said. 'Yes, and carried through the votes of the women.' I replied, 'Indeed I am surprised;' and he said, 'I am afraid I must add the women voted right—they voted for the fittest candidates'; and so I say with regard to the franchise—if our fellow-countrywomen are invested with it, I entertain no doubt they will use it uprightly, whichever way they vote: that is not our concern; what we want is a free vote, and a free conscience before all. Having with that little anecdote managed to point my moral, I will now close my tale.

Sir Robert Anstruther, Bart., M.P.—Madam, in rising to support

the resolution, I am sure I shall best consult the feelings of this meeting by first taking the opportunity of expressing our thanks to the distinguished lady who has preceded me for the able and eloquent address to which we have all listened with so much interest, and our earnest hope that she may not in the slightest degree suffer from the great effort she has made to-day. In turning to the subject of my resolution, which I may be allowed to read again—'That this meeting is of opinion that the extension of the franchise to women will tend to promote among them a more cogent sense of their special duties as citizens, and of their general responsibilities as concerned with the advancement of the highest moral interests of the whole community'—I am like a gleaner in a field reaped with all the improvements of modern machinery, and there are but few ears left for me to gather; but I may be, perhaps, permitted to say a few words on the gain to be looked for from this movement—first, to women themselves, and secondly, to the whole community. First, to a woman herself, in developing her sense of responsibility, enlarging the scope of her interests, giving increased stimulus for the improvement of her powers. It is true that of late years there have been more openings for the energies of women, and they have been allowed to take more share in social questions; but still, how many women are there with kind hearts, good natural abilities, leisure, and often money and influence, whose lives are occupied with a small round of so-called social duties and trivial interests! What a gain to such a one to be brought into contact with the real pressing needs around her—to be made to feel that she must accept her share of the responsibility for the crying evils that are rife in this Christian England. I admit that it is a fair subject for argument whether the conferring of the franchise is the best method of giving to women an increased interest in social improvement, but I think all will acknowledge that if it be so, the gain would be great, and we who approve this resolution feel that the franchise would be at least an important step in the right direction. Some may assert that in charitable work amongst the poor there is a sufficient opening for the employment of a woman's leisure; but it is those engaged in real charitable work—not merely money-giving, which only perpetuates the evil it strives to relieve—but in real well-considered schemes for helping the poor to help themselves, who would feel the benefit of being able to bring influence to bear upon those who have the power of remedying so much that stands in need of reform. This leads me naturally to consider the gain to the community from bringing women into the electoral roll. May we not reasonably suppose that the evils connected with the admin-

istration of the Poor-Law system, the crime, the ignorance, the immorality which prevail may be mitigated when the thousands of good women in England feel that they have a direct share in the responsibility of allowing them to continue without any attempt at legislative interference? Now, what I for one hope for from the present movement is, to see women's influence brought to bear upon the administration of the Poor Law, to see them superintend the sanitary condition of the dwellings of the poor, and occupied in the authorised visitation of prisons and reformatories, and in works of a kindred nature, for the performance of which I believe they are pre-eminently qualified; and more especially I look for a good influence in the cause of education. Time will not permit, Madam, that I should enter at any length into the many ways in which this might be exerted, whether by a seat on the School Board, by taking part in the official inspection of schools, or by other means; but above all, I humbly venture to think it might do good service to the country in softening those sectarian animosities and jealousies which at the present moment, fanned alike from all sides by Churchmen, Dissenters, and Secularists, bid fair to bring about the lamentable result of the exclusion from our primary schools of that Book from which have sprung the true liberty and greatness of our country, and the place of which, even as a refining and elevating influence, apart from higher considerations, cannot be supplied. Madam, upon such a subject as this the voice of the women of England is fairly entitled to be heard. And when that voice shall be heard, as it will be ere long, I venture to express my confident opinion that it will pronounce in favour of educating our children in those broad principles of Christian teaching and morals upon which all Christian denominations are founded, and which form the common ground upon which all Christians may meet and work together without the sacrifice of a single principle. These, Madam, are a few of the reasons which induce me to support this resolution, and why I hope before long to give the more substantial support of a vote in Parliament in favour of the Bill about to be brought in this session.

The resolution was then put to the meeting by Mrs. Taylor, and carried unanimously.

Mrs. Fawcett.—The resolution which I have been asked to move is, 'That this meeting regards with much satisfaction the introduction into the House of Commons of a Bill for removing the electoral disabilities of women.' I think that nearly every one interested in the extension of the suffrage to women feels that it is time that the question should again be brought before Parliament and the

country in a practical form. The objection we constantly meet with is, that women's suffrage is repugnant to the feelings—people do not seem to think it necessary to state what feelings, and whether these feelings are based upon reason and justice, or the reverse; all they say is, it is repugnant to their feelings. Now, I think the best way to meet such opposition as this is, by a full and frequent discussion of the claims of women to the suffrage, and the constant reiteration of the bases of reason and equity upon which that claim rests. And there is nothing so likely to awaken discussion and to provoke conversation on the subject, both public and private, as the introduction of a Bill into the House of Commons. There are some sanguine persons who tell us that this Bill is to be carried this year, and that soon the subject will be settled once for all. Whether this happy prediction is to be fulfilled or not, I think nothing but good can come from the introduction of the Bill into the House of Commons. There are some who look upon women's suffrage as merely a whim, and believe that it has no practical bearing upon politics. Such persons will be more respectful to it when they see it embodied in a Bill actually brought to the vote in the House. Then, again, there have been discussions and meetings in different parts of the country, in which women have taken part, thus showing their interest in their own political enfranchisement, and tending to dissipate the prejudice which is still so strong against women taking any part in public affairs. During the discussion upon the Bill, it will be perhaps brought out that the rights of men and the rights of women rest upon exactly the same basis; and if this is the case, we can scarcely fail to obtain the adhesion to our cause of all working-men and those who took their part during the agitation which preceded the Reform Bill of 1867. We can scarcely hope to overcome the great mountain of prejudice against women's suffrage at once; so, if this Bill is lost, we shall be nothing discouraged by it. I hope the first practical effect of its being lost will be a notice that it will be re-introduced on the first day of the next session. Some persons say that women ought not to be enfranchised, because most of them are Conservatives. I daresay the very same persons who use this argument are ardent admirers of the representative character of the Government of this country. But do not representative institutions require that all differences of opinion should have their due and proportionate weight in the Legislature? If most women are Conservatives, then the Conservative party in the House of Commons is disproportionately weak to its strength in the country; and in this case the representative character of our institutions is violated. But then, it is said, what a misfortune it will be—it will

be a public calamity—if the party of reaction is strengthened! To which it may be replied, I think, that nothing is so likely to strengthen the party of reaction as a non-adaptation between the character of a people and the rule under which they live. Therefore, I think, on all hands this argument ought to be repudiated. Conservatives, of course, cannot accept it; and Liberals are bound by their admiration for representative institutions to oppose it. These and many other arguments against women's suffrage will no doubt receive all the attention they deserve in the House of Commons and elsewhere. I will therefore conclude by moving the resolution.

Lord Amberley.—Ladies and Gentlemen, the resolution which has just been moved in the clear and interesting speech which we have heard from Mrs. Fawcett calls upon this meeting to express the satisfaction it feels at the introduction of a Bill into the House of Commons to remove the electoral disabilities of women. It will, I think, be consistent with the spirit of this resolution if I tell you very shortly what are the principal reasons which induce me to look with satisfaction on the introduction of the Bill, and which would make me welcome with still greater happiness its passing into the law of the land.

In the first place, it appears to me that, in a country governed by institutions like our own, we ought to welcome, as a thing good and desirable in itself, the wish for political equality on the part of any class of persons of her Majesty's subjects. We have been taught to look on the possession of a vote as a very valuable and excellent thing, and it appears to me, when a number of women come forward to tell you they would be glad to possess votes, and to take their share in the government of this country, we ought to welcome that as an advance in their political education and intelligence. We are told it is unnecessary to give them votes, because they have quite influence enough already, and they would gain nothing by admission to the franchise. It appears that many thousands of them do not think they have influence enough already, and it seems to me that they themselves must be the best judges of that question. But I might appeal with confidence on this subject to any member of Parliament, and I might ask him to judge by his own experience whether it is a fact that his female constituents have by any means the same influence on his conduct as his male constituents. I am sure he will be obliged to answer, They have not. They don't, for instance, act on his election committee, they don't come to meetings and put questions to the candidates upon the answers to which their votes depend, they don't write letters on

political questions asking his attention to this and that matter, to support one bill and oppose another. If women were admitted to the suffrage they would inevitably take greater interest and part in the discussion of political questions; and I am inclined to think that that is peculiarly important at a time when it is obvious that social questions are becoming every day more important, and more and more engaging the attention of the Legislature; for it is just upon social questions, questions of criminal law, questions of workhouse reform, and of the various evils which press upon society, that women are most competent to give us their advice and opinion. But there is another reason why I should desire the admission of women to the franchise, and why I should believe their influence would be insufficient without the possession of that right. I don't think the law will ever do justice between men and women unless both are placed on a footing of political equality.

It has been pointed out over and over again that in many ways there is extreme unfairness and injustice in the present state of the law as between man and woman, and that injustice arises from the fact that women have not been recognised as the political equals of men, and that therefore various advantages have been conferred on men to which women have not been admitted. Take the single case of a married woman's property; that will be sufficient to illustrate the very different way in which women have been treated, from not being able to make their own interests felt and heard in the way in which men make theirs felt and heard.

But there are objections made—and they are the gravest of all—to this proposal upon the ground that it will exercise a deteriorating influence on the character of women. Persons don't so much prove it as imagine it, and think it without being able to prove it; but from some undefined feeling or other they cannot bear to grant the suffrage to women because of the dreadful effect they think it will exercise on their character; they seem to look forward to a time when all women will be going about the country lecturing and delivering speeches, and men are afraid that, instead of occupying themselves in reading the latest novels which are to be found at the circulating library, they will be studying such pernicious and corrupting books as 'Mill on Logic,' and Grote's 'History of Greece.' That is, no doubt, a very terrible prospect, and must be peculiarly alarming to young men who have just passed through an education at our public schools or universities, and must therefore be supposed to be quite incapable of understanding these subjects. For my part I have no fear of these dreadful results, whatever may be done towards the education and enfranchisement of women. I am afraid I can't say

that there will ever come a time when there will be no frivolous women; indeed, I can't expect a time to come in which there will not be a sufficient supply for all the purposes of social life, because, considering that every branch of public life is open to men, and they are precluded from no political distinctions, I still know that such things are sometimes to be found as frivolous men.

But it is said they will be drawn away from their domestic duties, and their time will be employed in political agitation and political affairs. I cannot attempt, in the compass of a few words, to answer that objection completely; but if there is any one ground upon which more than another I should support the proposal to enfranchise women, it would be because of the influence I believe their enfranchisement would exercise on domestic life. It appears to me that experience is entirely on our side upon that part of the matter. We shall find, if we look at the past and compare other countries with our own, that the more extensively and entirely women are educated with a view to marriage and domestic life, the less well do they perform even those duties for which they are intended; and that is perfectly consistent with the analogy of all other cases. You don't expect to make any one fit for a special profession by educating them entirely with a view to that profession, but you think he will do better in his own business if he has a wide and general education. So it is in the case of marriage. I cannot doubt that women will be better wives and mothers if they have other interests besides those at home, and that they will be better able to educate their children if they themselves are interested in the political questions of the day. I am sure, for instance, if any one will take the trouble to compare the Continent with our own country, they will not be able to say that women on the Continent of Europe, who are brought up in a more narrow way and particularly with a view to marriage, are in any way better wives and mothers than those in our own country, who live more freely and have much wider interests. But then I must remark, that our opponents are very inconsistent on this part of the matter; while they are so afraid of women being drawn away from their domestic duties by political life, they are by no means afraid of their being drawn away by other things; a woman may give her time to all kinds of other things interfering immensely with domestic life and duties; she may spend her day in the manner that has been so admirably described by Sir Robert Anstruther; she may give up any amount of time she likes to her beauty, to her dress, to the most selfish amusements, to any kind of occupation of the most trifling character, and society will not have a word to say against her; but if she gives the same time to attending meetings for the promotion

of causes in which she is deeply interested, and if she is desirous to vote in support of the candidate whose success she believes to be important to the country, then she is thought to be unfeminine and undomestic, and society has no words too strong in which to condemn her. It certainly seems to me that is a grave inconsistency; but I don't ask any woman to give up any legitimate amusement and to turn to other occupations. I don't ask those women who think in that way to change their opinion and their conduct; let them go on as they have done if they are contented with their present position and occupation; all I do ask, and I think it is a modest request, is that they shall not interfere—by their ridicule, by their coldness, and by their hostility—to prevent other women, who are less contented than they are, from helping in every way they can the advancement of their own sex, and, if possible, the progress of the community at large.

Miss Helen Taylor.—That women, or at least large classes of them, have some reasonable ground for complaint, very few people will be found to dispute. But while there is this general consent that the position of women is not all it ought to be, directly we come to details we find a great variety of opinion about where it is that the shoe pinches. Some people think that if married women could only have the full control over their own property (when they have any), women in general would have little left to desire. Others see that though a woman had all her own property, and even her earnings, to herself, she still might object to being kicked with her husband's heavy-nailed boots, or beaten with the leg of the table till it breaks over her head, or to many other of the little amenities of domestic life which are going on every day and hour from one end to the other of the country. Then there are some who think it mean and ungenerous of men to shrink from fair and open competition with women in the professions, and to take advantage of their own political power to shut the door of every profitable profession in the faces of young women who have got to earn a living. Others would apply these unflattering epithets to the way in which the educational (and sometimes even the charitable) endowments, which were meant in old times for men and women, for boys and girls, have been taken possession of for the sole help and support of the weaker—no, I mean of the stronger sex.

I do not know, Ladies, which of these grievances seem to you most urgently to need reform. For my part, when I reflect on them, when I consider which reform is most urgently wanted to remedy crying evils of the most practical sort, which is most pressingly needed, it seems to me we need them all. And we need something

more. We need something which shall prevent fresh abuses, like those which have deprived us of our fair share of educational facilities; something which shall prevent fresh laws, like those which forbid us to compete in professions and for appointments; something that shall remind men that we are by their side in the affairs of life, with the same needs and the same desires that they have, that we are human, like themselves, and desire freedom and happiness just as they do. How can women be truly called men's companions while they are only companions in one part of life, and are shut out from the largest part of practical affairs? It is true there are some who say that women are too gentle and pure to be mixed up with the vulgar realities of politics, and that men respect them a great deal more while they hold aloof from the hard prose of life, and live in an atmosphere of sweetness and poetry. But this is a very fanciful ideal of women's life. There must be hard prose in human life, whichever way we turn. As if the common details of domestic life, with all its small economies and struggle of interests, and the prosaic realities of the education of children; as if society, with its rivalries and vanities, and all the jealousies between woman and woman, could not call forth quite as vulgar and unpoetical emotions (in those who will yield to them) as politics can do; and did not require, in upright and pure-minded women, quite as much exercise of self-control, of conscience, and of singleness of purpose in order to keep untainted their own nobility of mind and heart! But what these small troubles and limited experiences can never do is to enlarge the mind, and give breadth and solidity to the whole nature. Women have little judicial calmness, for they know scarcely anything of law or the administration of justice. They have few far-reaching sympathies, for they are told to confine their interests to their own homes; they have small balance of judgment, for they seldom know more than one side of a question; and so one might go on through the list of their defects, and the causes of those defects.

Nor is it possible, however respectfully the political disabilities of women may be expressed, that those disabilities can do other than cause them to be looked on with less respect. For with whom do we share those disqualifications? With criminals, with idiots, with lunatics, and, lastly, with minors—young people whose minds have not arrived at maturity. Now if some few men of a reflective or a sentimental turn of mind tell us, in the kindest and most considerate language, that it is the very superiority of women that shuts them out from the suffrage, that it is their gentleness and purity that unfit them for public affairs, the great mass will never think so. Brothers, sons, employers, servants, associates in trade or business, with that

rough common sense which belongs to the ordinary mind, will always feel that if women are classed, for political purposes, along with the childish, the wicked, and the mentally incapable, it must be because there is some resemblance between them. And they will respect them accordingly. And if what is said by so many good and thoughtful men were true, if women really are kinder and gentler, purer and more ideal than men, have we so much of these things in politics that we can afford to cast them aside with contempt? Are kindness and gentleness, singleness of mind and purity of heart, such drugs in political life, that we must needs shut them out of the arena for fear of being overdone with them? Does not that great mass of poverty, of corruption, and of ignorance which goes festering on, century after century, in the depths of society, come just from the coldness, the hardness, the selfishness of men? The horrors of war, for instance, the licentiousness of society, the universal standard of self-interest in all things, these we may admit are pre-eminently masculine. A little infusion of feminine gentleness would do no harm in those things, and might prevent some of that incessant action and reaction, that perpetual oscillation between extremes—such as despotism and anarchy, licence and severity—which is so marked in history; which betrays so plainly the want of balance in our system of society; and which is so exactly what we might naturally expect as the result of excluding one half of human nature from all direct action on public affairs.

Nor is women's suffrage wanted only for the sake of its influence on society as a whole, or of its effect on the character of women. It is wanted also to enable women to insist on the carrying out of those reforms which all the world acknowledges to be desirable, but which are perpetually set aside while more pressing things—which constituents demand—are being done. I have been told that when, three years ago, it was first proposed in the House of Commons to admit women to the franchise, many members, who disclaimed all sympathy with any such idea, yet expressed the strongest indignation at particular injustices to which women are subjected. Well, and what have these chivalrous gentlemen done? Where are the grievances they have redressed? One might have supposed that, when once their eyes were opened to the wrongs under which helpless women suffer, no time would have been lost in redressing them. All the world acknowledges, for example, that the British husband of the lower class is given to brutally ill-treating his wife. Have any of the members who think that women ought by no means to have the suffrage, but ought to be properly protected by the lawgivers, have any of these lawgivers brought in

a bill for flogging men who ill-treat women? Not one. It is very well worthy of note that no bill for the advantage of women has been brought in, except by men who vote for giving them the suffrage. For indeed, however men may talk, seldom when it comes to action will any of them trouble themselves to help women who are not glad to give them the means of helping themselves.

But I fancy I hear some ladies say, After all, are we not protected? Could we help ourselves any better than we are helped? Could we, by our own unaided strength, win for ourselves half the comforts and the luxuries we enjoy now, thanks to men's kindness and generosity? It is *we* who are treated as though we were the superiors; we to whom fall all the honours and the privileges of society. To women the first place is given, the sheltered corner; if there is anything hard to be done, the man must do it; if there is not room enough for all, the boys must walk, the girls must have the seat in the carriage. Well, ladies, and what is the lesson *we* have to learn from all this? It is that good men, whom we all respect, are, in these things, both just and generous. They scorn to take advantage of other's weakness or their own strength; they will not enjoy what they have not earned; they love rather to give than to take; and they recognise at once a duty and a pleasure in compensating to the weak for the disadvantages of nature and of fortune. Yes! here indeed is a lesson for women who are fortunate in life; whose influence is powerful either in their own homes or in society. That protection, that kind and generous encouragement our fathers and brothers give to us, we are bound to give back again to poor and weak and unprotected women. It suffices for us to know that the suffrage is a power—and all history and politics show that it is—for us to be bound to desire it, and to use it, for the sake of the weak, whether we wish to get anything for ourselves by it or not. A legitimate power is a sacred trust in the eyes of an upright man or woman; and to say 'I do not want it,' is to be like the servant in the parable, who buried the talent he was too indolent to use. It may be perfectly true that a woman who is respected and loved by all who surround her wields a power far surpassing that of the suffrage. But the same thing is true of good and great men; would you therefore disfranchise them? It is as true of women as of men, that what is wanted in politics is the suffrage of the great mass of society, rather than of exceptional genius, which can always make its influence felt. It is that this great mass may be able, by means of the suffrage, to make known its sufferings and its wants, that influential women are bound to strive.

One thing more I have to say. Who can feel for the sufferings

and the degradation of women as we can? Not the noblest and most generous of men can feel, as a woman must, for the misery of an ill-used wife, the horror of a woman's lowest degradation, the anguish of a mother deprived of her children, the helplessness of a poor and solitary girl in the state of society in which we live. Our sympathy in these things must be deeper, more intense, than the best man can feel. Therefore it is that we are bound to claim the suffrage that it may help us to force statesmen and lawgivers to come, quickly, to the rescue of these, the weakest, the most neglected of mankind.

The Hon. Auberon Herbert, M.P.—Ladies and Gentlemen, I think you will agree with me when I say that we men, after some of the speeches we have heard here, must look to our laurels if we do not intend to fall into the second rank. I think I shall express the feelings of many men who are present here, besides my own, when I say that it seems to me perfectly impossible to refuse this claim of women's suffrage when once it has been seriously asked for by a large number of women in this country; and when I go on to say that we welcome the claim because we look on it as a symbol that henceforwards a certain line that has existed between the education and the intellectual thought of men and women is to cease, and that we men are to invite all women into partnership with us as regards those subjects of the deepest intellectual interest, those subjects from which we derive all the best and the highest of our pleasures, and which make life worth living for. But I know it will be said, and indeed many of the speakers have referred to this, that in making this change there will be a certain loss of sweetness in our English homes; I entirely agree with those speakers who deny that that will be the case. In the first place I must say that whilst I think it is possible for us to see thousands of happy marriages, yet I must venture to say that I think it is a very difficult thing indeed to find a marriage anywhere in this country of which one may say, without hesitation, that husband and wife are perfectly companionable one to the other. What always strikes me is this, that a husband keeps all his greatest sources of interest outside of his home; there is a certain line drawn at the threshold of his home; outside of his home is all that appeals to the higher and deepest part of his intellectual nature; but he is in the habit of reserving, as it seems to me, too often for his home the most idle, the most trivial, I think I might even say the most sleepy part of his nature. Well, against that division I protest for one. I will take it for one moment from an entirely selfish point of view, and it shall be this: what man is there present here to-day who has not felt that the influence of woman on his life has been very great? what man is

there who has not felt that his life and that his character, such as it is, has been very much moulded and shaped by woman's influence? And is there a man here who does not feel that those influences would have been upon him a greater power for good if those women with whom he has had relation had received the same education which he had received, and received the same development of their intellect that he, perhaps, has received, and, in fact, had greater intellectual sympathy with him? I believe, and believe most sincerely—and I am not ashamed to make the confession—that men are not good enough, that men are not strong enough, to be able to do without all the good influences which might be exerted on their lives by women; each requires the help of the other, and what we have to do is, as it seems to me, to try so to organise society that men should act upon women, and women act upon men, in character, in thought, and in feeling, so that we may join in one common effort constantly to be reaching towards higher and better ideals.

I shall only look at the question from one point more, and that is, the great quantity of misdirected effort which there seems to me to be in this country. Nowhere more can you find that misdirected effort than you do in society. Who is there who is not aware of the enormous quantity of labour, of time, of expense, of pains, of effort, that is all consumed, all wasted in that great machinery which we call society; and who is there who is not sensible of this, that if once we could direct these great social forces in another direction, if once we could turn those particular qualities which belong to women, that faithful power of service, that devotion, that energy, towards nobler and greater objects than those which society holds out to them, who is there here who is not aware that we should at once make a most tremendous stride towards that future in which it will not be possible to find savagery and barbarism existing in the very midst of our civilisation; that future in which luxury and the restlessness of pleasure-seeking will not stand any longer face to face with helpless ignorance and helpless poverty? Once turn those great social forces to the side of what is good, and the future, the happy future to which we look forward, will be, in my opinion, brought immeasurably nearer to us. I have simply, Madam, to say in conclusion, that to my mind there is no gap whatsoever between the feelings of men and women—no gap made by nature—there is only the gap which we have made by our own perverseness, and the quicker we bridge it over the better and the happier for all of us.

The Resolution was put and carried.

Mr. Jacob Bright, M.P.—Mrs. Taylor, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have been asked to move the following resolution: 'That the great extension of the suffrage, so long as women are excluded from it, is a positive injury to them, since it is rapidly making them the only excluded class.' I do not think that any portion of this meeting will dissent from that resolution. So long as only a very few persons possessed the franchise, and so long as those few were, in a certain sense, isolated classes, it did not appear very noticeable that women should be wholly excluded; but now, when that arrangement is entirely altered, when in our boroughs, at least, every man can possess the franchise, the thing looks very different. A portion of the population of our boroughs, no inconsiderable portion I am afraid, has gone latterly by the name of 'the residuum.' That residuum, as you know, is wholly uninstructed, its habits and general condition are so unfortunate, that whenever we reflect upon it, we are almost ashamed to claim for this country the character of a civilised country; when that residuum is, as it is now, in possession of the franchise, it does seem somewhat remarkable that no woman, whatever her position, whatever her character, is allowed to influence the return of a single member of Parliament by her vote. As I have been asked, with my friend Sir Charles Dilke, to pilot the Bill for removing the political disabilities of women through the House of Commons, perhaps I may make a remark or two as to the present position of the question. It is now just about three years ago since Mr. Mill introduced this question into the House of Commons. I need not dwell upon the ability with which he introduced it, nor upon the very great advantage which the question had in being so introduced by him. I believe it derived great advantage from it; but I believe the remarkable support which it received in the House of Commons was owing very much more to the evident justice of the case, and to the impossibility of finding an answer to anything that was said. Some seventy or eighty members of Parliament followed Mr. Mill into the lobby, I believe something like one-third of the members who were present in the House. They went into that lobby because they had recently been discussing the question of Reform everywhere throughout the country, and much in Parliament; and they felt, as they could not but feel, that every argument which had been used in favour of extending the franchise to men generally applied equally to the case of women, and, therefore, for them to have gone into the opposite lobby from that into which they did go would have been certainly at a very great sacrifice of feeling and consistency. After Mr. Mill did that great service to this question in the House of Commons, associations were everywhere formed in the country. There may be those here who are not fully alive to the

character and influence of some of those associations; you have not only this Association in London, you have one of great influence in Manchester; you have associations in Edinburgh, in Dublin, in Birmingham, in Bristol, in Bath, in Carlisle, in Leeds, and I do not know how many places besides. I had a letter yesterday from a lady in Dublin to whom this question, so far as Ireland is concerned, owes a great deal—I mean a well-known lady there, Miss Robertson—and she tells me a fact that I was not before aware of, that Dublin sent, next to London and Manchester, more signatures to Parliament during the last session than any other place in the United Kingdom. Now, what is the character of the support which this proposed measure receives? It is well known to this committee that many of the most scholarly and distinguished men in our various Universities are on our side upon this question. It is equally true that the working-classes in our great manufacturing towns support this question. I have seen it introduced in many such meetings, and never saw any opposition to it. One little incident perhaps may be worth telling. During the last municipal election in some town in Yorkshire, I forget now which, the workingmen were so much interested in women having votes, and so well satisfied that they should have been promoted to this right, that they met together, subscribed a sum of money, and gave a handsome testimonial to the first woman who came up to the poll. That shows the great sympathy which exists on the part of working-men in regard to this question.

And now, what is our parliamentary position? I think I may say with Mr. Mill, since he introduced this measure there with such flattering success, that our parliamentary position is much stronger. We have good supporters in the House of Lords, and on both sides of the House of Lords. We have members of the Cabinet who are in favour of this Bill. We have law-officers of the Crown who will give us their support; and there is not a single part of the House of Commons, Tory or Liberal, nor a single part of each side of the House of Commons, in which we have not influential supporters. What does all this prove? It proves, undoubtedly, that the claim which women are making is a very strong claim; and it proves that the grounds upon which it rests are so simple that it can be understood both by the instructed and by the uninstructed.

I have been asked the question sometimes, in the House of Commons, whether this Bill will be carried. Why, nobody in England who pays any attention to public matters doubts that it will be carried. Of course it will be carried. Then we are sometimes asked, 'When?' Well, it would no doubt require a prophet

to tell when. A member of the House of Commons told me, the other day, that he believed it would be carried this session, and without a division; but another member, who stood by his side, said: 'No, it will not be carried this session, but it will be carried soon.' I do not want to be over-sanguine upon this matter; I have no confidence about its being carried this session; but I entirely agree that it will be carried soon—and for this reason, that it is a just and necessary Bill. Surely it is just that no class should be asked to obey laws in a free country in the making of which laws it has no influence whatever; and it is equally just that no class should be expected to pay largely towards the national funds when it has no control whatever over those funds. But, as has been amply shown by able speakers who have preceded me, and especially by those admirable speeches to which we have listened from the ladies on this platform, this is not merely a question of abstract justice; it is a question of urgent necessity for the women of this kingdom at least. I don't know whether they are subjected elsewhere to great legal disabilities; but, so far as my knowledge goes, I would say that no class in this world ever entirely got rid of legal disabilities unless they came into the possession of political power.

A great deal will depend, of course, upon the attitude which the Government may take upon this question. The Government may pass, I won't say any Bill that it likes, but any Bill that is at all reasonable the Government has the power to pass; and the Government has almost unlimited power in preventing the passing of a Bill. I say almost unlimited power, because happily there are some limits even to the power of such a Government as that which we now possess. In the last Session of Parliament there was a notable instance of it. The Government fought hard against a particular Bill, but it was beaten, and had to accept the Bill. The Bill was one of a benevolent character. I don't mean at all to say there were not two sides to the question; and although the Government was beaten, it may have been right. But I am not prepared to see the Government oppose this Bill. Why on earth should the Government have been willing to pass the Municipal Franchise Bill of last session, giving votes to women in 200 or 300 towns of this kingdom, including the very largest cities of the land—I say, why should the Government have been willing to give that right, sending women to the polling booth without the protection of the ballot; not every four or five years, but every year; why should they be willing to allow women to be mixed up in all this public strife, and to have this additional privilege, if they mean to turn round now

and say, 'No, you shall not have the parliamentary vote?' The thing would be unbearable, because every argument that applied to the giving women the municipal vote, applies to the giving them the parliamentary vote; with this marked addition, that a great many arguments of great weight could be used in favour of women having the parliamentary vote, which do not exist at all with regard to the municipal vote. I say then it would be unlikely, very unlikely, that the Government should oppose this Bill.

I daresay there are in this room both men and women of all shades of politics. I think the Conservatives here must have derived some support from what has been said with regard to the probable Conservative character of this measure. I offer no opinion upon that subject, but I should regret very much if a great Liberal Government should fix this peculiar stigma upon women, and say, 'You are capable of entering into mercantile affairs; you have sufficient intelligence and capacity to manage local matters; but when it comes to Imperial concerns you are altogether out of court, and you have no qualification whatever to take part in them.' I say a Liberal Government ought not to put itself into an attitude like that. Every class in the country should be raised, so far as the Government has power to raise it, and it should hesitate long before it takes any course that leads to the disrespect of any particular class.

In conclusion, allow me just to say one word; that whether this measure be obtained sooner or later, the duty of all who are interested in it is very plain. Every man and woman here who desires to remove the electoral disabilities of women should work hard for their removal, just as though we were entering upon a struggle of many years. There should be no possible place where you have any influence upon a member of Parliament but you should write him a note asking him to give a favourable attention to the Bill; and your committees throughout the empire should continue their labours just as though every possible obstacle beset our path.

Sir Charles Dilke, M.P.—Mrs. Taylor, Ladies and Gentlemen, I cannot help feeling, with my friend Mr. Bright, that our position to-day is rather that of listeners than of speakers. We have come here in performance of a duty, and, as a portion of our task of bringing this question forward this year, to hear whether we can gather new arguments and stronger arguments in support of the conclusion at which we have arrived; and whether, on the other hand, we can hear any echoes of arguments used against us outside and in the press. At the same time, I must ask leave for a moment to point out to the meeting that the Bill which is to be introduced is hardly

wide enough to justify some of the arguments which are used against it and some of the arguments by which it has been supported. The Bill is not one for giving a vote to every woman, but merely a Bill for giving votes to women who fulfil those conditions which are at present required of men; and that is so simple a matter, as it seems to me, that it is almost impossible to argue it before a meeting where there are no opponents present, or to anticipate the objections that may be urged; because it is impossible to judge, until the measure is brought forward in the House of Commons, what those arguments can possibly be. There is, I know, certainly one newspaper, and possibly more, which have by anticipation begun to argue against the Bill, but the only statements which they have made are that the women do not want the suffrage, and I think to that statement such a meeting as this is a sufficient answer. Were we asking now for all that we might ask for: were we asking that votes should be given to all women who desire it, or to all women without exception, then there might be wider arguments, although I don't think they would be very cogent, which would be brought forward against that proposition. It might be said here, as it has been said in America, that the duty of defending the country must go with the suffrage—as they say there, the musket and the ballot-box must go together—and that no one ought to have a vote who is not capable of taking arms to defend his country. Such arguments, however, are entirely inapplicable to the particular measure before us this year.

The resolution I find myself called upon to second is one which, if we were to criticise it very minutely, would perhaps prove to be hardly accurate. It states that the great extension of the suffrage, so long as women are excluded from it, is a positive injury to them, since it is making them the only excluded class. With regard to the last words in the resolution, I would say that women have always been the only excluded class: they have always been the only persons who have been excluded from the franchise without any other test whatever being applied: they have always been the only persons excluded in such a way that by no step they could possibly take, and by no change of circumstances which could possibly occur, could they be in a position to exercise the franchise from which they were shut out. I will not detain the meeting at this late hour, and after the ability with which the whole cause has been argued by the ladies, who have spoken and more appropriately than men could speak at a ladies' meeting upon this question; but I would like to say, with reference to what has fallen from my friend Mr. Jacob Bright, that I am one of those who believe that this Bill will be carried this year, and probably without a division. I believe those

who last year allowed the municipal clause to pass without a division will find, when they come to look into the question and consider it with care, that there is no kind of argument which could be adduced then which could not be adduced now. I would at the same time say that, whatever may be the result of debate or of division, I can assure Mr. Mill that, owing to the boldness of the effort which he made, and the courage with which he took this question up; owing also to the ability with which he has been supported by the ladies who have spoken to-day, and others, and also, I might add in common fairness, to the improved character of the constituencies and of the present House of Commons, there is not the slightest probability, or even possibility, when the subject comes to be debated next month, that the motion of my friend Mr. Jacob Bright will be met in the same degrading and disreputable manner in which his motion was met when he brought it forward for the first time.

Miss Hare.—I should not have ventured to come forward on the present occasion had I not been told that it was very desirable that as many women as possible should speak on such an occasion as the present, in order to satisfy a doubt which seems to remain in the minds of many whether women want the franchise or not. There is one point which has not been spoken of specially at this meeting upon which I would say a few words. It has been thought by many persons that any share in active life would be likely to destroy those feelings of refinement and purity which are naturally so specially valued in women. It seems to me that that is to begin at the wrong end of the subject, and that the argument, if it is worth anything at all, is an argument against any extension of the suffrage whatever. If there is so much evil, if there is so much moral and physical violence, and so much corruption and agitation in the act of voting, that it is demoralising to women to give them a share in it, it must also surely be demoralising to men, and a real evil must be done to any man who gets a vote given to him. Yet nobody really thinks that. Everybody knows that what a man is in the performance of every other duty, that he is in voting; the unworthy and the corrupt vote unworthily and corruptly, the highminded and the conscientious vote conscientiously and purely. And so it will be with women. Instead of destroying their natural dispositions, it will only bring them to bear on their votes; with this great difference, that after a time the conscientious among them will find it their duty to consider political subjects, in order that they may be able to vote fairly and rightly. To deprive women of their just share in the franchise is only to add another blot to the present system of representation; and the real remedy must be found in enabling

men and women alike to share in the advantages of a more perfect and just system, which shall raise the act of voting to its true moral and intellectual rank amongst the duties of life.

Professor Hunter.—Mrs. Taylor, Ladies and Gentlemen, it has been justly observed that the question of women's suffrage may be argued independently of the larger and more important demands that we have heard of this evening. Many persons may consistently accept this smaller instalment of woman's rights without committing themselves to anything more. Now, one of the arguments with which such persons are frightened is, that if women once get votes, they will never be satisfied until they get into Parliament. The experience that can be gathered from the Scottish churches does not confirm that opinion. In all the important dissenting churches women vote in the election of ministers and office-bearers. Now, this privilege has never made them aspire to office. They have been content to elect representatives to the ecclesiastical parliament without ever asking to be present except as spectators. Nor have they sought to enter the pulpit, although I can conceive few functions they could so well discharge, since even the bitterest satirists of women have never denied them the gift of eloquence. Nor has their voting interfered in the very least degree with family life, or in any way disturbed the usual social relations. But what it has done, I cannot help believing, is that it has created an immense interest in the welfare of the church, and greatly increased the zeal of the women in collecting funds for church purposes. The ecclesiastical bias of women is made the ground of an objection to entrusting them with the franchise. This has been handled in a manner I could not approach, by the great master of philosophical and political exposition who has preceded me; but, I ask, what is the teaching of history on this point? Have men always been free from the same reproach? Not so very far back, there was a time when the interest of men was engrossed by two subjects—Religion and War—a time when all intellect went to the cloister and all energy to the battle-field; when the whole duty of man might have been compendiously described as to save one's own soul and kill one's neighbour. What has produced the change? The growth of industrial enterprise has limited the dimensions of war and subordinated the warlike spirit, and the advance of science has tempered the heat of religious strife. Let the same beneficial influences that have been necessary to improve men be brought to bear upon women, and then we shall see a healthy distribution of their powers over the whole field of human knowledge. It is a striking coincidence that the arguments which are adduced in this country against giving women votes, are precisely

those adduced in India against teaching women to read and write. The progressive party in India are told that to teach women to read and write is a monstrous proposition; that it is unnatural and contrary to the constitution of society; that it would disturb all the domestic relations, and aim a deadly blow at that masculine superiority which is the only bond of domestic peace; that it would unsettle women's minds, and, puffing them up with useless knowledge, would make them despise their proper work; and last, but not least, that women do not want education. Now, this last is an argument that ought never to alarm any friend of women's suffrage. Before the Reform Act, we were told on all hands that the working-classes did not want the franchise. But when the day of trouble came, and when the railings of Hyde Park were pulled down, that argument gave way, and the suffrage was given to the working-classes. It is because at present women do not demand the suffrage that this Society exists; and its aim might not inappropriately be described as teaching women to want the suffrage, and teaching men to have the justice to allow the claim.

The resolution was put and carried.

Sir Wilfrid Lawson, Bart., M.P.—Ladies and Gentlemen, I have one very pleasant duty to perform before you go away. I beg leave to propose, what I am sure you will carry very heartily, a vote of thanks to the lady who has filled the chair to-day. The enthusiastic manner in which you have received the vote which I propose absolves me from saying anything more. I will therefore simply move the vote of thanks.

The vote was carried by acclamation.

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TEXTS

ON

WOMAN'S NORMAL POSITION.

"That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace."

EDINBURGH: JOHN MACLAREN.

1870.