

WOMEN AND POLITICS

BY

CHARLES KINGSLEY.

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CHARLES KINGSLEY,

(Rector of Eversley, Canon of Westminster.)

b. Holne, Dartmoor, Devon, June 12, 1819,

d. Eversley, January 23, 1875.

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"The position of women began in injustice. It began, historically, in barbarous times, out of man's wish to keep woman as his slave. It was carried on in medieval times by an anthropology—I will not disgrace the sacred name of theology by calling it that—which was backed by a whole literature of unreason".....

"Religion will not go right, nothing human will go right except in so far as woman goes right; and to make woman go right she must be put in her place."

CHARLES KINGSLEY.

## 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 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

\* '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.)

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 European 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 anyone 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 considered 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 dependents. 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 debaring 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 an 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 it 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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