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LIBERTY, EQUALITY, FRATERNITY.

Vol 4

A REPLY

TO

MR. FITZJAMES STEPHEN'S STRICTURES

ON

MR. J. S. MILL'S SUBJECTION OF WOMEN.

BY

✓ LYDIA E. BECKER.

REPRINTED FROM THE "WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE JOURNAL."

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## LIBERTY, EQUALITY, FRATERNITY.

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THE above words, which have hitherto been the motto of those who sought to establish the principles they affirm, have lately been adopted by an eminent man as the title of a book, the professed object of which is to oppose the development of the ideas they represent. The particular application of the principles implied by the words, which Mr. FITZJAMES STEPHEN has set himself to controvert, is embodied in the writings of Mr. JOHN STUART MILL; and three books, the Essay on Liberty, the Subjection of Women, and the work on Utilitarianism, are selected as exemplifications of each of the three ideas from which Mr. STEPHEN feels himself impelled to express his "dissent in the strongest way."

We are not here concerned with the first and last of these subjects, although it appears to us that Mr. STEPHEN has not represented his opponent quite fairly, and has drawn inferences from the position he attributes to Mr. MILL which are not deducible from Mr. MILL'S own language. We have never understood "Liberty" to mean—"the removal of all restraint on human conduct;" nor do we believe that Mr. MILL, or any disciple of what Mr. STEPHEN calls "The Religion of Humanity," interprets it in that sense. We think, also, that the method adopted by Mr. STEPHEN of drawing out a set of propositions in his own words, which he says are deducible from the work under consideration, and then setting himself to refute, not the original statements of his opponent, but

his own version of them, which to other eyes often appears strangely distorted, transcends the limits of fair controversy.

In reading Mr. STEPHEN'S book one would think that he regarded liberty as a curse, and that he looked to restraint and coercion as the most effectual means of promoting the good of mankind. How such a faith is reconcilable with the profession of "Liberal" politics we leave to the next constituency which Mr. STEPHEN may canvass on such grounds to discover and determine. But there was a time when the trumpet gave forth a different sound. In 1862 the English law courts were called upon to decide a momentous issue in the cause of religious liberty. Dr. WILLIAMS, in the exercise of the freedom secured to the ministers of the Established Church, published an essay containing opinions then unpopular, and supposed by many to be contrary to law. He was prosecuted; and the penalty would have been deprivation of his living and his status as a beneficed clergyman. He was fortunate in an advocate who knew how to pierce the clouds of popular prejudice which had obscured the true issue, and to bring out the grand and fundamental principles on which the question hinged. Mr. FITZJAMES STEPHEN'S defence of Dr. WILLIAMS was subsequently published in a volume, and it doubtless formed an epoch in the mental history of all thoughtful persons into whose hands it fell, and who were previously unaware of the legal and historical facts on which the argument is based. Even at this distance of time, and when the immediate interest of the controversy has passed away, we turn to the book with renewed admiration for the noble thoughts and noble language in which it abounds. Freedom is its watchword. "Do not assume the functions of a legislator, and that for the sake of restraining, and not enlarging liberty." And he speaks of the cause he is

defending as "a cause which might dignify the greatest genius that ever wore these robes, which might enlist the warmest sympathies of the human heart, for it is the cause of learning, of freedom, and of reason." We do not believe that the advocate will command these sympathies in an equal degree, when the cause he is defending is that of restraint, coercion, and force.

The portion of Mr. STEPHEN'S later work with which we are most directly concerned is that in which he maintains the expediency of the legal subordination of one sex to the other. We advert to this, not because there is any novelty in the views advanced by Mr. STEPHEN, but because the grounds on which he bases his opinion are simply the old common-places; and it is instructive to find that so accomplished an advocate can neither discover any fresh arguments nor dress up the old ones in a logical manner. He says,—“The first point is to consider whether it (*i.e.*, the law) ought to treat them (*i.e.*, men and women) as equals, although, as I have shown, they are not equals.” Now, it appears to us that a fallacy underlies these words. The assumption implied in the question is that the law ought to treat as equals those only who are equals in moral, physical, and intellectual vigour. If this be so the law ought not to treat all men as equals, since there are among men all gradations of physical and intellectual vigour. But if the personal rights of all men are equal in all things that concern their individuality as men, notwithstanding all differences of personal strength and power, logic seems to demand that the personal rights of women and men shall be equal in all that concerns their individuality as human beings, notwithstanding any difference which may exist between them in physical strength. Another false assumption is that the recognition of equality before the law implies that the law is supposed to secure equality of condition

among men, or as between men and women. But the equality for which we contend is aimed at no such conclusion. It is the equality which may be fairly demanded by those who are started on the race of life. It is the duty of the umpire in a race to see that all the competitors start on a footing of equality. It is no part of his duty to provide that they shall reach the goal in equal line.

Mr. STEPHEN has mentioned the inequality of age as one which is and which ought to be recognised by the law in bestowing unequal rights on persons of unequal age, and he places the inequality of sex on the same footing. But the inequality of rights between young and adult persons does not extend to all personal rights; there are certain rights secured to the youngest infant—to the unconscious babe—which the law protects as jealously as the rights of the strongest man. The law allows and secures property rights to the unborn child. The law protects with the highest sanction known to it the life of the new-born babe, equally with that of the full grown man. It is clear, therefore, that there are certain personal rights with which society and the law invest men at an age when they are utterly unable to assert or even comprehend them. If it were thought expedient to invest women with equal property rights with men, and with the electoral franchise, the law would be as competent to secure these rights to women—notwithstanding any inferiority in physical power—as it is to secure the property rights of infants, who are infinitely weaker than women, but who are in this respect treated by the law as the equals of the strongest men.

The legal disabilities, founded on inequality of age, differ so essentially from those founded on inequality of sex, that no argument can be drawn from expediency in one case as to expediency in the other. The same essentially inherent personal rights are recognised in men of

all ages—but during the period when their faculties are immature they are disabled from the exercise of functions which require a certain degree of maturity of powers for their due performance. An infant cannot divest himself of property, or bind himself by contract; these disabilities are imposed for his own protection. An infant cannot exercise the franchise; this disability is imposed for the benefit of the State, which rightly requires, as a qualification for the suffrage, a presumed age of discretion for its exercise. No inference can be drawn from the fact that “perhaps a third or more of the average duration of human life—and that the portion of it in which the strongest, the most durable, and beyond all comparison the most important impressions are made on human beings, the period when character is formed—must be passed by every one in a state of submission, dependence, and obedience to orders”; to the conclusion that half of the human race should remain throughout their whole lives in a condition of subjection. The influence exercised by this state of tutelage and obedience on the mind of an individual who knows that it is but the preparation for a period of his life when he shall become independent, and even be called upon to assume towards others the attitude of commander or guardian, will be widely different from that exercised on the mind of one who is brought up in the faith that it is a natural and permanent condition. There may be differences of opinion as to the duties and responsibilities which ought to be imposed by the State on men and women, just as there may be with regard to different classes of men; but there is an essential diversity of principle between those who would class women, as to personal rights, with children, who are necessarily in a state of tutelage, and those who would class them with men, who are dealt with as competent to direct their own actions and affairs. The question at issue between Mr.

MILL and Mr. STEPHEN in this controversy is simply whether women are human beings with the full rights and responsibilities of humanity, or whether they are a superior kind of inferior beings, whose personal rights and duties must be regarded as subordinate to those of men. Whether, in fact, the ludicrous misapplication which is so commonly made, both in jest and earnest, of the phrase "lords of the creation," by using it with reference to the male sex instead of to the human race, is to be the rule on which the relative political and social position of the two sexes of humanity is to be based.

Mr. STEPHEN says "If society and Government ought to "recognise the inequality of age as the foundation of an "inequality of rights of that importance,"—(*i.e.* that of command and obedience)—"it appears to me at least equally "clear that they ought to recognise the inequality of sex for "the same purpose, if it is a real inequality." We deny the proposition on which Mr. STEPHEN bases his inference, and we deny the justness of the inference drawn. The relations of command and obedience which are admitted between parents and children are not based on mere inequality of age. They depend on the fulfilment of the conditions and performance of the duties of parentage. A child owes obedience to his own parents, or to those who stand towards him in the place of parents; but he owes no obedience towards other men merely because there is an inequality of age between him and them. The ground of the relation is the dependence of the child, who from weakness is unable to support and govern himself, on the sustenance and authority of the parent for maintenance and guidance. As soon as the child has gathered strength to depend on itself the "inequality of age" is not recognised in this country as furnishing the basis of a claim to obedience, although in some countries the filial relation is or was so recognised.

The sole reason for the subjection of infants to their parents and guardians is the fact that infants are unable to maintain and govern themselves. The subjection is not for the benefit of or for the sake of the parents, but for the sake of the maintenance and education of the children. It is temporary in its duration, and tends to train children by habit of obedience into the capacity for command. The subjection of women to men is different in its reason, in its character, and in its duration. Women are capable of maintaining themselves and of governing themselves, without other assistance from men than that which men render to each other in the ordinary relations of business and society. There are vast numbers of women who maintain themselves by their own exertions, who owe nothing to the personal protection of individual men; nay, who may have helpless or incapable men dependent on them. Mr. GLADSTONE stated in the House of Commons that "the number of self-depending women is increasing from year to year, especially in our great towns." We say with Mr. GLADSTONE that "this is a very serious fact;" and we may adopt Mr. STEPHEN'S style of argument and say if it be true that there is a progressive increase in the number of self-dependent women the law ought to recognise that fact.

The subjection of women to men is different in character from that of children to their parents, inasmuch as it is maintained avowedly for the sake of securing to men the services of women as wives, toys, housekeepers, or domestic servants. Men who oppose the enfranchisement of women are not afraid or ashamed to imply that if women were free they would not consent to hold these relations to men, and therefore that is necessary to hold them in legal subjection in order to secure the permanence of domestic relations. The subjection of children to their parents is never advocated for the sake of the value of the children's



labour to the parents, nor for reasons analogous to what has been called the "cold mutton and buttons argument," which is still so popular with certain classes of men, neither do parents claim that vested right to the services of their children which some men claim in virtue of their sex to the domestic services of women.

The subjection of women to men is different from that of children to their parents, in that the one is temporary and disciplinary, the other permanent and lifelong. The temporary subjection of the infant to the parent is an accidental relation of two persons having inherently equal personal rights. The permanent subjection of women is affirmed to be a relation which pre-supposes inherently *unequal* personal rights. Therefore any inference from the expediency of maintaining the subjection of infants to their own parents to the expediency of maintaining the subjection of all women to all men is faulty as to fact and reasoning.

Mr. STEPHEN'S proposition is that society and government ought to recognise inequality of sex as the foundation of inequality of rights. He illustrates this proposition by stating that if we were engaged in a great war it might be necessary to have a conscription both for land and sea service. He asks, "ought men and women to be subject to it indiscriminately?" and he implies that an answer in the negative should be taken as a confirmation of his proposition. But the question cannot be reduced to such a narrow issue. In case of a conscription men would not be subject to it *indiscriminately*, the maimed, the blind, the halt, and the aged would be exempt, at least, until all the able-bodied had been called out. Yet no one proposes to recognise a difference in the personal rights of able-bodied and infirm men, based on their liability to compulsory military service. In the next place a conscription could only take place in a great

national emergency, and, in such a crisis, women equally with men would be called upon to devote themselves to the service of their country, both by contributing the sinews of war, and by personal exertion and risk of some kind. There are more kinds of service, even of military service, than actual bearing of arms, and more kinds of force, even in warfare, than material force. When NELSON joined the fleet at Trafalgar he added one to its numerical strength, yet the frail one-armed man brought moral force so great, that it was said that every ship was doubly manned from that instant. When France lay prostrate at the feet of England's king, a woman brought force enough to an army and a nation to enable them to repel the invader; and though this be the age and France the land of pilgrimages to the scene of supernatural revelations said to have been vouchsafed to women, we may be pardoned for believing that the spirit which inspired the MAID OF ORLEANS was the womanly spirit of courage, patriotism, and self-devotion, that this spirit is of no particular age or country; and that in any great crisis touching the life of the nation the daughters of England, as well as her sons, would bear an equal if not a similar part in the services and the sacrifices which the nation as a whole was called upon to render. It would be as reasonable to say that because men do not hazard their lives in the duties of maternity they ought to be deprived of political rights, as to say that because women are not called upon to run the risk of being shot in the service of the country they are therefore not to be counted as citizens. As a matter of fact, we understand that the per centage of women who lose their lives in the dangers incident to them in the profession of marriage exceeds the per centage of soldiers killed in battle. Why should the risk of life be thought so honourable and heroic in the one sex as to form the basis for claiming a monopoly

of a voice in the government, and so little worthy of honour in the other that the mere liability to be called upon to enter the condition of life which demands it is to be held as a permanent disqualification for the exercise of political rights?

Mr. STEPHEN has adduced military service as a subject on which inequality of treatment, founded on a radical inequality of the two sexes, is admitted. He claims education as another subject on which the same question presents itself. He says, "Are boys and girls to be educated indiscriminately, and to be instructed in the same things? Are boys to learn to sew, to keep house, and to cook; and are girls to play cricket, to row, and to be drilled like boys? I cannot argue with a person who says 'Yes.' A person who says 'No' admits an inequality of the sexes on which education must be founded, and which it must therefore perpetuate and perhaps increase."

We may here remark that Mr. STEPHEN'S professed inability to argue with a person who maintains a given proposition does not necessarily prove the proposition to be false. PLATO held the doctrine that boys and girls ought to be educated indiscriminately and taught the same things. Were the philosopher to re-appear and maintain this doctrine, Mr. STEPHEN would dismiss him with the remark, "I cannot argue with PLATO." But something more than this would be needed in order to prove that PLATO was in the wrong. There are many doctrines, in themselves erroneous, which are believed by people who are sufficiently reasonable to be capable of being convinced by an opponent who has the ability to argue and to prove that they are unsound. There is no proposition so false and absurd that its falseness and absurdity cannot be demonstrated by argument. This does not imply the assertion that everybody can be convinced by the argument, because there are some persons

who are unable to follow a chain of reasoning, or to judge adequately of the value of evidence. If an astronomer were to say, "I cannot argue with a man who maintains that the earth is flat," such a declaration would go no way towards proving that the earth was round. The proposition that the earth is round was established by men who knew how to argue with those who believed that it was flat; and the principles which are to serve as the basis for just legislation must be established by the same methods as have served for the discovery and recognition of the laws of nature.

In the passage we have quoted Mr. STEPHEN appears to play fast and loose with the word "education" in a manner which is more convenient for his purpose than conducive to the elucidation of a sound principle. It is remarkable that the things which he selects as appropriate respectively to boys and girls lie altogether out of the province of "education" in the proper sense of the word. The subjects he selects for girls are matters of purely technical or industrial instruction. Those for boys refer to physical education. There are some persons who think that boys would be no worse for being trained to use their fingers in some occupation which might beguile their leisure hours and produce some useful result. There are more who believe that the bodily training afforded to girls is miserably insufficient, and that they would be mentally and physically benefited by the introduction into their schools of athletic exercises similar in spirit and purpose, if not exactly identical in kind, with those practised by boys. But setting aside these considerations, we can afford to make Mr. STEPHEN a present of the admission that every girl should be taught to sew, to keep house, and to cook, and every boy be taught to row, to play cricket, and be drilled, without prejudice to the proposition that boys and girls ought to be educated alike, and to be instructed in the same things. We object

to the use Mr. STEPHEN makes of the word "indiscriminately," for we suppose he would not allow that all boys should be educated *indiscriminately*, and instructed in the same things. Since the whole field of human knowledge is too vast to be mastered by any one mind, there must be discrimination in selecting the particular subjects of instruction for each youth with reference to individual tastes, capacities, and circumstances in life. But the main purposes of education are the same whatever be the differences in its method and appliances. These are, the acquisition of information, the cultivation of habits of observation and reasoning, and the application of the knowledge and reasoning so acquired to the general purposes of life. There is no difference between boys and girls as to the manner in which they must severally acquire the mastery over any special subject of study. As there is no royal road, so there is no female road to learning distinct from that which must be traversed by men. We do not understand whether Mr. STEPHEN means to affirm that there are some branches of a liberal education which women have no right to cultivate. But it would seem that he does mean this when he "admits an inequality between the sexes on which education must be founded, and which it must therefore perpetuate and perhaps increase."

Now we think Mr. STEPHEN should not have left matters in this undefined state. If only in compassion to those women, if such there be, who are content to accept his limitation of their mental sphere, as one beyond which no woman ought to pass, he should have condescended to explain somewhat more clearly what are the subjects of study to which he considers women have unequal rights with men. The old-fashioned notion was that boys should be taught classics and mathematics, and girls modern languages and accomplishments. The rule has become

so far modified that it is no longer deemed unfeminine for a woman to understand Latin, or effeminate for a boy to know French. The old landmarks are removed, and the oracle sets up no new ones in their place. We should like to know also whether supposing the field of education is to be partitioned between boys and girls, whether male trespassers on the feminine portion are to be warned off as inexorably as girls who may show a desire to wander in the forbidden masculine ground? We are persuaded that could such a separation be effected between the education afforded to boys and girls respectively, that the consequences would be disastrous in the extreme to the mental culture of both; that there is no foundation for the assumption that the law ought to recognise an inequality between the sexes as to the right to education, that the existing inequality with regard to educational endowments and appliances is unjust and injurious in the highest degree, not only to the girls themselves, but to the community of which they will hereafter become the mothers; and further, that no human being has a right to prescribe to another human being the limit which must not be passed in the cultivation of the mental powers either as to direction or extent. Equal opportunities should be afforded to all children, without distinction of sex, for acquiring such education as may be within reach of their means, and no differences as to general culture should exist between the men and the women who associate together in the same rank of life. Individual inequalities of the widest kind there always will and must be, but there should exist no general inequality between the intellectual culture of men and women founded on difference of sex.

Mr. STEPHEN says, "Follow the matter a step further to the vital point of the whole question—marriage. All that I need consider in reference to the present purpose

"is whether the laws and moral rules should regard it as  
 "a contract between equals or as a contract between a  
 "stronger and a weaker person involving subordination for  
 "certain purposes on the part of the weaker to the  
 "stronger." Now, we say that the special relations of  
 man and woman in marriage are *not* the vital point of the  
 whole question as to the political and personal rights of  
 women. Women are women before they are wives, and  
 have rights independent of and antecedent to the latter  
 relation. If it is just to place the wife in the status of  
 legal subjection, to whom does the unmarried woman owe  
 obedience? We say that the personal and political rights  
 of unmarried women ought to be equal and similar to those  
 of unmarried men, and that the conditions of the marriage  
 contract ought to be determined by the free consent of both  
 the sexes who are parties to it, and not arbitrarily imposed  
 by one sex on the other by physical force. But Mr. STEPHEN  
 says, "If the parties to a contract of marriage are treated  
 "as equals it is impossible to avoid the inference that  
 "marriage, like other partnerships, may be dissolved at  
 "pleasure." To us it appears that instead of being im-  
 possible to avoid, it is impossible to draw such an inference  
 from such premises. It would be equally easy, and  
 equally untrue to say—if marriage is regarded as a  
 contract between a stronger and a weaker person, invol-  
 ving subordination on the part of the weaker, it is impos-  
 sible to avoid the inference that marriage might be dis-  
 solved at the pleasure of the stronger party. The fact is  
 the permanence of the marriage contract does not depend  
 upon the strength or the pleasure of either of the parties  
 to it, but upon the law of the land; and the law would be  
 equally powerful to enforce its permanence, whether it  
 were regarded as a contract between equals or as a contract  
 between persons of unequal antecedent rights. The law  
 secures the permanency of the marriage tie by refusing its

sanction to other engagements contracted by one party  
 during the lifetime of the other, and by enforcing on  
 appeal the compulsory "restitution of conjugal rights."  
 This sanction could be maintained quite as well whether  
 marriage was considered as a contract between equals or  
 unequals in personal rights.

Mr. STEPHEN is good enough to allow that "No one  
 "contends that a man ought to have power to order his  
 "wife about like a slave, and beat her if she disobeys  
 "him." We are very much obliged to him for the con-  
 cession, but we do not see how it is to be defended on  
 his own principles. We are afraid that as a matter of  
 fact a great many men do order their wives about like  
 slaves, and beat them if they disobey, sometimes even if  
 they do not disobey. What answer would Mr. STEPHEN  
 make to a man who treated his wife in this manner, and  
 who turned his own arguments on him? If physical force  
 is the foundation of personal rights, the man who beats  
 his wife establishes his right to do so by that which Mr.  
 STEPHEN considers the foundation of all law. Put a case  
 in which a man orders his wife to do something which  
 she considers that he has no right to command. Here  
 the issue is a difference of opinion, and a conflict of will,  
 between husband and wife. Granted that the wife ought  
 to obey her husband and give way. But suppose she will  
 not, what has the husband a right to do in such a case?  
 After exhausting all peaceable means of persuasion, he  
 may either beat his wife till she obeys, or he may, on  
 finding all persuasion useless, give way to her rather than  
 resort to physical force. Is the first course justifiable?  
 and if not, why not, on Mr. STEPHEN'S principles, when the  
 man has no alternative between submitting to his wife's  
 will, or coercing her by physical force? Suppose that it  
 is a case in which even Mr. STEPHEN would admit that the  
 wife was in the right and the husband in the wrong, as

in the instance he adduces of the captain giving an order to the lieutenant which the latter, who is the better seaman, knows to be wrong. There is no doubt that the captain in such a case would be justified legally and morally in the employment of any degree of physical force necessary to enforce obedience in case of contumacy on the part of the lieutenant. He would betray his trust if on being satisfied that his own judgment was right, he were to refrain from putting his subordinate in irons, or even proceeding to stronger measures in a case of emergency. But is there any corresponding right in a husband to enforce his commands by similar means? Mr. STEPHEN says "no;" but what would he say to a man who addressed his wife, stick in hand, in the following words quoted from "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity"—"It is impossible to lay down principles of legislation at all, unless you are prepared to say "I am right and you are wrong, and your view shall give way to mine, quietly, gradually, and peaceably, but one of us two must rule and the other must obey, and I mean to rule"—and who applied this reasoning practically by means of the stick?

It may be said that this is an extreme case, but the soundness of a principle can only be tested by applying to an extreme case. If it breaks down when pushed to its legitimate conclusion it cannot be a right one.

There are two principles on which the subjection of women to men in marriage can be maintained. The one considers the parties to it as having antecedently unequal personal rights; divides the people into two classes according to sex, and decrees that the one class shall be subject to the other irrespective of the personal relations of contract between individual men and women. The other considers that all human beings, whether male or female, have the same inherent personal rights. As the principle is more directly expressed by a reviewer of Mr. STEPHEN'S

book in the *Quarterly Review*, "That women have an equal right with men to recognition as persons, and to every civil right following on that recognition, is no longer likely to be disputed in any quarter." In passing we may be allowed to express our surprise that such an assertion should be made in reviewing a book, one of the main objects of which is to dispute the proposition that women have equal civil rights with men. The recognition of equal antecedent rights between men and women is perfectly compatible with the recognition of subordination for special purposes of women to men in the marriage relation, just as the recognition of the equal personal rights of all men is compatible with the recognition of subordination for special purposes of some men to others in the relations of commanding and subordinate officers and men, and masters and servants. There is nothing degrading in such a relation, nothing humiliating in the obedience so rendered. It is a case of voluntary association for a special purpose, which can only be carried out by allowing legal authority to rest somewhere, and the obedience is limited to matters which concern the business of the partnership. The rights of masters and servants are unequal in the affairs of the household; they are equal in matters outside this domain. A man may lawfully order his coachman to drive him in a given direction, but if the coachman be an elector the master may not lawfully order him to vote for a particular candidate. A husband may lawfully order his wife to do certain things; he may not lawfully order her to go to a particular church, or profess any particular creed, against her own convictions. A man whose wife is a physician, or a member of a school board has no authority over her with respect to the treatment of her patients, or the administration of the Education Act. It is perfectly possible to maintain the expediency of the subjection of wives to husbands for the special

purposes of family government, along with the recognition of the equal rights of men and women who do not hold these relations to one another, and of husbands and wives in matters unconnected with family affairs. The *Quarterly* reviewer, to whom we have previously alluded, says, very justly, that there are two questions about women's rights which have been a good deal confused—the reviewer says by Mr. MILL and his friends—we say by Mr. STEPHEN. The first—which the reviewer says should never have been a question at all—is whether the legal nullity of women under the old Roman and under the feudal law, should be the legal doctrine of days of more advanced civilisation; the second is whether marriage involves or does not involve a subjection of woman to man which is natural and necessary, and not legal and artificial in its origin. Mr. STEPHEN'S arguments are addressed mainly to the latter question, and when he has, as he believes, proved his case, he says he has established the general proposition that men and women are not equals, and that the laws which affect their relations ought to recognise that fact.

Mr. STEPHEN appears to base his argument on the general proposition that the law or the Legislature ought to take a survey of all sorts and conditions of men, to observe whether there is any actual inequality in their relations or conditions, and whenever it finds any existing inequality it should "recognise that fact," by legislation based on the inequality, and designed to perpetuate it. We do not know whether Mr. STEPHEN is or was an advocate of negro slavery, but the arguments he advances for the maintenance of the subjection of women would have applied equally well to the maintenance of slavery in the United States. He might have harangued the Abolitionists in the style he uses about Mr. MILL'S claim for equal rights for women. "Ingenious people may argue

"about anything, but all the talk in the world will never shake the proposition that [white men] are stronger than [negroes] in every shape. They have greater muscular and nervous force, greater intellectual force, and greater vigour of character. This general truth has led to a division of labour between [white men] and [negroes] the general outline of which is as familiar as the general outline of the differences between them. These are the facts, and the question is whether the law and justice of man ought to recognise this difference."

Mr. STEPHEN grossly misrepresents Mr. MILL'S doctrine by the gloss which he intrudes into it. He speaks of "Mr. MILL'S doctrine that the law of the strongest, *or the law of force*, has been abandoned in these days." The words in italics are an interpolation which alter the meaning of the doctrine. Mr. MILL'S words are—"We 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"—a very different proposition from that which Mr. STEPHEN combats. We understand Mr. MILL to mean that the state of society in which the law of the supremacy of the will of the strongest individuals over the lives and the wills of the weaker members has given place to a state of society in which the force of law is supreme alike over the strong and the weak. The maintenance of personal rights no longer depends on personal strength, but on the force of the law. Mr. MILL maintains that the subjection of women is the relic of a condition of things in which law, or the collective force of society, was weak, and individuals were strong, and that it is unsuited to a state of society in which the law has irresistible force, and the individual is powerless before the law. In days of old a powerful noble or an audacious bandit not unfrequently openly and successfully defied the power of the law and the

Government. In these days there is no safety for the law breaker, save in concealment or flight. The illustrations Mr. STEPHEN has given by way of confuting the doctrine he foists on Mr. MILL do in fact so admirably confirm that on which he really founds his claim for the enfranchisement of women that we give them here. He illustrates the state of society, which Mr. MILL calls "the law of the strongest," by the condition of Scotland in the fourteenth century, as portrayed in SCOTT'S novel "The Fair Maid of Perth." "My name," says one of the characters, "is the Devil's Dick, of Hellgarth, well-known in Annandale for a gentle Johnstone. I follow the stout Laird of Wamphray, who rides with his kinsman the redoubted Lord of Johnstone, who is banded with the doughty of Earl Douglas, and the earl, and the lord, and the laird and I, the esquire, fly our hawks where we find our game, and ask no man whose ground we ride over." Mr. STEPHEN says that the first impression on comparing this spirited picture with the Scotland we all know is that the fourteenth century was entirely subject to the *law of force*, and that Scotland in the nineteenth century had ceased to be the theatre of force at all. We say that the impression, from Mr. MILL'S point of view, would be that in the fourteenth century Scotland was subject to the *law of the strongest*, "the good old rule, the simple plan, that those should take who had the power, and those should keep who can," and that in the nineteenth century, the reign of the strongest had given place to the reign of law. Under the first rule women could not have assured to them equal rights with men, because they have not equal personal strength to maintain them. Under the second rule women can have equal rights secured to them with men, because the maintenance of rights assured by law does not depend in any way on personal strength. Mr. STEPHEN says, "Look a little deeper, and this impres-

sion" (*i.e.*, the impression that Scotland in the fourteenth century was subject to the law of force, and that Scotland in the nineteenth century has ceased to be the theatre of force at all) "is as false, not to say childish, as the supposition that a clumsy row-boat, manned by a quarrelsome crew who can neither keep time with their oars nor resist the temptation to fight among themselves, displays force, and that an ocean steamer which will carry a townful of people to the end of the earth at the rate of three hundred miles a day so smoothly that, during the greater part of the time, they are unconscious of any motion or effort whatever, displays none." The fact that a supposition is childish ought to be a guarantee even to Mr. STEPHEN that a reasoner like Mr. MILL never could have made it. The simile is another apt illustration of the doctrine really maintained by Mr. MILL. While the motive power of the ship of the State was vested in individual rowers, and the direction of the voyage determined by the greatest number of the strongest arms, without reference to law or reason, it is evident that women, however deeply interested in the result of the venture, could have exercised no effective control over the guidance of the craft. But in the case of the ocean steamer owned, say, by a company of shareholders of both sexes, whose voice in the direction of the voyage is determined, not by the degree of physical strength, but by the amount of the shares they hold, women shareholders could exercise power on exactly the same terms, and at neither greater nor less disadvantage, than men.

Mr. STEPHEN says, "The force which goes to govern the Scotland of these days is to the force employed for the same purpose in the fourteenth century what the force of a line-of-battle ship is to the force of an individual prize-fighter. The reason why it works so quietly is that no one doubts either its existence or its crushing

“superiority to any individual resistance which could be offered to it.” We recognise this fact with gladness, for it is the basis of the possibility of the recognition of the equal rights of women and men before the law. Let the collective moral and physical force of the whole community of men and women be organised in support of laws which declare equal personal rights to all human beings, and the laws so supported will prove adequate to assure and protect in the exercise of these rights even the weakest man, woman, or child in the community, and to repress the usurpation of lawless power by the strongest baron who might awake out of a Rip Van Winkle’s sleep in the belief that he still lived in the good old times.

There are many passages in Mr. STEPHEN’S book which convey the impression that he thinks the change that has taken place in society since the days of the “gentle Johnstone” a matter for regret. Apparently he does not think political power worth having unless a man can grab a large share of it, and use it in his own way. Speaking of the recent extension of the suffrage he says, “we have succeeded in cutting political power into very little bits, which with our usual hymns of triumph we are continually mincing, till it seems not unlikely that many people will come to think that a single man’s share of it is not worth having at all.” He says again, “Political power has changed its shape, but not its nature. The result of cutting it up into little bits is simply that the man who can sweep the greatest number of them into one heap will govern the rest. The strongest man in some form or other will always rule.” We may admit this last proposition while giving an emphatic denial to the first. Granted that under any form of representative government the strongest man will always rule, there is an essential difference in the nature of the political power exercised by a representative and a despotic

ruler. The difference is occasioned by that same sweeping process which Mr. STEPHEN dismisses so unceremoniously. When political power is distributed in very little bits over a large number of persons, the bits cannot be swept into a heap by force, even by the strongest ruler. He must give or offer some advantage to the possessors of them, or must persuade them that he is the fittest man to rule, before they will cast their bits within the sweep of his brush. And if he disappoints their expectations they can disperse the heap as readily as it was swept together, and his power dissolves like summer snow. The wide distribution of political power renders its possession by the people more secure. It may be easy to rob one man of five pounds,—it would be impracticable to rob a thousand men of one penny each.

The “mincing” process by which political power has been sub-divided and spread over so wide an area, and so many classes and interests, both facilitates and necessitates the distribution of a share to women. It facilitates it, because under the conditions on which it is dispensed it is easy to give to women an equality of political rights, without giving them such an actual share in the government as would seriously interfere with the existing order of things, or have the effect of superseding the general conduct of the affairs of government by men. Even under universal suffrage it is probable that the greatest amount of actual political work would continue to be done by men, at least for a long time to come. Under household suffrage, where the men voters so greatly outnumber the women, there would not be the slightest probability of the disturbance of the present method of government. The extension can therefore be made without inconvenience and without risk.

The general distribution of political power necessitates the giving of a share to women, because every extension of



the franchise to classes hitherto excluded lowers and weakens the status of the classes which remain out of the pale. Agricultural labourers in counties, and women householders everywhere, are now excluded from influence over the Government. They possess none of those "little bits" of political power which those who would govern the country need to sweep into a heap by means of persuasion, and offers of just measures and legislative protection. The larger the body of unrepresented persons in the country, the stronger is that body. If the unrepresented body consists of two distinct classes having interests not always in common, and sometimes apparently antagonistic, as in the classes of employers and employed, it is evident that if one class is admitted to the safeguards of representation the one left out is in a worse position than before. It has obtained another master in place of a fellow-sufferer, and its interests will have less chance than ever of being considered, as they will have to withstand the rivalry of those belonging to the class just admitted to a share of these magical and all-potent "bits" of political power.

It is because each "bit" is so small that it is safe to assign a bit even to the uneducated and indifferent elector. No man or woman, however stupid or silly, could do much mischief with the infinitesimal share of power comprised in his or her particular "bit." It is perhaps for this reason that so many intelligent women and men are slow to appreciate the value of a vote. Because the mere possession and occasional exercise of a vote seems a small thing in itself, is actually an infinitesimal factor in the sum of most persons' experience, they imagine that it is an equally unimportant matter to the interests of a class. One drop is an infinitesimal item in a shower, yet it would not be safe to say that the shower is unimportant because each drop composing it is a very small thing. It matters little or nothing personally to any individual woman

whether she has a vote or not. It is of vital consequence to the interests of women as a class that they should have representative government.

We have limited our remarks on Mr. STEPHEN'S book to those portions having especial reference to the enfranchisement of women. But it is not only liberty for women which Mr. STEPHEN deprecates; he seems also averse to the application of the principle of liberty to men. In commenting on "the opinion that laws which recognise any sort of inequality between human beings are mere vestiges of the past, against which as such there lies the strongest of all presumptions" he takes exception to "the assumption that the progress of society is from bad to good; that the changes of the last few centuries in our own, and in other leading nations of Western Europe, have been changes for the better," and while not altogether denying it, he says he cannot assent to it. "Even if the inequality between men and women is a vestige of the past, and likely to be destroyed by the same process that has destroyed so many other things, that is no reason for helping it on. The proper reflection may be 'the more the pity.'" "The waters are out, and no human force can turn them back, but I do not see why, as we go with the stream, we need sing 'Halelujah to the river god.'" "It is useless to lament, or even to blame, the inevitable." We gather from these and similar utterances scattered through the book, first that Mr. STEPHEN considers the movement for the enfranchisement of women to be a part of the general movement of society towards the abolition of class distinctions and legal inequalities, next, that he regards, not simply the enfranchisement of women, but the stream of modern progress of which it forms a part, with dislike and distrust, and, lastly, that he believes the change to be inevitable, and the result of forces which no human power can withstand.

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no. 10  
C. S. Mann  
Miss Jod  
Miss Taylor  
Madame Bella  
M<sup>rs</sup> A. Armit  
Serjeant

DE

# L'AFFRANCHISSEMENT POLITIQUE

## DES FEMMES

## EN ANGLETERRE

PAR

✓ M<sup>ME</sup> C. COIGNET

PARIS

LIBRAIRIE GERMER BAILLIÈRE

RUE DE L'ÉCOLE-DE-MÉDECINE, 17

1874

*F. W. Crippen*

C100

DE

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Extrait de la Revue politique et littéraire

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DE  
**L'AFFRANCHISSEMENT POLITIQUE**  
**DES FEMMES**

Un des spectacles les plus intéressants et les plus curieux de l'ordre politique est celui que nous présente aujourd'hui l'Angleterre.

En voyant ce peuple abandonner de plus en plus sa prépondérance en Europe et faire aux nations une sorte de déclaration de paix à tout prix, on a prononcé parfois le mot de décadence. L'excès du bien-être et des richesses, a-t-on dit, et les satisfactions égoïstes qui en dérivent produisent, là comme partout ailleurs, leur effet d'atonie et d'engourdissement. Encore quelques années, l'Angleterre sera devenue une nouvelle Hollande. Mais ceux qui suivent d'un œil plus attentif et plus pénétrant la politique anglaise à l'intérieur en appelleront de ce jugement.

Il est bien vrai que les traditions orgueilleuses qui ont porté pendant des siècles le Royaume-Uni à s'arroger la souveraineté des mers et la suprématie sur le continent, s'affaiblissent de plus en plus, — et la classe qui les avait si hardiment proclamées et si hardiment soutenues perd chaque jour de son prestige. La bourgeoisie est aujourd'hui prépondérante en Angleterre. Or, les classes travailleuses ne sont jamais guerrières; connaissant le prix des richesses acquises

par leurs propres efforts, elles tiennent à la paix qui les conserve, à la liberté qui leur permet d'en jouir, et préfèrent au bruit du champ de bataille les luttes fécondes de la vie civile et les joies du foyer. Peut-être la classe moyenne en Angleterre manque-t-elle encore de la culture supérieure, des traditions diplomatiques et des larges visées de la vieille aristocratie. Aussi, sous sa direction, le pays a trouvé jusqu'à présent moins d'éclat extérieur que sous ses anciens chefs (1). Mais cette même classe peut acquérir ce qui lui manque, et si d'ailleurs elle mène à bonne fin l'œuvre qu'elle a entreprise, — la réforme libérale des institutions, — l'Angleterre y trouvera plus de vraie gloire que dans toutes les conquêtes.

Qu'on ne parle donc pas de décadence. La vitalité de cette forte race n'a nullement diminué; jamais, au contraire, son énergie et son activité n'ont été aussi intenses; seulement elles se concentrent à l'intérieur.

Les questions politiques et sociales qu'on débat aujourd'hui en Angleterre sont celles qui agitent l'Europe moderne tout entière. Elles peuvent se ramener à une seule: la lutte d'un monde nouveau fondé sur le droit humain, la liberté et l'égalité des individus, contre un vieux monde fondé sur le droit divin, les privilèges de classes et les pouvoirs ecclésiastiques.

Les diverses réformes obtenues dans le cours de ce siècle en Angleterre (2), et celles qu'on y réclame encore aujourd'hui (3), ne sont que les manifestations de cette lutte, et le progrès social s'y rattache en entier. Dégager la société mo-

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(1) L'Angleterre peut remplir en Europe un grand rôle, sans viser à la conquête. Nous espérons qu'elle le comprendra. L'abstention systématique et absolue serait trop aisément taxée d'égoïsme, d'étroitesse et d'impuissance. Un peuple ne saurait s'isoler du groupe auquel il appartient et se désintéresser de la politique extérieure, sans voir diminuer, non-seulement son influence, mais sa valeur morale.

(2) Le mariage civil, le libre échange, la suppression des brevets achetés dans l'armée, la suppression du serment religieux à l'entrée du parlement et des universités, la réforme électorale, etc.

(3) La séparation de l'Église et de l'État, l'enseignement public et laïque généralisé, l'extension du suffrage, la libre possession et la libre transmission de la terre, etc., etc.

derne, laïque et démocratique, de la société théologique et aristocratique du moyen âge: telle est la question dans tous les pays. Mais il y a bien des manières de la résoudre, et ici nous allons reconnaître un des traits les plus caractéristiques de l'esprit anglo-saxon.

Le progrès social en Angleterre n'apparaît jamais comme le fruit d'une révolution violente qu'un parti peut obtenir par surprise et imposer par force. Il est le résultat d'une transformation lente et régulière accomplie par la nation elle-même. Chaque nouvelle réforme doit être soumise à l'opinion; avant d'arriver au Parlement, elle doit avoir été débattue et acceptée par le peuple.

Or, chez cette race positive et fortement attachée à ses traditions, il ne suffit pas qu'une réforme soit juste et conforme à l'intérêt du pays pour devenir populaire; il faut encore qu'elle ait un fondement dans la législation, un précédent dans l'histoire, qu'elle rentre en un mot dans le développement régulier des institutions.

Ce respect de la volonté nationale aussi bien dans les traditions du passé que dans les tendances du présent fait la force morale de l'Angleterre. Il élève le patriotisme au-dessus de toutes les divisions de classes et de partis, et, en donnant à l'action politique la résistance, la force et la durée, il lui donne une incomparable grandeur. L'esprit traditionnel, si puissant d'ailleurs en Angleterre, peut retarder parfois la réalisation des réformes, mais ne les fait pas échouer; il ne leur présente jamais un obstacle qu'on ne puisse tourner ou vaincre.

Dans un pays où aucune loi n'a jamais été abolie, aucun code révisé, et où la jurisprudence se puise aussi bien dans la coutume et l'équité que dans la loi écrite, il ne saurait être difficile au réformateur de maintenir un lien entre les temps. La question qui va nous occuper aujourd'hui en est un saisissant exemple.

I

Certes, s'il est une réforme importante, une réforme qui doive atteindre la société dans ses profondeurs, c'est celle qui consisterait à supprimer toute distinction légale entre les sexes, et s'il est un pays où une telle réforme semble devoir rencontrer une opposition invincible, c'est celui de tous où la législation a établi dans le mariage le plus d'inégalités. C'est pourtant dans celui-là, c'est en Angleterre que la question est aujourd'hui posée et publiquement débattue, et qu'elle gagne du terrain chaque jour.

Quand nous parlons de supprimer toute distinction légale entre les sexes, nous indiquons la question dans sa véritable portée philosophique (1), non point telle que l'ont formulée devant le public la masse de ceux qui la défendent. Fidèles à l'esprit et aux habitudes de leur contrée, ils se sont placés, au contraire, sur un terrain essentiellement pratique : ils ont restreint leur réclamation à un point précis et bien déterminé, sachant que c'est le meilleur moyen pour obtenir peu à peu tout le reste.

Ce point est le droit politique.

Peut-être, en France, s'étonnera-t-on du choix ; mais il s'explique en Angleterre, d'une part, par les habitudes du *self government*, de l'autre, par les conditions spéciales du droit politique, qui y rendent le vote bien plus accessible aux femmes qu'il ne le serait chez nous.

Voici comment la question s'est déterminée d'elle-même :

De nombreuses réformes étaient demandées touchant la condition sociale des femmes en Angleterre, et la conve-

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(1) M. Mill, un des principaux promoteurs du mouvement, l'a posée ainsi dans son remarquable ouvrage sur l'*Assujettissement des femmes*.

nance, la justice de certaines d'entre elles étaient généralement reconnues. Les réformateurs alors ont dit :

« Si l'on doit réviser la législation qui règle la condition de la femme, n'est-il pas juste et dans l'esprit même de notre loi nationale que les femmes participent à cette révision ? Chacun est pour soi le meilleur juge, et l'on ne saurait changer le sort de la moitié des membres de la communauté sans les consulter sur ce changement. »

Or, la seule manière de consulter légalement les femmes, c'est de leur accorder une part à la législation au moyen du vote.

Sans doute, s'il s'était agi d'ouvrir inopinément la vie politique à une nouvelle masse d'électeurs, on aurait pu reculer devant un changement aussi considérable, mais la question ne se présentait point ainsi.

Le suffrage universel n'existe pas en Angleterre. Le vote y est considéré comme un privilège tenant à la propriété, non comme un droit personnel attaché à l'individu. Toutes les libertés publiques ont une origine traditionnelle ; elles se rattachent à ce vieil adage que ceux qui payent l'impôt ont un droit de contrôle sur ceux qui le lèvent et qui l'appliquent.

S'appuyant donc sur le droit public ainsi déterminé, les femmes ont demandé le suffrage, non pas en tant que personnes morales et civiles, ce qui aurait pu être sujet à contestation, mais en tant que propriétaires titulaires, payant l'impôt. La réclamation sous cette forme avait le double avantage de restreindre le nombre des nouveaux électeurs aux *feme sole* (1) (demoiselles majeures, et veuves), et de s'appuyer sur le droit historique le plus ancien.

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(1) Expression de la loi normande pour désigner les femmes qui ne sont ni en puissance de père, ni en puissance de mari. Il faut remarquer toutefois que, par le fait de l'émigration, cette catégorie est en Angleterre beaucoup plus nombreuse que chez nous. Dans ce pays, le nombre des femmes dépasse celui des hommes d'un million environ, et on y trouve deux à trois millions de femmes non mariées ou veuves. On a calculé que le jour où la loi passerait elle augmenterait d'un septième le nombre des électeurs. Cette proportion est relativement considérable.

La loi salique, en effet, qui, dans notre pays et dès l'époque des Francs, excluait la femme de l'héritage paternel comme incapable de le défendre, n'a jamais existé en Angleterre. Les plus vieux souvenirs de cette contrée nous montrent les filles héritant de leurs pères à défaut des descendants mâles, et jouissant dans ce cas des mêmes droits que ces derniers.

Avant même l'invasion normande, et sans cesse depuis, les femmes possesseurs titulaires de fiefs prenaient part au gouvernement de leur pays, tantôt par mandataires et tantôt d'une façon directe.

Thomas Hughes, dans la *Vie d'Alfred le Grand*, nous dit que les nobles dames, mêmes mariées, conservaient leurs propriétés personnelles, qu'elles pouvaient en disposer, et à ce titre siégeaient dans le *Wittenagamott*, conseil national des Saxons; elles siégeaient aussi dans les assemblées provinciales, les comités de paroisse, et elles étaient protégées par des lois spéciales alors que, dans ces temps de violence, la faiblesse de leur corps les plaçait en état de péril.

Gurdon, dans ses *Considérations sur les antiquités du parlement*, parle aussi des femmes de naissance et de qualité qui siégeaient au conseil avec les chefs saxons.

L'abbesse Wilde, dit encore Bede, présida un synode ecclésiastique.

Sous Henri VIII, dans la salle Booth de Gloucester, lady Anne Berkeley tint une cour de justice comme juge-président. Elle avait en cette qualité une commission du roi, et Fosbrook, l'historien de Gloucester, raconte comment elle vint, s'assit sur le banc dans la salle des sessions publiques, présida le jury, reçut les témoignages, déclara les accusés coupables de complot et de désordre public, et les condamna comme ennemis du genre humain.

Sous Henri III, quatre abbesses furent convoquées au Parlement. Sous Édouard III, plusieurs dames nobles y comparurent par leurs mandataires. On cite encore mistress Copley, sous le règne de Marie, et lady Packington, sous le règne d'Élisabeth.

La dernière manifestation publique que nous ayons de ce droit date de 1640; mais on peut voir que l'usage commence

déjà à s'affaiblir, car le shériff fait alors cette remarque qu'il est honteux pour un homme d'être élu par des femmes.

Dans le siècle suivant, les juges le reconnaissent encore, mais on n'en réclame presque plus l'application.

En 1739, la douzième année du règne de Georges II, devant la cour du roi (*kings' bench*), sir William Lee étant premier juge (*chief justice*) et sir Francis Page étant second juge, on posa la question de savoir si une *feme sole* pouvait voter pour les officiers de la paroisse, les sacristains, et si elle pouvait elle-même exercer ces fonctions. Dans le cours du procès, sir William Lee déclara que le droit était incontestable, et qu'en nombre de cas les *feme sole* avaient même voté pour les membres du Parlement, mais que, lorsqu'elles étaient mariées, leur mari devait voter pour elles. Le juge Page s'exprime de la même façon dans un cas analogue, et lord Coke, qui est une autorité en ces matières, confirme ces dires.

Il nous reste d'ailleurs un témoignage vivant et plus éclatant que tous les autres de cette interprétation du droit féodal : c'est la royauté qui en dérive. Les femmes occupent le trône en Angleterre, et chaque terme de la loi qui en règle les conditions est applicable à un sexe comme à l'autre. La reine régnante remplit toutes les fonctions du roi; elle a les mêmes prérogatives, les mêmes obligations. Bien plus, elle est en Angleterre la seule épouse qui conserve la liberté de la *feme sole*. Après comme avant le mariage, elle peut acheter, vendre, recevoir des dons et des héritages, tester, et enfin prendre toute sorte d'engagements.

Le droit traditionnel est donc incontestable, et si l'usage s'est perdu, il faut en accuser l'indifférence des femmes, qui n'ont point été assez jalouses de maintenir ce droit en l'exerçant. Toutefois, et en dépit d'une telle négligence, le principe n'en demeure pas moins comme un élément de la constitution et de l'histoire du Royaume-Uni, et, en le relevant de nos jours, en demandant à le remettre en vigueur, les femmes n'innovent pas, elles retournent à la tradition; ce point a une grande importance.

Voici dans quels termes miss Mary Dowling (1), secrétaire

(1) Miss Dowling, femme aussi distinguée par le caractère et par

générale de l'Association en faveur du suffrage des femmes, déterminait, au mois d'août 1873, l'objet de cette Association. S'adressant au principal journaliste de la ville de Ramsgate, où devait se tenir un *meeting* sur cette question, elle s'exprimait en ces termes :

« Nous ne demandons pas, comme quelques personnes se l'imaginent vaguement, que chaque femme ait un vote. Mais la propriété, la rente et l'impôt étant la base des droits politiques en Angleterre, nous disons qu'il est très-injuste d'en exclure les femmes qui sont propriétaires, rentières, et qui payent l'impôt. Nous ne demandons nullement le droit de vote pour les jeunes filles et les épouses chargées des devoirs de la vie domestique, mais seulement pour les femmes dont la situation civile peut être assimilée à celle des hommes. Nous demandons que les femmes non mariées et les veuves appelées à partager la charge de l'impôt participent au privilège qui y est attaché quand le contribuable est un homme. La question en litige n'est donc point la question abstraite des droits de la femme, sur laquelle les membres mêmes de notre Association peuvent différer d'opinions, mais la question de savoir si la qualité du sexe peut destituer du droit politique un membre quelconque de la communauté.

» J'ajouterai que nous avons sur ce point en notre faveur la plus haute autorité légale du pays. Notre avocat général lui-même, sir John Coleridge, a reconnu en plein Parlement qu'il était difficile à un Anglais de dénier un tel droit (1). »

Nous ne pouvons qu'admirer la sagesse et la modération d'un tel langage. La fermeté dont les femmes anglaises font preuve, en limitant leur réclamation au strict principe du droit positif, est à nos yeux un gage certain de succès. On verra d'ailleurs, en continuant cette étude, quelle marche régulière et progressive la question a suivie. Nous la reprendrons au début, sur le terrain législatif.

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le cœur que par les facultés de l'intelligence, a été prématurément enlevée à sa tâche et à l'affection de ses amis, au mois de janvier 1874. La cause à laquelle elle s'était entièrement vouée a fait, par cette mort, une grande perte.

(1) Séance du 1<sup>er</sup> mai 1872.

II

Le registre parlementaire d'Hansard nous donne, à la date du 3 août 1832, la première mention qui ait été faite à la Chambre des Communes du droit des femmes au vote politique.

M. Hunt (1) se lève et dit qu'il a une pétition à présenter, laquelle sera peut-être un sujet de gaieté pour les *honorable gentlemen*, mais qui lui paraît néanmoins mériter quelque attention. Cette pétition vient d'une dame de haut rang, Mary Smith de Stanmore, du comté d'York. La pétitionnaire établit que, possédant de grands biens, elle paye des taxes considérables, et elle demande, selon le principe de la constitution anglaise, à participer à l'élection de ceux qui représentent la propriété. Elle ajoute que les femmes étant sujettes à tous les châtimens de la loi, sans excepter la mort, il lui paraît juste qu'elles ne demeurent pas étrangères à la législation. Et pourtant, ajoute-t-elle, non-seulement elles en sont exclues, mais quand elles ont à subir un jugement, elles ne reconnaissent personne de leur sexe parmi les jurés et les juges. La pétitionnaire ne voit aucune bonne raison pour refuser aux femmes les droits sociaux, en Angleterre surtout où la plus haute fonction de l'État, celle de la royauté, peut être exercée par une femme, et elle termine en demandant que toutes les femmes non mariées ou veuves se trouvant d'ailleurs dans les conditions légales, puissent voter pour les membres du parlement.

M. Hunt ne se méprenait pas en prévoyant le peu de succès de cette pétition. Elle fut écartée sans discussion, mais non sans quelques sourires des honorables *gentlemen*.

A cette époque, d'ailleurs, l'opinion n'avait point encore

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(1) Ministre de la marine dans le cabinet actuel.



été saisie, et cet acte isolé passa pour une excentricité sans valeur et sans conséquence.

C'est seulement treize ans après que la question apparaît dans le public avec un certain éclat, relevée et soutenue par deux noms populaires : M. Richard Cobden et M. Stuart Mill.

Dans un discours à la date du 15 janvier 1845, à Covent-Garden, M. Cobden se prononce en faveur du suffrage des femmes (1), et l'année suivante, M. Stuart Mill, dans un ouvrage politique sur la nature du gouvernement, se prononce à son tour avec non moins de fermeté dans le même sens. Dès cette époque, on peut prévoir l'attitude résolue que M. Mill prendra plus tard dans la lutte.

L'appui de noms aussi estimés et aussi populaires commence à donner à la question une importance nouvelle. Cependant le progrès est lent, et c'est seulement douze ans après qu'un incident la remet en lumière, sans amener encore de résultats positifs.

En 1858, les ouvriers de Newcastle, ayant formé une association en faveur du suffrage universel, demandèrent à un groupe de femmes distinguées et libérales de se joindre à eux et d'appuyer leurs réclamations.

Celles-ci proposèrent alors d'unir la question du vote des femmes à celle du suffrage universel. Mais les ouvriers, tout en admettant le principe, craignirent de compromettre leur cause par cette union, et les pourparlers n'eurent pas de suite.

En 1865 seulement, à l'époque des élections, la question revint devant le public avec un éclat nouveau. Les électeurs de Westminster avaient proposé la candidature à M. Mill.

« J'écrivis en réponse, nous dit-il dans ses Mémoires, une lettre destinée à la publicité. Au sujet des droits électoraux, je leur déclarai péremptoirement que dans ma conviction, conviction à laquelle je conformerais mes actes, les femmes

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(1) « C'est un fait singulier à mes yeux, dit M. Cobden, et une grande anomalie, que les femmes ne puissent pas voter elles-mêmes quand, en nombre de cas, elles peuvent conférer le vote. Je souhaite pour mon compte que leur droit finisse par être reconnu. »

avaient le droit d'être représentées dans le parlement sur le même pied que les hommes. C'était sans doute la première fois que cette doctrine s'affirmait devant des électeurs anglais. Aussi le succès de ma candidature, après cette déclaration de principe, a-t-elle donné l'impulsion au mouvement, devenu depuis si vigoureux, en faveur du suffrage des femmes » (1).

On remarque, en effet, que l'année suivante, en 1866, M. Mill put déjà présenter à la chambre des Communes une pétition de 1500 femmes pour demander le suffrage.

Dans cette curieuse séance, M. Disraeli, chef du parti conservateur, se rallie à l'idée générale contenue dans la pétition. Il s'exprime en ces termes :

« Dans un pays gouverné par une femme, alors que nous reconnaissons aux femmes le droit de former une partie de l'État en qualité de *pairesses* de leur propre chef, alors que nous admettons, non-seulement qu'elles possèdent la terre, mais qu'elles soient dames de manoir (*Lady of the manor*) et tiennent des cours de justice, quand elles peuvent être gardiennes de l'Église et surveillantes des pauvres, je ne saurais voir par quelle raison on les exclurait du droit de vote. » (*Hansard's Parliamentary debates.*)

En 1867, M. Mill présenta une seconde pétition de 12 247 personnes, hommes et femmes, et, de plus, un *bill* ou projet de loi, en faveur de la réforme. Voici dans quels termes il posa alors la question :

« Je me lève, messieurs, pour proposer une extension du suffrage qui ne saurait exciter aucun sentiment de classe ou de parti, qui ne peut pas plus donner d'ombrage aux partisans les plus absolus des droits de la propriété qu'aux défenseurs les plus ardents des droits du nombre ; une extension qui ne troublera pas dans la moindre mesure ce qu'on appelait dernièrement la balance des pouvoirs politiques, qui

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(1) *Histoire de ma vie*, par Mill, p. 269.

n'alarmera ni les adversaires les plus craintifs de la révolution, ni les démocrates les plus jaloux des droits populaires... La question que je vous adresse est celle-ci : Est-il juste de refuser à une moitié des membres de la communauté, non-seulement l'exercice, mais la capacité d'exercer jamais les droits politiques, alors que ces membres se trouvent dans toutes les conditions légales et constitutionnelles qui suffisent aux autres membres?... La justice, qui représente à mes yeux un groupe particulier d'intérêts, n'exige pas sans doute qu'on confère les fonctions politiques à chacun, mais elle exige qu'on n'en destitue arbitrairement personne. Or, peut-on prétendre que des femmes qui administrent leurs biens personnels, possèdent et exploitent la terre, conduisent des fermes, des maisons d'affaires et des établissements d'éducation, sont chefs de famille et paient des impôts considérables, restent incapables de remplir une fonction à l'exercice de laquelle tout homme, quel qu'il soit, peut être appelé?... Et ce n'est pas seulement le principe de la justice qui est violé par cette exclusion des femmes, en tant que femmes, c'est notre constitution même. La vieille doctrine sur laquelle elle est fondée, doctrine chère à tous les libéraux et reconnue par tous les conservateurs, n'est-elle pas contenue dans cette maxime que *l'impôt et la représentation sont coexistants*? Or, cette maxime est violée par l'exclusion des femmes. »

M. Mill examine ensuite tous les arguments contraires au projet de loi, arguments qu'on tire des obligations de la femme dans la vie privée, et il ajoute : « Qu'est-ce donc que la liberté politique, sinon le contrôle de ceux qui exercent directement les fonctions publiques par ceux qui ne les exercent pas? Ce contrôle est-il donc de nature à absorber l'existence, pour qu'on le déclare incompatible avec les soins de la famille et ses obligations? Si l'on est sincère, on pourra peut-être réduire ces arguments à un sentiment obscur et honteux de lui-même, que nous traduirons ainsi : — Une femme n'a pas le droit d'être autre chose que la servante la plus utile et la plus dévouée d'un homme. — J'ajouterai que, dans ma conviction, il n'y a pas un seul membre de cette Chambre capable d'un sentiment si bas. »

A la suite de ce discours, le *bill* obtint 82 voix : la plupart

appartenaient au parti radical (1). Quelques conservateurs cependant suivirent l'exemple de M. Disraeli, au nom de la tradition constitutionnelle, et votèrent comme lui pour le *bill*.

Ainsi, chose curieuse ! la question du droit politique des femmes est entrée sur le terrain législatif appuyée par les chefs des deux partis les plus opposés de la Chambre, et grâce à l'honorable minorité qu'elle obtint, on peut dire qu'elle y conquit ce jour-là sa place officielle. On pouvait encore la combattre, mais on ne pouvait plus la traiter de chimérique et d'absurde.

Cette même année, un incident se présenta qui permit de faire en sa faveur, et sous une autre forme, une tentative nouvelle.

La loi écrite, en Angleterre, se sert du terme *person* (personne) pour désigner quiconque possède certains droits, ou est sujet à certaines obligations. Or, dans un cas particulier, un juge ayant décidé que le mot *person* n'était point applicable aux femmes (2), on avait senti le danger d'une jurisprudence qui aurait fini par dispenser les femmes de tous les impôts si on l'avait généralisée, et, pour parer à la possibilité d'un tel abus, lord Romilly avait présenté une loi, votée sans discussion par la chambre des Communes, qui décidait que le terme législatif de *person* était également applicable aux deux sexes, à moins que l'intention contraire n'ait été clairement exprimée par le législateur.

L'année suivante néanmoins, en 1867, quand on vota la réforme électorale, entraîné par l'usage, on employa encore

(1) Les radicaux représentent la partie la plus avancée du parti libéral. Ce terme, toutefois, n'implique aucune signification révolutionnaire. Tous les partis politiques, à la chambre des Communes, sont constitutionnels.

(2) Voici quel était ce cas : Le dernier duc de Buckingham avait cité quelques chasseurs devant la justice pour fait de braconnage à Stowe. Ceux-ci furent condamnés à l'amende, et, par vengeance, ils attaquèrent de la même façon la duchesse pour avoir chassé le faisan sans permis. Les magistrats décidèrent que pour les permis de chasse, la loi, employant le mot de *person* et le pronom *he* (il), n'était pas applicable aux femmes.

le terme *person* pour désigner les votants, sans déterminer le sexe. Les partisans du suffrage des femmes ne devaient pas manquer de se prévaloir de cette inadvertance ; voici comment ils procédèrent :

Les listes électorales, en Angleterre, sont dressées par les municipalités et révisées par un avocat de la couronne qui, dans le cas où les inscriptions ne lui paraissent pas conformes à la loi, peut effacer d'office les noms inscrits. Ses décisions toutefois ne sont pas souveraines ; il y a une cour d'appel.

En 1868, l'année qui suivit la réforme, quand les nouvelles listes furent dressées, nombre de femmes se présentèrent pour être inscrites comme électeurs. Il y eut des cas où les officiers municipaux consentirent à cette inscription, d'autres où ils la refusèrent, et il y eut aussi des cas où les avocats de la couronne ratifièrent l'inscription municipale, d'autres où ils effacèrent d'office les noms de femmes.

Dans tous les districts où les noms furent maintenus sur la liste, les femmes purent voter ; et de fait, elles votèrent. On cite entre autres le district de Finsbury, à Londres, où cinq femmes votèrent. A Worcester, il y en eut une ; à Ashford, dans le comté de Kent, il y en eut vingt ; il y en eut dans beaucoup d'autres. La validité de ces votes n'a jamais été contestée.

La question néanmoins restait pendante. Il fallait la résoudre sur le terrain légal. On s'entendit à cet effet.

A Manchester, cinq mille femmes enregistrées comme électeurs avaient vu leurs noms rayés d'office par l'avocat de la couronne ; elles en appelèrent, et leurs réclamations furent portées devant la Cour.

Malheureusement pour la cause, il se trouva dans la façon dont les réclamations furent présentées un incident qui la compromit.

On se rappelle que l'objet des deux dernières réformes électorales, celle de 1832 et celle de 1867, avaient été d'étendre le droit de vote de la propriété à la rente. Il y avait dans le principe de cette réforme un élément qui paraissait une dérogation à la pure tradition constitutionnelle, et le parti conservateur ne l'avait acceptée qu'avec répugnance, contraint

par l'opinion publique. Or, le corps de la magistrature, en Angleterre, y compris les avocats et les avoués, appartenant exclusivement au parti conservateur, on pense que si les réclamations avaient été présentées à la Cour au nom des femmes propriétaires, conformément à l'ancienne loi, elles avaient chance d'être accueillies.

Malheureusement, la première pétition inscrite venait d'une femme rentière, et on dut statuer en se plaçant au point de vue de la réforme. Les juges étaient naturellement peu enclins à étendre les applications d'une loi dont ils n'approuvaient pas le principe ; ils rejetèrent donc la requête et décidèrent que le mot *person*, employé fortuitement par le législateur, ne comprenait pas dans son esprit les deux sexes, mais les hommes seulement.

Ce jugement, qui enveloppait en masse toutes les réclamations, avait force de loi, et c'est la première décision légale qui ait exclu les femmes du vote politique en Angleterre.

Malgré cet échec, le mouvement ne fut pas arrêté, car les années suivantes un nombre de pétitions comprenant, en 1868, 49 780 signatures, en 1869, 56 475, puis 134 561, puis 186 976, puis 355 806, furent successivement présentées à la Chambre.

En 1869, M. Mill n'avait pas été réélu, mais M. Jacob Bright, frère de John Bright quaker et membre du ministère, avait repris au Parlement la défense de la même cause, et, en attendant qu'il présentât un nouveau *bill*, il obtenait de la Chambre, en faveur de l'intervention des femmes dans la vie publique, les décisions les plus importantes. Il obtenait le droit de vote dans les élections municipales, dans l'élection des officiers de police, des comités d'hygiène, des gardiens des pauvres et, l'année d'après, en 1870, quand on discuta la loi de l'instruction primaire, l'élection et l'éligibilité dans les *school-boards* (1).

(1) Les *school-boards* sont des comités locaux qui organisent, administrent et gouvernent l'enseignement primaire dans chaque district. Ce ne sont pas seulement des comités scolaires, mais de véritables pouvoirs qui décident de la création des écoles et forcent les conseils municipaux à lever les taxes nécessaires à ce sujet. Ils décident, en

En outre, la même année, il présenta un nouveau bill qui, après avoir été renvoyé devant une commission par une majorité de circonstance (la Chambre n'était pas en nombre), fut ensuite rejeté par un autre vote de surprise (1). La discussion parlementaire se trouvait ainsi close jusqu'à la fin de l'année ; mais la semaine suivante un grand *meeting* fut tenu à Londres, dans lequel on décida avec enthousiasme de continuer la lutte jusqu'au jour du succès.

En 1871, en effet, la question, qu'on n'avait pas cessé d'agiter devant le pays, revient devant le Parlement, et on peut encore constater ses progrès de deux manières : d'abord par le nombre des votes, qui s'élèvent de 94 ou de 124 à 151; puis par l'attitude très-différente du cabinet. M. Gladstone, au lieu de s'opposer personnellement au *bill*, laisse entendre, dans un langage toutefois assez obscur, qu'il n'est pas loin d'en admettre le principe. Il croit le moment prématuré, car le vote à bulletin ouvert donne lieu à de telles scènes de violence que la présence des femmes ne pourrait y être supportée. Mais une fois le vote secret adopté, la situation sera très-différente (2). « Les adversaires du *bill*, dit M. Gladstone, lui opposent cette grande loi de la race humaine en vertu de laquelle les travaux et les devoirs de la vie domestique incombent à la femme, et les travaux et les devoirs extérieurs incombent à l'homme ; mais ils oublient que cette loi se modifie chaque jour sous l'empire des faits. Le nombre de femmes indépendantes vivant soit de

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outre, si l'enseignement sera obligatoire dans le district et s'il sera laïque ou religieux. Les femmes peuvent y être élues, alors même qu'elles ne paient pas de cote personnelle et sont mariées. La première élection qui s'est faite après le vote de la loi a introduit sept femmes dans les *school-boards* ; la seconde, qui a eu lieu à la fin de 1873, huit pour l'Angleterre et vingt-quatre pour l'Ecosse.

(1) La majorité lors du premier vote était de 124 contre 94. Lorsque le bill revint pour la seconde fois devant la Chambre, M. Gladstone, chef du gouvernement, s'y opposa ouvertement et le fit rejeter en provoquant un vote subit à une heure du matin, auquel prirent part tous les députés faisant partie du gouvernement. On remarqua que 58 députés qui avaient voté pour le bill la première fois étaient alors absents.

(2) Depuis cette époque le vote secret a été adopté.

leur propre fortune, soit de leur propre travail, augmente chaque année, surtout dans les grandes villes. Or, on ne saurait contester que ces femmes, en assumant la responsabilité de leur propre existence, assument en même temps toutes les charges qui appartiennent d'ordinaire exclusivement aux hommes, et elles les assument dans des conditions plus difficiles que leurs puissants compétiteurs. Il y a dans ce fait une inégalité et une injustice qu'aucun de nous ne peut contester. Il est donc certain qu'il y a des réformes à faire.»

En 1872 et en 1873, le *bill* revient au Parlement et obtient la dernière année un gain de 4 voix (155). C'est un faible progrès, mais on se trouve en face de la même Chambre.

C'est M. Jacob Bright, M. Eastwick et M. Fawcett qui ont remplacé M. Stuart Mill dans la défense de la cause.

« On discute, dit M. Fawcett, la question de savoir si les femmes sont plus ou moins capables que les hommes de prendre part à un gouvernement représentatif : je répondrai que nous n'en savons rien, que nous ne pouvons rien en savoir avant l'expérience. Mais je dis qu'il est contraire aux principes de ce gouvernement et contraire à la justice d'imposer des lois à certains membres de la communauté sans leur donner en même temps le pouvoir de contrôler ces lois. Un grand nombre de mes amis me disent qu'ils ne voteront pas pour le *bill* parce qu'ils pensent que l'intervention des femmes augmentera la force du parti conservateur et celle de l'Église. Je n'admets pas même qu'on pose cette question. Si les femmes sont favorables à l'Église, elles en ont le droit, et nous devons prendre leur opinion en considération, quelles que soient nos sympathies. »

« On a donné le vote aux femmes dans les conseils municipaux et les *school-boards*, dit M. Jacob Bright, parce que, a-t-on dit, elles sont intéressées autant que les hommes aux questions d'éducation et aux questions d'administration locale. Mais ne pouvons-nous pas employer le même argument quand il s'agit de la représentation générale du pays ? Est-il une seule de nos lois qui ne les intéresse d'une façon directe ou indirecte ? On nous demande d'étendre le vote dans les

campagnes à la classe si nombreuse, mais si inculte, des laboureurs ; si nous y consentons, pourrions-nous encore refuser ce même vote aux femmes ? Remarquez qu'en Angleterre et dans le pays de Galles il n'y a pas moins de 22 708 femmes qui louent des terres et gouvernent des fermes en leur propre nom. Or, en travaillant ainsi pour le plus grand bien de la communauté, non-seulement elles supportent les désavantages inhérents à leur sexe, mais elles sont en outre privées, avec aussi peu de justice que de courtoisie, de certains privilèges dont jouissent leurs compétiteurs de l'autre sexe (1). Augmenterez-vous encore cette injuste inégalité en accordant le vote aux uns et en le refusant aux autres (2) ? Voyez, en effet, continue M. Bright, à quel point les injustices s'enchaînent. En 1868, on fait une enquête électorale à Bridgewater. Cette enquête est longue et coûteuse, et on lève un impôt local pour parer aux frais. Les femmes veuves et non mariées de Bridgewater se réunissent et adressent au premier ministre la requête suivante : « Nous soussignées, veuves et femmes non mariées de Bridgewater, dans le comté de Somerset, nous nous adressons à vous, comme premier lord de la Trésorerie, pour vous demander la réparation d'un tort. On nous a chargées d'une taxe que nous vous dénonçons comme injuste. Cette taxe, en effet, a pour objet une enquête électorale. Or, ne possédant pas la franchise, nous ne pouvons être impliquées dans les pratiques légales ou illégales qui sont l'objet d'une telle enquête. »

Pour toute réponse, le secrétaire d'État attaché au département de l'intérieur exprime son regret d'un fait qui peut être considéré comme une anomalie, mais qu'il ne saurait changer, puisqu'il a une origine légale.

(1) La Société royale d'agriculture en Angleterre a refusé aux femmes qui tiennent des fermes en leur propre nom de les recevoir parmi ses titulaires. Or, de grands avantages pour la culture et la vente des produits sont attachés à la qualité de membre de ladite Société.

(2) Les grands propriétaires, en louant des terres à un fermier, comptent parmi leurs avantages l'influence qu'ils exercent sur son vote. Les femmes, étant privées du vote, se trouvent par là dans une condition d'infériorité même au point de vue du fermage.

« Ainsi, c'est au Parlement seul que revient la responsabilité d'une telle injustice ; c'est à lui de la réparer. »

Un des côtés intéressants de cette discussion, c'est la façon résolue avec laquelle un certain nombre de conservateurs importants se convertissent à la question et annoncent eux-mêmes leur conversion à la tribune.

« Je n'ai pas encore voté pour cette mesure, dit sir George Ward Hunt, parce que j'ai pour opinion qu'une réforme nouvelle ne doit jamais être accordée aisément. Il est rare aussi que des propositions venant de ce côté de la Chambre (la gauche) reçoivent mon appui, mais celle-ci l'obtiendra parce qu'elle s'impose à ma raison. Après avoir envisagé le sujet avec réflexion et calme, j'ai reconnu que le sentiment opposé au *bill* vient de vieux préjugés et n'est pas conforme à la justice. »

Et lord John Manners, répondant au député de Kilmarnock :

« Mon honorable adversaire, dit-il, semble penser que si l'on peut accorder aux femmes de voter pour les corps inférieurs, tels que les conseils municipaux, les comités d'enseignement, etc., un membre de la chambre des Communes est un être trop auguste pour qu'elles prennent part à son élection. Personne n'est plus jaloux que moi des privilèges de cette Chambre. Mais prétendre que les femmes, en tant que femmes, sont indignes d'en élire les membres, c'est, me paraît-il, s'arroger une supériorité que je crois injuste. »

« J'ai jusqu'ici voté contre ce bill, dit l'honorable J. W. Henley ; mais après avoir suivi de près les résultats de la franchise électorale accordée aux femmes dans les élections des conseils municipaux et des *school-boards*, je ne vois aucune raison pour la leur refuser dans les élections parlementaires. Leur intervention a été considérée partout comme utile et bienfaisante. On dit que les révolutionnaires français leur ont refusé la franchise, mais précisément nous ne sommes pas, nous ne voulons pas être des révolutionnaires, et je trouve ici une raison de plus pour la leur accorder. »

« Quand les femmes possèdent des propriétés personnelles,

dit encore sir George Jenkinson, elles les administrent généralement tout aussi bien et même souvent mieux que leurs voisins d'un autre sexe. Pourquoi ces propriétés ne seraient-elles pas représentées ? Les femmes ont aujourd'hui le droit de dire que les hommes monopolisent la législation, qu'elles sont soumises à des lois dont elles ne possèdent pas le contrôle ; elles en appellent à notre justice ; cet appel ne saurait rester vain dans un Parlement de la Grande-Bretagne. »

« Il y a en Europe, dit le docteur Lyon Playfair, un mouvement d'opinions qui tend à élargir le droit des femmes. Notre propre législation s'occupe continuellement de diminuer les injustices de la loi à leur égard, et nos universités elles-mêmes, sentant l'injustice de leur exclusion, accordent peu à peu les bénéfices de leurs examens à cette moitié du genre humain qu'elles en avaient exclue. Ces faits sont moins la conséquence de l'agitation provoquée par les femmes que l'éveil de la conscience publique qui s'élève à l'égalité du droit. C'est en me plaçant au point de vue de la justice que je donne au bill tout mon assentiment. »

La dernière séance du Parlement relative à ce *bill* a été celle du 30 avril 1873. Depuis cette époque, de nouvelles élections ont eu lieu et le parti conservateur est arrivé au pouvoir.

Pense-t-on que les chances de succès aient pour autant diminué ? Nullement.

Il est bien vrai que quarante à cinquante membres favorables à la cause n'ont pas été réélus, entre autres Jacob Bright, qui avait présenté le bill à la dernière session, Eastwick et Hinde Palmer, qui l'avaient soutenu. Mais en revanche, combien d'autres adhérents on a gagnés !

Le parti conservateur incline de plus en plus à adopter cette cause et il ne faut pas en être surpris. Non-seulement le point de droit ne lui est pas contraire, mais, dans le fait, le vote des femmes lui sera favorable, au moins pendant un certain temps, les élections municipales l'ont bien démontré. La première fois que les femmes ont voté dans ces élections, leur intervention a valu à ce parti plusieurs victoires dans

des bourgs où depuis longtemps il était habitué à être battu. Il est vrai que la seconde fois les victoires ont été moins nombreuses, mais c'est déjà beaucoup de gagner le présent.

Dans le nouveau Parlement, on parle de 225 membres, 133 conservateurs et 92 libéraux, qui se sont déclarés en faveur de la cause, et, tant à la chambre des Lords qu'à la chambre des Communes, 15 membres du gouvernement actuel seraient dans ce cas (1). Lord Salisbury, secrétaire d'État pour le gouvernement de l'Inde, disait en outre dernièrement que lorsque le bill passerait à la chambre des Communes, il ne rencontrerait pas d'opposition à la Chambre des Lords.

C'est M. Forsyth, député conservateur, avocat de la reine, qui a présenté le *bill* à la chambre des Communes le 22 mars dernier (2), et la seconde lecture est fixée au 23 juin prochain (3).

Ou ne sait pas encore si M. Disraeli l'appuiera comme chef du gouvernement, et ce n'est guère probable, au début surtout de la législature. Mais, dans tous les cas, le passé

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(1) Parmi ces derniers, on cite : sir Stafford Northcote, chancelier de l'échiquier ; l'honorable Ward Hunt, premier lord de l'amirauté (ministre de la marine) ; lord John Manners, chef de l'administration des postes ; M. Gordon, lord avocat d'Ecosse ; le colonel Taylor, chancelier du duché de Lancastre ; sir Selwyn Ibbetson, sous-secrétaire du ministre de l'intérieur ; sir C. Adderley, président des chambres de commerce ; sir Massey Lopes, etc.

(2) La question parlementaire se présente en ce moment d'une manière assez complexe, et voici comment :

Lorsqu'on a accordé aux femmes le vote pour les élections municipales, on demandait en même temps de l'étendre à une nouvelle catégorie d'électeurs hommes. Les deux bills ont été joints et ont passé ensemble. Pour le vote parlementaire, on comptait sur une situation analogue. On demande en ce moment d'étendre aux fermiers des campagnes les bénéfices de la dernière réforme électorale applicables seulement aux bourgs ou villes. On pensait donc unir les deux bills comme dans le premier cas et les faire passer ensemble. Mais il se trouve que les deux bills ne sont pas inscrits pour la même époque. Celui qui a trait aux fermiers vient en mai, et on cherche le moyen de se joindre.

(3) Tout bill sérieusement appuyé passe sans discussion à la première lecture.

l'engage ; il votera *pour*, et son influence personnelle est considérable. Déjà les enthousiastes parlent du succès pour cette année. Les politiques plus calmes le renvoient à la fin de la législature et il nous paraît que ces derniers voient juste. Il n'est pas probable que le *bill* passe cette année, car, en dehors de toute autre considération, le nombre d'électeurs à inscrire nécessiterait une nouvelle dissolution de la Chambre, et nul ne la désire. Mais à la fin de la législature, cet inconvénient cessera, et le cabinet actuel aura un double intérêt à appuyer le *bill*. D'une part, il se rendra populaire en adoptant une loi proposée et défendue par les radicaux ; de l'autre, il tirera de cette loi même un profit direct, un accroissement de puissance. A une époque où les élections sont si vivement disputées, il peut lui devoir une victoire nouvelle et son maintien au pouvoir.

Qu'on ne croie pas, d'ailleurs, qu'une telle perspective puisse effrayer ou décourager les libéraux. Dans un pays vraiment politique comme l'Angleterre, tout parti de gouvernement sait qu'il est bon, à certaines heures, d'être écarté du pouvoir. C'est dans l'opposition qu'on se retrempe, qu'on étudie, qu'on se prépare, et les périodes de repos sont les plus fécondes. Ceux qui ont foi dans leurs principes, d'ailleurs, sont capables de désintéressement. Si le droit politique des femmes triomphait au moyen des conservateurs, les libéraux triompheraient moralement deux fois, et dans la conversion de leurs adversaires, et dans la cause de l'égalité et de la justice, qui restera toujours la leur.

### III

Lorsqu'une question arrive devant le parlement, en Angleterre, avec une certaine autorité, on peut être sûr qu'elle y a été portée par l'opinion publique, l'action des Chambres n'y étant jamais que l'expression de la volonté du pays.

Suivons, en effet, en dehors du parlement, la marche de la question qui nous occupe, et nous verrons avec quelle rapidité surprenante elle se répand dans la nation et y

prend racine. Son prompt succès peut être, selon nous, attribué à deux causes principales :

La première vient de ce qu'elle n'a jamais été posée devant le public d'une manière qui pût porter atteinte à la religion et aux mœurs ;

La seconde tient à l'existence d'une classe très-nombreuse de femmes non mariées, et directement intéressées à la défendre.

En effet, tandis que, sur le continent, cette question est compromise par des écoles socialistes opposées au christianisme et à la monogamie, en Angleterre elle conserve un caractère exclusivement civil et politique. Ses défenseurs s'attachent avec prudence à des points de droit positif et la préservent ainsi de toute interprétation fâcheuse (1). Ils s'appliquent également, en religion, à la tenir en dehors du dogmatisme et la rattachent au progrès vers la liberté et la justice qui, selon l'expression de Stuart Mill, « naît de l'esprit chrétien (2) ».

Grâce à cette sagesse de conduite, non-seulement on évite bien des objections, mais on se concilie le bon vouloir et même le concours de ceux que, dans d'autres pays, on a eu pour adversaires : les chrétiens croyants.

Il faut remarquer qu'en Angleterre la Réforme a produit un fruit d'émancipation morale qui place les partis religieux dans une situation tout à fait particulière.

Les Églises dissidentes, ou séparées de l'État, représentent une véritable démocratie chrétienne à côté de l'Église anglicane très-aristocratique, et elles s'organisent partout elles-mêmes de la façon la plus libre. Le suffrage universel y est rigoureusement pratiqué pour la nomination des chefs, et il s'étend aux deux sexes. Les quakers même vont plus loin : ils appellent les femmes à toutes les fonctions de l'apostolat.

Dans un pareil milieu, les adhérents de la nouvelle cause

(1) Ils refusent même de se joindre à ceux qui demandent une réforme dans la loi du divorce, loi dont les conditions sont en Angleterre très-inégaies pour les deux sexes, et très-défavorables aux femmes.

(2) *De l'assujettissement des femmes*, par M. Stuart Mill.

devaient être nombreux ; ils le furent en effet : ils accoururent de toutes parts.

La seconde raison de succès n'a pas été moins puissante que la première.

Par le fait de la colonisation le nombre des femmes, en Angleterre, excède celui des hommes d'un million environ. Le mariage ne saurait donc y être comme ailleurs, comme en France par exemple, la loi commune ; et, en effet, on n'y compte pas moins de deux à trois millions de femmes non mariées ou veuves. Cette population féminine, vivant d'une manière indépendante, soit par la fortune, soit par le travail, représente dans le pays des droits et des intérêts considérables, et la situation même qu'elle occupe exerce une grande influence sur l'éducation et les habitudes du sexe entier.

Dans toutes les classes sociales, dans les plus fortunées et les plus hautes, comme dans les plus humbles, les jeunes filles, n'étant jamais assurées d'avance de se marier à un certain âge, sentent la nécessité de se créer des ressources personnelles d'existence. Au lieu de croire leur éducation terminée à l'âge classique de dix-huit ans et d'attendre, en allant au bal, l'heureux mortel qui deviendra leur époux, elles travaillent à acquérir une instruction solide et s'adonnent à des occupations sérieuses. Elles s'intéressent aux questions générales et à toutes les affaires du pays ; elles entrent dans des associations, elles voyagent, elles écrivent ; enfin, elles s'habituent à penser, à agir, à être quelque chose par elles-mêmes.

Il faut remarquer, d'ailleurs, la grande supériorité de l'éducation protestante sur l'éducation catholique pour le développement du caractère. Dans les groupes les plus religieux, l'usage de lire et d'analyser la Bible, d'y puiser une foi personnelle ou un doute motivé, au lieu de croire et de nier d'après l'opinion des autres, donne de bonne heure des habitudes de réflexion et d'indépendance. La conscience a besoin d'exercice comme toutes les autres facultés, et il n'est pas de meilleure culture que ce retour sur soi, cette interrogation intime qui la met incessamment en action. Des femmes formées à un tel régime, se mariant tard ou

ne se mariant pas du tout, acquièrent des qualités exceptionnelles : les connaissances positives, l'usage de l'observation et du raisonnement, une volonté ferme et suivie, l'indépendance tempérée par l'esprit de conduite, et souvent une originalité vraie.

Mais dans un état social où les femmes n'exercent à peu près aucune fonction active, de telles facultés, en dehors du mariage, n'ont pas d'objet direct et sont un fardeau pour celles qui les possèdent.

Les femmes pauvres, livrées à une existence difficile et précaire, encombrant les rares carrières qui leur sont réservées. Les femmes riches souffrent de leur inaction et de leur impuissance. Toutes ont le sentiment d'une vie incomplète.

Une réforme qui avait précisément pour objet de combler ces lacunes, d'ouvrir devant les femmes non mariées des voies d'activité nouvelles, devait trouver parmi elles ses adhérents les plus ardents, ses défenseurs les plus résolus, ses soldats, ses apôtres. Si des hommes populaires comme Stuart Mill ont beaucoup fait en posant publiquement la question, en la couvrant du crédit de leur nom et de leur personne, c'est à la coopération zélée et persévérante, à l'infatigable activité des femmes qu'on a dû de la voir pénétrer partout, dans les campagnes, les fermes, les villages, comme dans les grandes villes, dans les lieux les plus retirés et les plus paisibles, au sein des familles, au cœur de la nation elle-même.

Des femmes en effet, et des femmes appartenant aux conditions les plus diverses, pouvaient seules, par l'intimité et la multiplicité des rapports sociaux, frapper à toutes les portes, s'adresser à tous les cœurs, intéresser tous les esprits, émouvoir toutes les consciences. Seules, elles pouvaient ébranler l'opinion, soulever cet étau de fer des convenances qui pèse si lourdement sur les mœurs anglaises, et grâce auquel nous rencontrons à chaque pas, dans ce curieux pays, le contraste de la convention la plus roide, la plus formaliste, avec la liberté la plus large, l'originalité la plus vraie.

Or, telle a été l'œuvre des femmes.

Dans toutes les situations, dans tous les rangs, elles ont pris part à l'action sans craindre de se compromettre, et les



sympathies que la cause a rencontrées dans les hautes classes ont beaucoup contribué à lui valoir les faveurs populaires. On cite, parmi les femmes qui l'ont soutenue avec le plus de dévouement : la vicomtesse Amberley, fille de lord Stanley et femme du fils aîné de lord John Russell; sa sœur, mistress Drummond; lady Anna Gore Langton, sœur du duc de Buckingham; lady Bowring; lady Kane; la comtesse de Mar; la comtesse de Mount Cashel; lady Jane Moore; lady douairière Emerson, Tennent; lady Wield, de Dublin; mistress Stuart Mill et sa fille, miss Taylor; mistress Fawcett, femme du député de ce nom; ses sœurs, mistress Carrett et mistress Anderson, cette dernière docteur-médecin de l'Université de Londres et de la Faculté de Paris; miss Hariett MacGincau, miss Franco Power Cobbe, mistress Bodichon, bien connues par leurs écrits; miss Florence Nightingale, non moins connue dans la guerre de Crimée; mistress Mac Laren, d'Édimbourg; mistress Dale et miss Sturge, de Birmingham; les miss Ashworth, riches propriétaires de Bath, nièces de M. Bright; mistress Jacob Bright, miss Becker, de Manchester; miss Finch, de Liverpool; miss Caroline Biggs; mistress John Hullah; miss Kirkpatrick; miss Beedy; miss Downing; mistress Mark Pattison, et bien d'autres que nous pourrions nommer, toutes appartenant aux premières familles de la noblesse et de la bourgeoisie.

La propagande prend toutes sortes de formes, emploie toutes sortes de moyens. On se groupe, on forme des sociétés libres, on lève des souscriptions, on écrit dans les journaux, on parle dans les *meetings*. Les dames de la noblesse vont parmi les paysans de leurs terres; elles réunissent les femmes, leur expliquent les injustices du code à l'égard de leur sexe, les réformes qui doivent les réparer, et elles leur font signer des pétitions au parlement auxquelles les maris et les pères ne craignent pas d'ajouter leurs noms. La même propagande se fait dans les villes parmi les ouvrières, et avec un succès non moins grand. Les femmes pauvres accourent partout avec empressement, écoutant comme une révélation la parole qui leur fait espérer un meilleur sort. C'est déjà pour elles un soulagement de songer qu'on s'occupe de leurs maux. Ces pro-

messes, d'ailleurs, n'ont rien d'illusoire. Si on demande le suffrage pour certaines femmes se trouvant dans la situation privilégiée d'électeurs, ce n'est pas seulement pour leur rendre l'exercice d'un droit dont elles sont injustement déstituées; on a en vue un objet positif. Les femmes en possession du vote feront usage de leur nouveau pouvoir pour obtenir des lois plus justes et plus égales touchant le sexe entier. La cause est donc véritablement d'intérêt général, et la solidarité relie entre elles toutes les femmes.

Les hommes les plus dévoués à cette cause appartiennent, comme les femmes, à tous les rangs de la société. En dehors des personnages politiques, ce sont pour la plupart des hommes éclairés, des pasteurs, des professeurs, des savants, des industriels, quelques officiers de l'armée, quelques dignitaires de l'Église, et beaucoup de membres de la noblesse. Parmi ces derniers, on aime à citer le fils du duc d'Argyll, le marquis de Lorne, époux de la princesse Louise, troisième fille de la reine Victoria. Se présentant comme candidat aux élections dans la petite ville de Dunoon en 1868, le marquis de Lorne déclara publiquement qu'il voterait en faveur du bill. L'influence de la princesse Louise n'a pas été, dit-on encore, étrangère à cet engagement. On cite également le vicomte Amberly, fils aîné de lord John Russell; lord Haughton, lord John Manners, le colonel Taylor, sir C. Adderly, sir Selwyn Ibbetson, sir Robert Kane, le lord évêque d'Exeter, le diacre de Waterford, le docteur Davidson, le révérend Dale, le célèbre professeur Maurice, le docteur Lyon Playfair, le professeur Newman, le philosophe Herbert Spencer, sir George Jenkinson, M. Muntz, le révérend Canon Kingsley, l'avocat général Coleridge, sir Wilfrid Lawson, M. Peter Rylands, l'honorable J. Henley, etc., etc.

Un des grands moyens de propagande, ce sont les *meetings*. Nous n'avons aucune idée, en France, de ce que sont de ces réunions et de l'influence qu'elles exercent sur la vie publique. Quand une question politique se présente, quelle qu'en soit la nature, le *meeting* est le premier procédé dont on se serve pour la répandre. Ainsi avons-nous vu, pour la cause des femmes, non-seulement les grandes villes populaires, Londres, Édimbourg, Manchester, Birmingham, réunir des

*meetings* importants, — mais des villes même de second ordre, de petites localités, presque des villages (1). En 1870, on en compte déjà quarante-trois dans le Royaume-Uni; en 1871, on en compte cent trente-six; en 1872, plus de deux cents.

Rien n'est intéressant pour un étranger suffisamment habitué à la langue et aux usages du pays comme ces réunions, qui ont un caractère si complètement national.

Qu'on se représente une vaste salle contenant souvent plusieurs milliers de spectateurs, avec une estrade, un parterre, et, pour les plus grandes, un amphithéâtre et des tribunes. La salle, ouverte au public payant et non payant, se remplit rapidement. A l'heure désignée, les orateurs arrivent, hommes et femmes; ils se groupent sur l'estrade autour du président, qui leur donne la parole successivement. Tout se passe avec un grand ordre et généralement beaucoup d'entrain et de gaieté. On parle du flegme anglo-saxon, mais aucun public n'est plus enthousiaste et à l'occasion plus bruyant. Il applaudit avec vigueur les passages qui lui plaisent et il siffle, il *hue* (il grogne) non moins ardemment les choses qui soulèvent son indignation.

Les discours qu'on entend dans les *meetings* anglais n'ont pas le caractère général et vague que nos orateurs considèrent comme le plus favorable à l'éloquence. Ils sont, au contraire, pleins de faits, pleins d'allusions aux personnages politiques, aux événements du jour, aux usages locaux. L'Anglais mélancolique aime à rire et il rit très-franchement.

J'ai fréquemment assisté à des *meetings*, et j'ai été frappée du respect et de la courtoisie qu'on montre aux femmes orateurs, et même de la faveur avec laquelle le public les ac-

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(1) Ces réunions, qui nous paraissent toujours un peu, en France, une sorte d'événement, se font en Angleterre de la manière la plus simple. Une personne se rend dans une ville et demande au maire une salle de la municipalité pour réunir le *meeting*. Si elle est accompagnée d'un habitant de la ville, elle l'obtient de droit. Sinon, le maire peut refuser. Dans ce cas, elle doit louer une salle. Elle fait ensuite poser des affiches sans avoir besoin d'aucune autorisation, et, au jour et à l'heure annoncés, pour peu que l'objet du *meeting* intéresse le public, la salle est pleine.

cueille. Elles sont parfois jeunes et belles, bien qu'exceptionnellement; mais il semble que nul ne doive y songer. La simplicité de leur costume, la dignité de leur attitude et de leur manière, le sérieux de leur parole s'imposent aux auditeurs. La langue anglaise est certainement pour l'orateur bien plus facile à manier que la nôtre; elle offre plus de ressources dans les expressions, plus de liberté dans les tours de phrase. Mais il faut néanmoins que les femmes aient une certaine disposition à l'éloquence pour être parvenues à aborder la tribune aussi aisément, et pour s'y maintenir avec tant de mesure et de convenance. Leur parole n'a pas les caractères habituels de l'inexpérience; elle n'est ni prolixe, ni confuse, ni embarrassée; elle ne trahit aucun lyrisme hors de propos, aucune exagération, aucun sentiment irrité ou amer.

Il y aurait tout une étude à faire sur les femmes orateurs en Angleterre, étude pleine d'intérêt. Mistress Fawcett, par exemple, est un véritable économiste de l'école de Stuart Mill. J'ai entendu un de ses discours sur le travail des femmes et son influence dans la production et la circulation des richesses: on ne saurait imaginer un esprit plus méthodique et plus ferme, une parole plus nette, plus claire, des expressions mieux appropriées, et une connaissance plus approfondie du sujet. Lady Amberley se fait remarquer par sa facilité et son élégance. L'éloquence de lady Anna-Gore Langton procède davantage de l'imagination et du cœur; elle a une teinte marquée d'enthousiasme. Miss Beedy et miss Sturge abondent en traits d'esprit, etc.

Parfois des scènes comiques se mêlent à la propagande la plus sérieuse.

« Je viens d'aller, m'écrivait il y a quelques mois une de ces dames, dans la ville de \*\*\* pour organiser un *meeting*. Je me suis adressée au maire afin d'avoir une salle de la municipalité. Mais quand il a su quelle cause nous voulions défendre, il s'est emporté et m'a dit que je devais retourner dans ma maison pour chercher un mari et mettre des enfants au monde. »

Dans la dernière élection partielle de Taunton, le candidat, s'étant déclaré contre les femmes, voit toutes les forces du parti s'élever contre lui et l'atteindre dans son intimité la

plus proche. La colère le gagne. « Vous employez contre moi des armes déloyales, dit-il à ses adversaires. Vous apportez la guerre dans la famille en soutenant les femmes contre les maris ; vous êtes des *faillis sociaux* » (*social failures*)— faisant allusion à leur situation de femmes non mariées. Et en même temps il ajoute, trait caractéristique de l'esprit anglais : « Je suis contre ce prétendu droit, mais si la moitié plus une des femmes de mon district signe une pétition pour l'obtenir, je voterai pour le bill (1). »

Une autre fois, Miss A\*\*\*, âgée de vingt-trois ans, fort belle personne, orpheline et maîtresse d'une fortune territoriale considérable, va rendre visite au représentant de son comté. Celui-ci est un membre du parti tory, vieillard respectable et plein de courtoisie, mais très-imbu des vieilles coutumes, et qui n'a pu encore prendre tout à fait au sérieux les nouvelles prétentions des femmes. Quand on lui annonce le nom bien connu de Miss A\*\*\*, il s'empresse d'aller la recevoir, ignorant l'objet de sa visite.

« Monsieur, lui dit la jeune fille avec douceur, vous savez que ma famille possède depuis longtemps de grandes propriétés territoriales dans votre district. Ces terres aujourd'hui m'appartiennent en propre : or, le principe de notre constitution étant que toutes les terres doivent être représentées, je viens vous demander, à vous légiste, et notre mandataire devant la Chambre, si justement et légalement je ne devrais pas posséder le vote représentatif de mes terres aussi longtemps que je serai une *feme sole*. »

Le grave député est pris au dépourvu. Il n'a rien à opposer à un tel argument, et après un instant de silence, s'inclinant devant sa belle interlocutrice, il répond : « Je pense que votre droit est incontestable, et je me sens tenu de le reconnaître. » A dater de ce jour, il a voté avec M. Disraeli.

La presse est un moyen de propagande non moins répandu et non moins efficace que les *meetings*. Quelques Revues se

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(1) C'est là, il faut en convenir, une manière d'entendre le mandat impératif dont nous sommes assez loin.

sont attachées dès le début à la cause, et le nombre s'en est accru. Nous remarquons, entre autres, la *Revue de Westminster*, longtemps dirigée par les disciples de Bentham, à la tête desquels était le père de M. Stuart Mill, puis par M. Stuart Mill lui-même, qui en est resté le collaborateur actif alors même qu'il ne la dirigeait plus. Nous remarquons aussi l'*Examiner*, le *Macmillan's Magazine*, la *Fornightly review*, etc.

Tantôt, le révérend Canon Kingsley, si populaire par ses écrits, réclame pour les femmes le vote comme le droit commun du pays ; c'est au nom des principes constitutionnels qu'il en appelle à la justice de l'esprit anglais. Tantôt le célèbre docteur Maurice demande leur admission à la franchise comme un moyen d'accroître la vie morale de la nation. « En les excluant de la politique, dit-il, nous faisons des femmes des politiques de la pire espèce ; nous justifions leurs choix dictés par le caprice et tous les abus de l'intrigue qu'elles emploient trop souvent. En les admettant à l'exercice régulier du droit de suffrage, le législateur élèvera graduellement le niveau du pays en élevant celles qui souvent, à leurs propres dépens, gouvernent leurs maîtres (1). »

D'autre part, nombre de Revues et de journaux non moins importants combattent le droit des femmes au nom de l'inégalité et du privilège. Ce sont d'abord les éternelles et superficielles railleries qu'on retrouve sur ce sujet dans tous les pays, les caricatures, les charges, puis les critiques passionnées, les attaques violentes. Plus la question gagne de terrain, plus les adversaires s'animent. Mais la lutte même contribue à son succès et lui gagne chaque jour de nouveaux défenseurs.

Selon les habitudes anglaises, la propagande se constitue d'abord dans les localités. Dans toute ville de quelque importance, on fonde des associations en faveur de la nouvelle cause. Ces associations se composent de membres souscripteurs, puis d'un comité d'initiative et d'action. Mais à mesure que les associations se multiplient, elles sentent le besoin de se réunir et de combiner leurs efforts.

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(1) *Macmillan's Magazine*, 1869. — *Spectator* du 5 mars 1870.

En 1871, elles s'entendent pour organiser à Londres un comité représentatif général, où chaque société particulière envoie un délégué. Ce comité a son siège dans la partie la plus centrale de Londres (1). Durant la dernière session, il était composé de quatre-vingts personnes des deux sexes; on y comptait environ quarante membres du parlement.

Ce comité a pour organe la *Revue de la femme anglaise* (*the English woman's Review*) publiée par miss Caroline Biggs, de Londres, et le journal du *Suffrage des femmes* (*Women's Suffrage Journal*) publié par miss Becker, de Manchester. La première de ces Revues remonte à 1856 (2); la seconde date de l'année 1870. Toutes deux sont pleines de renseignements très-complets et très-intéressants et d'articles de fond très-solides. Nous y renvoyons le lecteur pour une étude plus complète de la question.

#### IV

Cette intervention si nouvelle des femmes dans la vie publique en Angleterre a nécessairement apporté un certain trouble dans les vieilles mœurs et les vieilles habitudes du pays.

On parle, il est vrai, bien haut de traditions et de droit féodal; on s'attache à montrer comment les faits d'aujourd'hui se lient aux faits d'hier dans la chaîne respectée du temps. La tradition toutefois n'existe-t-elle pas bien plus dans la lettre que dans l'esprit de la réforme? Il est bien vrai qu'un des principes les plus anciens de la constitution anglaise, c'est la représentation de la propriété, principe qui persistait sous un

(1) 9, Berners street, Oxford street.

(2) Cette Revue a paru d'abord sous le titre de *Journal de la femme anglaise* (*English woman's journal*). Après une interruption de deux ans, de 1865 à 1867, elle a reparu à nouveau sous son titre actuel (22, Berner's street). C'est à miss Biggs que nous devons la plus grande partie des renseignements et documents qui nous ont servi pour cette étude. Nous saisissons ici l'occasion de l'en remercier.

autre régime, alors même que le propriétaire titulaire se trouvait être une femme. Mais en réalité, ce principe tout politique avait bien moins pour objet le droit de l'individu que l'intérêt de la propriété. Que, dans des temps aristocratiques, des dames de manoir, des abbesses de couvent aient exercé pour leur fief le droit de représentation, c'étaient des cas fort rares, limités à une classe privilégiée et perdus dans l'ensemble d'une civilisation très-dure à l'égard des femmes. La législation anglaise a toujours courbé l'épouse sous le joug de l'époux de la façon la plus tyrannique et, en s'en tenant à la lettre de la loi, M. Mill a pu dire qu'en Angleterre la femme est l'esclave de son mari, autant que, dans l'antiquité, les esclaves l'étaient de leurs maîtres (1).

Les mœurs, il est vrai, adoucissent dans une très-grande mesure la barbarie de la loi; elles en reconnaissent néanmoins le principe. Nulle part la distinction morale entre les sexes n'est plus tranchée et plus profonde, leurs fonctions respectives plus séparées. Ce qui a été le salut de la femme, en Angleterre, ce n'est ni la loi, ni l'opinion, c'est un sentiment profond et caractéristique de la race: le respect. L'Anglais peut considérer la femme comme passive de nature et faite pour la soumission; néanmoins il attache à son rôle une grande idée morale et croirait s'abaisser lui-même en la traitant comme un jouet. Nulle part il n'y a moins d'égalité dans le mariage, et nulle part il n'y a plus de respect. Or, le respect donne à la famille anglaise un grand caractère de noblesse et d'austérité. Le pouvoir y est fort, mais il reste digne; il est large, bienveillant et véritablement protecteur (2). Si l'époux tient à son droit, il ne faillit pas devant son devoir; il ne recule devant aucune responsabilité, aucune charge. Sans

(1) Selon la loi anglaise, la personne de la femme disparaît entièrement dans le mariage sous la puissance du mari. Elle ne jouit d'aucune propriété personnelle; elle n'a aucun pouvoir sur ses enfants, elle ne peut pas tester sans le consentement de son mari.

(2) Il y a certainement, en Angleterre comme partout ailleurs, de grands abus du pouvoir marital. Nous voulons seulement mettre ici en relief l'esprit de l'institution.

doute il est un maître dans la plus large acception du mot. C'est lui qui possède les biens et en dispose d'une façon souveraine. Le nom, la fortune, le foyer, les enfants même lui appartiennent (1). Sa femme est dans sa main; c'est un être faible, délicat, souvent maladif, incapable de supporter de lourdes fatigues et de grands soucis, peu accessible aux choses de la raison, très-dominée par le sentiment; — mais enfin c'est son épouse devant Dieu, douée comme lui d'une âme immortelle. C'est la mère de ses enfants, le complément nécessaire de son existence. Il doit la soutenir, la guider dans la vie, lui faire une existence douce, facile et honorée, lui donner un foyer, l'entourer de soins et de comforts. Elle lui rendra en échange la soumission, la tendresse, la douceur, la fidélité, le dévouement.

Ainsi, les rôles sont bien tranchés : l'homme, occupé au dehors, gouverne ses affaires et celles de son pays ; la femme, retirée dans son intérieur, obscure, dépendante, exclusivement adonnée à la surveillance de la maison et aux soins des enfants, ignore volontairement tout ce qui dépasse cette sphère (2), et elle met sa gloire et son bonheur à l'ignorer.

Tel est l'idéal qui, pendant longtemps, a été celui de la famille anglaise.

Qu'on lise les historiens, les romanciers, les poètes, qu'on pénètre dans les rapports de la vie intime, on en trouvera partout la trace. Or, cet idéal est menacé de disparaître pour faire place à une nouvelle conception du rôle de la femme dans le monde, et chaque jour la transformation se détermine avec plus de force. Quand on se rappelle, en effet, l'épouse des anciens jours, timide, voilée, silencieuse et ignorante de tout, et qu'on voit la même femme se livrer aujourd'hui aux plus hautes études, frapper à la porte des

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(1) D'après la loi anglaise, un mari peut même par testament disposer de la tutelle de ses enfants et les enlever à leur mère, qui n'a sur eux aucun droit personnel.

(2) Nous ne parlons pas ici des cas exceptionnels, des femmes lettrées et érudités, très-nombreuses en Angleterre. Nous déterminons le caractère de la règle commune.

universités, concourir avec les étudiants, souvent les dépasser dans le concours; quand on l'entend réclamer l'entrée de toutes les carrières, l'usage de toutes les professions, l'exercice de tous les droits; bien mieux, quand on la voit déjà à l'œuvre, voter pour les conseils municipaux, se présenter comme candidat, puis siéger dans les *school-boards*, organiser des *meetings*, paraître sur l'estrade à côté des membres du Parlement et prononcer des discours applaudis souvent par plusieurs milliers de personnes, comment ne pas sentir qu'un souffle nouveau a passé sur le pays, qu'il y soulève d'autres pensées, d'autres sentiments, d'autres vouloirs, qu'il y prépare d'autres mœurs? Comment s'étonner que les véritables dévots de la tradition lèvent avec effroi les bras au ciel? Bien des familles en effet sont divisées, chacun prenant parti pour ou contre la nouvelle doctrine. Ici, ce sont les demoiselles qui s'opposent aux femmes mariées; là, les hommes se montrent plus libéraux que les femmes, et les pères que les enfants. On trouve de grands enthousiasmes, des ardeurs juvéniles, et, tout à côté, des désespoirs qui frisent le comique. Les matrones surtout rappellent leur jeunesse en secouant la tête; elles ne reconnaissent plus la nouvelle génération. « Puissé-je mourir assez tôt pour ne pas être témoin de ce qui se prépare », entendais-je dire un jour à une demoiselle respectable menacée de devenir électeur.

Si encore on était sûr que la réforme se bornât à ce qu'on demande aujourd'hui, le vote des femmes contributives, la transaction serait possible. Mais il n'y a pas moyen de se faire illusion. Tout en limitant strictement et prudemment la réclamation officielle, le parti ne dissimule guère ni ce qu'il pense ni ce à quoi il est résolu. Quand les femmes non mariées auront obtenu le vote, elles pèseront sur les élections de manière à modifier la loi civile du mariage; elles demanderont, par exemple, que l'épouse conserve la possession personnelle de ses biens. Si l'épouse reste propriétaire titulaire, pourquoi alors ne voterait-elle pas comme la femme non mariée? On trouverait encore dans la tradition des exemples. Puis on restreindra le pouvoir marital, on reconnaîtra l'autorité de la mère, on établira l'égalité dans la loi du divorce, on ouvrira aux femmes toutes les carrières, on

les déclarera aptes à tous les emplois. Que restera-t-il alors de la vieille Angleterre ?

Le *kant* (1) est tout puissant dans ce pays, et pendant longtemps il a été de mauvais goût pour les femmes de réclamer l'exercice de leurs droits. Aujourd'hui que des personnalités aristocratiques, des membres même de la famille royale se sont prononcés en faveur de cette cause, il est moins inconvenant de la défendre ; pourtant elle garde encore quelque chose qui répugne aux esprits délicats. Des êtres vraiment raffinés et élégants ne peuvent guère se dispenser d'un dédaigneux sourire quand on leur parle d'arracher la femme au divin piédestal où l'a enveloppée, pendant des siècles, l'encens de la poésie ! Mais, hélas ! combien cette thèse est difficile à soutenir devant les vulgaires besoins de l'existence quotidienne, le terre-à-terre d'une impitoyable nécessité ! « Je me soucie fort peu de droits politiques, écrivait dernièrement une femme pauvre à un député qui avait fait contre la cause un discours plein de fleurs littéraires ; soyez donc assez bon pour me dire comment je pourrais gagner mon pain sans descendre de l'empyrée. » — « Je n'ai pas encore réfléchi à cette question, » répondit naïvement le député.

Une chose curieuse pour l'observateur, c'est le sentiment assez différent qu'apportent les deux sexes à la défense de la même cause.

Il y a une douzaine d'années, je me trouvais en Angleterre dans une famille amie, un modèle d'union domestique. Le mari, très-engagé dans les affaires publiques, jouait dans sa ville, une grande ville manufacturière de la province, un rôle politique important. Sa femme, distinguée en même temps par le cœur et l'esprit, prenait une part plus active à sa vie que la plupart des femmes anglaises. Tous deux s'étaient mariés par amour, quelques années auparavant, et l'amour n'avait pas déserté leur foyer.

Un soir, comme nous étions réunis dans l'intimité, la conversation tomba sur la question de l'affranchissement poli-

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(1) Le *kant* pourrait se traduire par la *mode*, en y joignant une idée d'austérité et de convenance que n'exprime pas le mot français.

tique et social des femmes, question qui commençait seulement à préoccuper le public.

« Je n'ai jamais compris, dis-je à M. X\*\*\*, comment, en se plaçant à un point de vue purement philosophique, en partant de l'égalité humaine, on arrive à conclure qu'il est juste qu'un sexe exerce sur l'autre un pouvoir légal. »

M. X\*\*\* parut surpris d'un tel doute, puis il me répondit longuement. Il invoqua la loi de nature, qui avait établi entre les sexes des différences profondes correspondant précisément à la mission du commandement et au devoir de la soumission, et il finit par me citer, comme sanction de ses paroles, le bonheur et l'union qui règnent dans une famille anglaise soumise à ces lois. Sa femme l'avait écouté avec attention, les yeux fixés sur le foyer, et comme il se tournait vers elle, faisant un muet appel à son témoignage, elle releva tout d'un coup la tête et, le regardant avec un indéfinissable mélange de tendresse et de mutinerie : « Mon cher Robert, lui dit-elle, je n'ai jamais cru un mot de tout cela. Je pense sur ce sujet absolument comme notre amie. »

Rien ne peut rendre l'expression de surprise qui apparut alors sur la loyale figure de M. X\*\*\*. Depuis dix ans, il était le plus heureux des époux et des pères, mais il croyait son bonheur fondé sur tout un système de discipline familiale d'origine divine.... Et voilà que sa femme elle-même, cette tendre et charmante épouse, cette mère pieuse et dévouée qui lui a fait un si doux et si honorable foyer, renverse en riant la base de l'autorité même, a-t-il bien entendu ? M. X\*\*\* regarde encore sa femme, qui est toujours là devant lui et qui le regarde aussi avec la même tendresse, mais sans démentir une seule syllabe. Quelle étrange anomalie, et quel écroulement !

Bien des pères et bien des maris en Angleterre ont ressenti ce que M. X\*\*\* a éprouvé à cette heure : une profonde surprise. Que manque-t-il donc, se sont-ils dit, à nos épouses et à nos filles ? Aucun respect, aucune joie, aucun bien-être leur fait-il défaut dans ces demeures commodes et luxueuses où nous avons tout créé pour leurs convenances ? Est-il pour elles un meilleur sort que celui de vivre sous nos lois ?

Je revis M. X\*\*\* quelques années après. Il était devenu un

chaleureux partisan de la cause des femmes; je le complimentai sur son changement.

« Je ne suis pas aussi changé que vous le pensez, me répondit-il en souriant. — Comment cela? repris-je étonnée à mon tour. — Les femmes réclament la liberté et l'égalité comme nous les avons réclamées dans d'autres temps. Chacun est juge pour soi, et nous n'avons pas le droit de leur refuser ce que nous avons trouvé bon pour nous-mêmes; — mais les choses n'allaient pas si mal auparavant. »

La clairvoyance est rarement le don de ceux qui gouvernent. On ne se garde guère d'une certaine fatuité naïve dans la contemplation de son propre pouvoir; il est si doux de se persuader, quand on commande, que les autres sont heureux d'obéir!

C'est dans la différence de leurs situations respectives que réside la différence du sentiment apporté par les deux sexes à la défense de la même cause.

Tandis que les femmes l'ont embrassée avec ardeur et éprouvent une grande fierté à l'idée du succès, les hommes, tout en étant aussi résolus, sont moins enthousiastes. En dehors des philosophes attachés à la réalisation d'une théorie, la plupart agissent bien plus par esprit de justice que par une sympathique conviction. Mais nous admirons alors d'autant plus le triomphe de cet esprit libéral qui les élève au-dessus de leurs propres instincts, de leurs préjugés les plus chers. « Chacun est souverain dans sa propre conscience et nous devons respecter le droit chez les autres, alors même que nous n'approuvons pas tout l'usage qu'ils en font. » L'Anglo-Saxon ne se contente pas de répéter cette maxime, il la met en œuvre. Les hommes accorderont donc aux femmes le droit de vote, tout en gardant au fond du cœur plus d'une réticence. L'avenir leur paraît obscur et ils répètent volontiers en secouant la tête: « Les choses n'allaient pas si mal auparavant ». Ce sera aux femmes à leur démontrer que les choses peuvent aller beaucoup mieux après.

V

Après avoir exposé l'historique de la question du droit des femmes en Angleterre, après en avoir montré dans le passé les développements, dans l'avenir les chances de succès, il nous reste à la juger en elle-même, et indépendamment des circonstances où elle s'est manifestée.

Sur le terrain philosophique, nous nous rattachons entièrement au principe de liberté et d'égalité invoqué par M. Mill, et nous ne voyons pas, si l'on accepte son point de départ, qu'on puisse rien opposer de sérieux à son argumentation.

Dans une société laïque et libre, fondée sur le droit individuel et l'égalité des individus, au nom de quelle justice peut-on destituer de leurs droits certains membres de la communauté sans qu'ils aient démérité par leur conduite? Et comment des catégories légales fondées sur le sexe auraient-elles plus de raison d'être que des catégories fondées sur la couleur de la peau ou sur la forme de la tête?

Si, abandonnant le principe, on invoque ici des raisons d'utilité et de convenance, nous répondrons encore avec M. Mill que des raisons d'utilité et de convenance ne sauraient prévaloir contre le droit. Toutes ces raisons d'ailleurs, sans en excepter aucune, ont été invoquées avec la même force en faveur de l'esclavage et du servage, qu'on a détruits néanmoins et qu'on ne voudrait sans doute pas rétablir. Nous ferons remarquer ensuite que l'expérience seule permet de reconnaître l'utilité. Or, l'expérience sur ce sujet n'a jamais été faite. On ne saurait comparer un état social où la femme jouit de la liberté et de l'égalité à un état où elle n'en jouit pas, car jamais le premier n'a existé. Nous concluons donc, avec le même auteur, que la seule raison de la subordination de la femme en tant que femme est, d'une part, sa faiblesse physique dans un temps où la force est la seule loi sociale, de l'autre, l'instinct de despotisme naturel au cœur humain. Les lois et les religions positives, les mœurs, les préjugés, l'opi-

nion sont venus ensuite confirmer ces abus primitifs qui avaient eu pour résultat d'exalter l'orgueil des maîtres et d'abaisser, d'annihiler les subordonnés. Le droit de la femme est identique au droit de l'homme, et toute réforme qui contribuera à le dégager des liens qui l'asservissent ou des préjugés qui le diminuent, sera un progrès vers la justice.

Mais autre chose est le principe, autres choses les procédés de réalisation. Nous ne vivons pas dans un monde rationnel et abstrait ; nous vivons dans un monde pratique, en face du passé, en face du droit positif et des faits acquis, et il y aurait de la puérité à n'en pas reconnaître la force. M. Mill lui-même, quand il s'adresse à la chambre des Communes en Angleterre, tient compte du milieu : il cherche la mesure du possible et ne demande que ce qui peut être obtenu.

Ainsi, la réforme politique peut nous paraître opportune dans un pays de suffrage restreint comme l'Angleterre ; elle le serait moins dans un pays de suffrage universel. Si jamais en France le droit des hommes est assez assuré pour qu'on puisse s'occuper du droit des femmes, nous pensons qu'on trouvera préférable de commencer d'une autre manière. Il y a de grandes réformes à faire dans notre loi civile ; il y en a plus encore dans l'éducation ; celles-là seraient immédiatement réalisables et ne soulèveraient ni les mêmes difficultés, ni les mêmes oppositions. Établir plus d'égalité dans les conditions du mariage et dans la forme des contrats dont il est l'objet ; réserver les droits de la femme sur l'administration et la jouissance de ses biens personnels et sur les fruits de son travail ; créer des maisons d'éducation où les deux sexes reçoivent un enseignement analogue qui établisse entre eux de véritables rapports intellectuels : de telles réformes seraient déjà un progrès immense. La dernière surtout aurait des conséquences incalculables. On n'arrivera à la force et à l'unité nationale que par le concours des deux sexes. Or, c'est en puisant, dans la jeunesse, aux mêmes sources morales que l'homme et la femme pourront s'unir dans les mêmes pensées, les mêmes vouloirs, les mêmes œuvres.

Il serait non moins juste et non moins utile d'ouvrir aux femmes toute les carrières qu'elles pourraient exercer et de les y préparer d'avance, de sorte que le mariage, venant libre-

ment à son heure, n'ait plus le caractère d'une *profession officielle*, d'un *établissement*.

Que de fonctions d'ailleurs les femmes accompliraient aisément et parfois mieux que les hommes. Que de lacunes leur intervention pourrait heureusement combler !

Prenons l'enseignement, par exemple. N'est-ce pas au moyen du concours des femmes que l'Amérique est parvenue à couvrir d'écoles son immense territoire ? De même, en France, on n'arrivera à généraliser l'enseignement populaire, à le rendre fructueux, à le faire pénétrer partout, qu'en y donnant à la femme une très-large place. D'un côté de l'Océan comme de l'autre, l'influence de l'institutrice sur de jeunes garçons, surtout dans les classes incultes, sera éminemment favorable au progrès des bonnes mœurs, au développement de l'esprit de famille et de tous les sentiments de délicatesse et de respect.

Certaines fonctions administratives (1), certaines professions libérales pourraient être aussi très-heureusement exercées par des femmes (2) et pour le plus grand bénéfice de la société elle-même. Avec une meilleure distribution du travail, l'espace et les ressources ne manqueraient pas.

Supposons maintenant, comme simple hypothèse, que le but aujourd'hui visé ait été atteint dans sa plénitude. Supposons, ainsi que le demande M. Mill, un état social où chaque individu jouirait de tous ses droits, sans considération du sexe, où la législation ne ferait acception de personne, quelles en seraient les conséquences ? Verrions-nous, comme quelques apôtres enthousiastes le pensent, un entier boule-

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(1) En France, l'administration des postes confie aux femmes les fonctions inférieures ; il n'y a aucune juste raison pour les exclure de celles qui sont plus élevées et plus lucratives. En Angleterre, on emploie des femmes dans la télégraphie électrique, et le dernier rapport administratif reconnaissait leur supériorité sur les hommes dans cet emploi. Elles ont plus d'exactitude, elles sont moins sujettes aux dérangements de toute sorte.

(2) La pharmacie et la médecine, par exemple. Les femmes n'ont-elles pas précisément le genre d'aptitude qui convient à ces professions ?



versement dans les rapports sociaux et dans les rapports de famille ? Verrions-nous le mariage abandonné et les deux sexes confondus dans tous les travaux, dans toutes les fonctions, de sorte qu'il ne resterait plus trace de ce partage qui assigne aujourd'hui à la femme l'activité de l'intérieur et à l'homme celle du dehors ? Notre pensée est tout autre.

Quand on aura supprimé toutes les lois d'exception, les obstacles, les barrières, les incapacités conventionnelles ; quand on aura rendu à la femme toutes les libertés, ouvert devant elle toutes les carrières, on n'aura pas pour autant transformé sa nature. Or, tant que cette grande fonction qui consiste à perpétuer notre espèce lui appartiendra comme son œuvre propre, les réformes de la législation, tout en lui rendant l'exercice du droit, ne changeront pas l'ordre de sa vie. La fonction maternelle implique chez elle, et, comme conséquence, dans le milieu où elle vit, tout un ensemble de choses indestructibles.

La femme, destinée à mettre les enfants au monde, a moins de vigueur que l'homme pour accomplir la plupart des travaux extérieurs ; elle a moins aussi d'activité. Ses dispositions physiques la rendent sédentaire aussi bien que son humeur et ses goûts, et si certains travaux lui conviennent, combien d'autres, et de ceux qui ont le plus de valeur sociale, qui donnent le plus de force, de pouvoir, d'influence, lui échapperont toujours !

Quand il s'agira de s'emparer du globe, de l'exploiter, de l'asservir, quand il faudra conduire des vaisseaux dans des mers lointaines et inconnues, commander à des armées de soldats ou de travailleurs, défricher des terres vierges, organiser et conduire de grands établissements d'industrie, la femme pourra-t-elle opposer à l'homme une concurrence sérieuse ? En dépit de toutes les libertés légales, son corps ne sera-t-il pas toujours plus faible, moins apte aux grandes fatigues et aux grandes résistances, ses goûts moins aventureux, sa volonté moins hardie, son cœur plus timide et plus délicat ?

La femme, très-apte à accomplir certains travaux suffisants pour la soutenir, pour lui donner la dignité et l'indépendance, ne sera jamais l'égal de l'homme dans la lutte qui

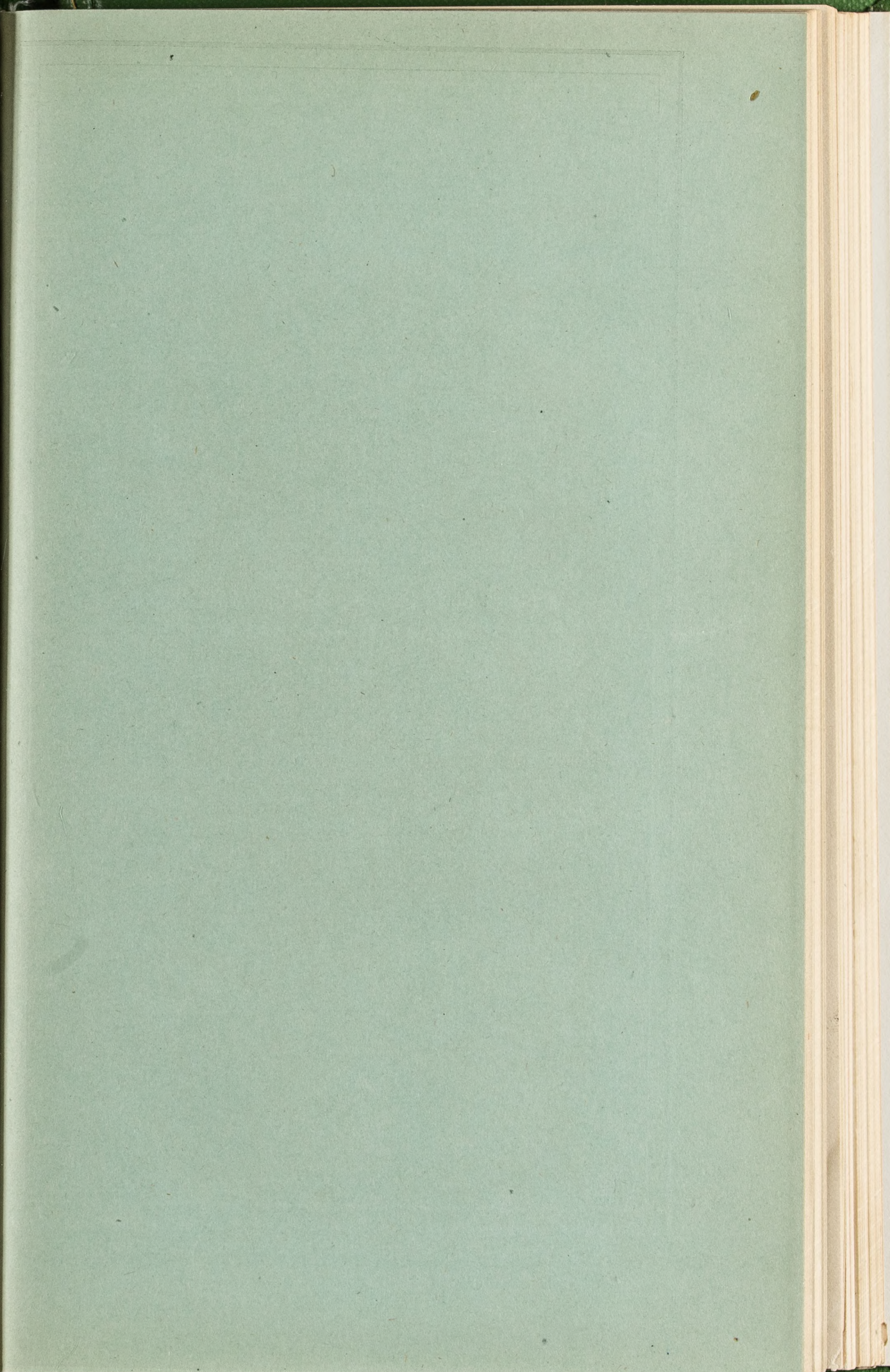
doit asservir la nature à l'humanité, et quand elle voudra se mesurer sur ce terrain avec son puissant compagnon, il la dominera toujours. Or, si nous pouvons demander à la loi de ne pas accroître les inégalités naturelles en les érigeant en dogmes, nous ne pouvons lui demander de les détruire. Le régime de la liberté ne fera donc que mettre ces inégalités en lumière et démontrera avec la dernière évidence que la femme ne saurait prendre dans l'ordre du travail sa véritable place que par l'accomplissement de la tâche qui lui est spécialement dévolue : la maternité. Cette tâche, en effet, est la première en dignité et en valeur ; elle compense toutes les autres avec avantage, mais elle a aussi ses conditions spéciales. Tandis que les fonctions extérieures peuvent donner à l'homme la richesse, la puissance et la gloire, le rude travail de la maternité n'assure pas même à la femme l'indépendance. La naissance des enfants, les premiers soins à leur donner, les sollicitudes et les soucis de l'éducation suffisent à absorber les meilleures années de sa vie, sans lui rapporter aucun gain positif. Ce qu'une femme peut faire à côté d'un berceau sera toujours peu de chose, et ce qu'elle fera dans un âge avancé sera moins encore. Cette situation amène donc forcément entre les époux une nouvelle sorte de liens. Leur vie ne saurait être seulement juxtaposée comme dans les associations ordinaires ; elle doit être véritablement *unie* ; le principe social du mariage est la communauté des intérêts et le partage des fonctions. L'homme gouverne la vie du dehors, la femme celle du dedans, et ils jouissent *en commun* du fruit de leurs *communs* efforts. La femme attend, il est vrai, de son époux l'appui matériel de l'existence ; mais elle lui rend celui du cœur, qui n'est pas moins grand, et par les soins de la famille elle lui assure, comme père, la sécurité. Il n'y a donc pas d'humiliation dans sa condition dépendante, car s'il travaille pour elle, elle travaille pour lui, et moralement parlant ils ont un égal besoin l'un de l'autre. Telle est, à nos yeux, la loi normale du mariage. Or, la loi du mariage est la loi même de l'humanité, et ne serait-il pas puéril de craindre qu'un des deux sexes pût jamais y renoncer d'une façon volontaire ?

Les hommes font preuve, à nos yeux, d'une grande mo-

destie en pensant qu'il faille les difficultés de la vie et les rigueurs de la loi pour attacher une femme à son foyer, et ils font preuve d'une grande humilité en acceptant le bénéfice de ces rigueurs. Ils doutent trop d'eux-mêmes et ils doutent trop aussi de la nature des choses. La pleine possession de la liberté et du droit servira surtout à augmenter le prix du don que la femme est disposée à faire d'elle-même. Sans doute, il y aura des exceptions. Il y aura des femmes douées de facultés rares et qui aspireront à sortir de la voie commune, d'autres qui manqueront des qualités du cœur et reculeront devant la tâche de la maternité, d'autres encore frappées dans la jeunesse par quelque inconsolable douleur. Pourquoi celles-là ne pourraient-elles pas demander au travail, sous leur responsabilité propre, soit la gloire et l'indépendance, soit la force et l'oubli ? Si elles se méprennent sur leur puissance, si elles affichent des ridicules ou des prétentions, elles subiront les conséquences de leur folie, elles auront des mécomptes. Soit : le mécompte n'est-il pas la grande leçon de la vie, et la vertu le fruit de la liberté ?

Que les hommes d'ailleurs se rassurent, les exceptions seront rares. La nature a voulu que la femme préférât à une indépendance orgueilleuse et à une ambition solitaire l'amour et la maternité ; la nature aura aisément raison des fausses théories, et les femmes seront les premières à reconnaître que la solution du problème de l'égalité n'est ni dans l'asservissement, ni dans la séparation et la concurrence, mais dans le partage librement accompli de l'activité sociale, de l'affection et du bonheur.

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# OUR POLICY:

*An Address to Women concerning the  
Suffrage.*

BY

✓ FRANCES POWER COBBE.

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

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OUR POLICY:

AN ADDRESS TO WOMEN CONCERNING THE SUFFRAGE.

THERE is an instructive story, told by Herodotus, of an African nation which went to war with the South Wind. The wind had greatly annoyed these Psyllians by drying up their cisterns, so they organized a campaign and set off to attack the enemy at head-quarters—somewhere, I presume, about the Sahara. The army was admirably equipped with all the military engines of those days—swords and spears, darts and javelins, battering rams and catapults. It happened that the South Wind did not, however, suffer much from these weapons, but got up one fine morning and blew!—The sands of the desert have lain for a great many ages over those unfortunate Psyllians; and, as Herodotus placidly concludes the story, “The Nasamones possess the territory of those who thus perished.”

It seems to me that we women who have been fighting for the Suffrage with logical arguments—syllogisms, analogies, demonstrations, and reductions-to-the-absurd of our antagonists' position, in short, all the weapons of ratiocinative warfare—have been behaving very much like those poor Psyllians, who imagined that darts, and swords, and catapults would avail against the Simoon. The obvious truth is, that it is Sentiment we have to contend against, not Reason; Feeling and Prepossession, not intellectual Conviction. Had Logic been the only obstacle in our way, we should long ago have been polling our votes for Parliamentary as well as for Municipal and School Board elections. To those who hold that Property is the thing intended to be represented by the Constitution of England, we have shown that we possess such property. To those who say that Tax-paying and Representation should go together, we have pointed to the tax-gatherers' papers, which, alas! lie on our hall-tables wholly irrespective of the touching fact that we belong to the “protected sex.” Where Intelligence, Education, and freedom from crime are considered enough to confer rights of citizenship, we have remarked that we are quite ready to challenge rivalry in such particulars with those Illiterates for whose exercise of political functions our Senate has taken such exemplary care. Finally, to the ever-recurring charge that we cannot fight, and therefore ought not to vote, we have replied that the logic of the exclusion will be manifest when all the men too weak, too short, or too old for the military standard be likewise disfranchised, and when the actual soldiers of our army are accorded the suffrage.

But, as I began by remarking, it is Sentiment, not Logic, against which we have to struggle; and we shall best do so, I think, by endeavouring to understand and make full allowance for it; and then by steadily working shoulder to shoulder so as to conquer, or rather *win* it over to our side. There is nothing astonishing or blameworthy in the fact that both men and women (women even more than men), when they first hear of the proposal that political action should be shared by both sexes, are startled and shocked. The wonder would be if, after witnessing women's inaction for thousands of years, the set of our brains were *not* to see them for ever “suckling fools and chronicling small-beer.” The “hereditary transmission of psychical habits,” which Dr. Carpenter talks of, could not fail to leave such an impression; nay, a very short period of seclusion would have

sufficed to stamp a prejudice against our ever taking part in public affairs. I had myself the misfortune at one time to consult fourteen eminent surgeons concerning a sprained ankle, and, as a result of that gross imprudence, to pass four of the best years of life as a miserable cripple upon crutches. At the end of that period, when my friends saw me once more walking erect and free, they unanimously exclaimed, "Oh, do not attempt it! For pity's sake do not go into the street!" One of the tenderest of them even added, almost in tears, "I cannot *endure* to see you going about without your crutches!" Of course I had much difficulty in persuading these kind people that there was really nothing indecent, or even unladylike, in making use of the limbs wherewith nature had provided me. But I succeeded at last; and so I think women in general will eventually succeed in converting the world to the notion that the faculties bestowed on us by Providence—whether they be great or small—ought all to be used. Humanity might very properly be represented by a man who has all his life used his right hand vigorously, but has kept his left in a sling. Whether the limb were originally weaker than the right, and could not have done as good work, it is not easy to say. It is quite certainly now a poor sinister arm, soft, tender, and without muscular force, and so long accustomed to hang from the neck, that when by chance it is set to work it begins to move in a very nervous and unpractised fashion. Nevertheless, unless any one be prepared to maintain that a man is the better for keeping his left hand tied up, and doing his work with his right alone, it must, I think, be obvious, that this same Humanity will be considerably more happy, and perform its labour more satisfactorily, with two free arms than one.

To win over the public Sentiment now opposed to it, to this great and portentous emancipation of the Left Hand from its sling, very many different sagacious methods will, I am sure, suggest themselves to my readers. I shall venture merely to offer a few hints, which appear to me most important, regarding, 1st, the things which we women ought to *stop doing* and *being*, and, 2ndly, the things we ought to begin to *do* and to *be*.

For the first, we decidedly ought (if we can) to cease to be silly. It is very tempting, I understand, to be silly, when silliness is obviously infinitely more attractive than sense, and when a sweet little piece of utter folly is received as "so charming" by all who are privileged to hear it. The lady who said (or perhaps did not say) to one of our eminent senators, that "if she had a vote she would sell it directly to the candidate who would give her a pair of diamond ear-rings"—that sweet young thing (if she ever had existence) was no doubt rewarded by the cordial and gallant approbation of the representative of the masculine gender to whom she confided her elevated views. Nevertheless, her silly speech, and the tens of thousands of speeches in the same vein, made in every ball-room in the kingdom, serve, like so many flakes of snow, to hide the ground. The woman who makes one of them with an ingenious simper, generally has her reward in a rapturous smile; but she has done in that moment of folly all that lay in her power to defer a measure of justice on which hangs, more or less directly, the moral and physical welfare of thousands of women.

Nor is it only, or chiefly, by directly scoffing at the demand for Woman Suffrage that silly women hurt our cause. They hurt us much more by showing themselves unfit for it; by perpetuating the delusion that women are so many kittens—charming to play with, but no more fit to be given political rights than Caligula's horse to be made a Consul. In looking over an American journal devoted to our interests, I have just fallen on three names in succession, which alone seem (very unjustly no doubt) to place the ladies who are willing to bear them through this serious mortal

life, rather in the kittenish than the womanly category. Think of gravely demanding political influence, and then signing oneself as Miss "Mettie" Wauchop, Miss "Lulu" Wilkinson, or Miss "Vinnie" Ream! Silly Dress is a subject so portentous, and on which I feel so little competent to speak, that I shall only remark that, while true taste in attire must always add a pleasant prepossession in favour of everything a woman may ask of right or respect, the style which betrays that hours have been devoted to devising it, is absolutely prohibitive of such consideration. The human soul which has been occupied for an entire morning, like one of Pope's sprites, striving—

"Invention to bestow,  
To change a flounce, or add a furbelow,"

has, by the hypothesis, neither leisure nor inclination for the graver and nobler pursuits of a rational being.

Another point on which it behoves us women to mend our ways, is the matter of Courage. Men give courage the first place among the virtues, because, without it, there is no guarantee for any other virtue. Assuredly this principle applies no less to women, who, if they be cowards, may be bullied or coerced into every kind of falsehood and baseness, like Ingoldsby's Duchess of Cleves, when her husband pinched her to make her betray her friends—

"His hard iron gauntlet, the flesh went an inch in,  
She didn't mind death, but she couldn't stand pinching."

If we cannot "stand pinching," in more ways than one, slaves we are and slaves we must ever be, whether civil and political rights are given to us or not. When I hear a woman say, with a complacent smile, as if she were announcing an ornament of her reputation, "O, I am *such* a coward!" I always feel inclined to say, "Indeed? And, may I ask, do you ever go about boasting—'O, I am such a liar?' If you are really a coward you will become a liar any day." Because we have more sensitive nervous systems than men is no reason why honour, and conscience, and self-respect should not teach us to dominate them. I have no doubt there are some virtues, like Temperance, which cost a man more self-control to exercise than they cost a woman, but we do not hold him exonerated on that account if he fail to exert such self-government. We may pity a woman who cannot stop herself from shrieking if a horse runs away, or a boat tosses on the waves; but assuredly we do not feel she is a person to be trusted with an important charge. On the other hand, the sight of a weak, and perhaps sickly or aged woman, calm, silent, and resolute in the face of peril, is a thing never to be forgotten; and the veriest jackanapes alive who expresses his sublime horror of a "strong-minded female" will bless his good fortune that it is in her carriage or boat he is sitting, and not in that of the shrieking Angelina.

There are many more things which we ought to refrain from doing if we desire to conquer public Sentiment to our side; but I must hasten to the second part of my subject—the things which we Ought to Do for that end. In the first place, we ought to perform our present share in the world's work—the housekeeping, the house-adorning, the child-educating—so as to prove that, before we go a step further, we can and will at least do *this*. Before Political Economy comes the Economy of the Kitchen, the Larder, and the Coal-cellar; and before the national Budget the household weekly bills. I do not say that the wife, daughter, and sister who manages a house with perfect order and frugality, to the comfort of all the in-dwellers, will thereby convince them of her right to the Suffrage; but I am quite sure, that if she neglect so to manage the house, or live in a despicable

muddle of eternal strife with her servants, she will very completely prove her *unfitness* for any higher functions.

Next, we should, as much as possible, seek for employments of the kind for which we are suited, but which have been hitherto monopolized by men; and when we have chanced to obtain one, we should take good care not to lose it by fitful, irregular attendance, slovenly work, or any appeal whatever to special consideration *as women*. Secretaryships, clerkships, telegraph and post-office work, and especially work on the public press (wherein our influence can be direct, as well as indirect), are all objects of concern. I rejoiced much recently to see thirty charming young ladies, the daughters of professional men, at work in the Prudential Insurance Office on Ludgate Hill; and as many more painting porcelain for Messrs. Minton at South Kensington. Mr. Stansfeld's generous appointment of Mrs. Nassau Senior, to report to Government on the condition of pauper girls in London, and that lady's admirable performance of her task, will, I trust, lead ere long to the regular employment, by the State, of Female Inspectors of workhouses, schools, and asylums of all kinds wherein either women or children find refuge. I do not hesitate to say that one woman who does such work as this—even the humblest of those I have named—steadily and thoroughly, does at the same time more for the cause of Woman Suffrage than one who clamours for it most vehemently, but does nothing to prove the fitness of her sex for any public function.

Lastly, we must avail ourselves with the utmost care and conscientiousness of every fragment of Civil Rights which have hitherto been conceded to us. Not the election of a Poor Law Guardian or a parish Churchwarden, still less a municipal election, ought to pass without all the female ratepayers giving their votes, and showing that they do so intelligently, and after due enquiry. If it were possible for us to act in each locality mainly in concert—a committee of the more leisurely obtaining and transmitting the information needed—and everywhere upholding the best candidates, our action would in time come to be felt throughout the country. As to the School Board elections, had they been devised expressly as a prelude and preparation for women's entrance into political life, we could not have had anything better, and we must needs regret that, as yet, they have been very inadequately utilized for such purpose. The ladies who have fought the good fight, and their generous male supporters, deserve from us the heartiest thanks, whether they have or have not proved successful.

The sentiments of men about women must necessarily be formed on the characters of those with whom they associate. If a man's mother be a fool, and his sisters "Girls of the Period," and if he select for himself the society of ladies of the *demi-monde*, or of that section of the *grand monde* which emulates the *demi-monde* as closely as it dares, it is quite obvious that when the abstract idea "Woman" is suggested to him, he will think of a creature in paint, powder, and chignon, whose breath of life is the admiration of men like himself, and who has no more heart, mind, or conscience than a broomstick. He will tell you, and tell you truly, that a woman—such as he knows the creature—loves nobody in earnest, but is ready to pretend to love anybody who will marry her and make her rich; that she is envious of all her female friends, especially the pretty ones; and that she has neither fixed religious nor political opinions, but only pretends ardently to adopt those which she thinks will commend her to the man whom she desires to attract. When I hear a man talk in a mode which implies that this is, at bottom, his idea of a woman, I always make a private memorandum regarding the quarter whence he must have

derived his models; just as when I was an *habitué* of the Roman studios I knew precisely from which old beggarman on the steps of the *Trinità* one painter had taken his "Jupiter," and from which damsel of uncertain morals another had copied his "Madonna Immacolata." Of course I am not afterwards surprised when such a man answers the demand for Woman Suffrage by such laughs as resound through the House of Commons when the subject is broached.

"Who would care for a doll, though its ringlets were curled  
And its petticoats cut in the fashion?"

If women *be* dolls, none but children would play the farce of giving them political rights—in a Baby-house State. The only question is, *Are* they toys? Or is the opinion of the men who find (or make) them so, the one to be acted upon?

On the other hand, if a man's mother be a wise and loving woman, if his sisters be innocent-hearted and intelligent girls, and if he have associated in manhood from preference with good and sensible women, the notion which he forms of the other sex is absolutely the reverse of all I have described. He knows that a woman is capable of love—motherly, conjugal, sisterly—the purest, most disinterested, and most tender. He knows that, so far from being without fixed opinions, she is apt to hold those which she has early acquired with too rigid and narrow a prejudice; and that the ideas of duty and religion occupy commonly a far larger space in her mind than in those of the majority of his male companions. Lastly, by one curious test, his view of woman may always be discriminated from that of the man who has preferred to associate with the *Hetaira* order of female. He will know that, instead of being jealous of her associates, the true woman generally carries her loving admiration for the gifts and graces of her female friends to the verge of exaggeration, and glories in their achievements in educational competitions, in literature, and art, with a generous enthusiasm not often found among masculine rivals. He will take, for example, the letters published in Mrs. Somerville's "Recollections," which passed between that lady and Mrs. Marcet, Miss Edgeworth, Miss Berry, and Mrs. Joanna Baillie—each expressing her warm delight in the other's gifts and successes—as precisely the most natural outcome of the feelings of women of their class for one another.

To a man trained to think thus of women, the proposal that they should begin to take a part in public affairs, may indeed, at first, seem startling, even offensive; but it will be because he has thought so highly of them, not so lowly. By degrees, perhaps, he will come to learn that the Niche does not make a Saint, and that Idleness is not the root of all good for women, while it is that of all evil for men. Possibly, at last, he will think as the devout Dr. Upham said at the close of his life—that, "since the coming of Christ, no event has promised so much for the virtue and happiness of the human race as the admission of Woman into a share of public duty."

Thus then, it seems clear, that if the Sentiment of men is to be won over to the claims of women, it must be by compelling them to recognize as the true ideal of womanhood, not a Phryne or a Ninon, but a Zenobia or a Madame Roland.

The great obstacle to the concession of the claims of women does not lie with *men*, for even those most opposed to them might be won over. Still less is it with *busy* women, for it has never happened to me yet to meet a woman who had done much work in the world as a philanthropist, artist, litterateur, or landed proprietor, who did not emphatically endorse the demand for the removal of those political disabilities which she had surely found at one point or another clog her steps. But the great obstacle



lies with *idle* women, and nearly exclusively with those for whom nobody dreams of asking for the franchise—for the wives of rich men who have never known a want unsupplied, who have been surrounded by tenderness and homage from their cradles, and have lived all their days like little birds in a downy nest, with nothing to do but to open their beaks and find food dropped into them. It is to the eternal disgrace of such women that, instead of feeling burning shame and indignation at the wrongs and hardships which (as every newspaper shows them) their poorer sisters undergo, they think that, because the world is easy for *them*, it is "the best of all possible worlds," and that nothing ought to be changed in it. Like Marie Antoinette, they tell those who want bread to live on buns; and they extol the advantages of the "chivalry" of men as ample compensation for the lack of every right, without once troubling themselves even to inquire whether the same "chivalrous" gentleman, who hands them so courteously into a carriage, will not rudely brush past the shabby old governess, or call up the poor work-girl's blushes by his insolent address. When the time comes—perhaps in this approaching Session—when the doors of the Constitution will be opened once more to welcome a new and still lower horde of Illiterates, by the assimilation of the County with the Borough Franchise, we shall, doubtless, again hear the oft-repeated assertion, that our legislators would gladly extend the privilege to women if they believed they really desired it; but that all the ladies whose opinions they have asked, vehemently repudiate the proposal. They might as well offer bread to an alderman at the end of a feast, and, because he declines it, refuse it to a pauper begging at the gate.

But, in spite of the rich and idle wives; and in spite of the men who think the archetypal woman was—not a Monkey—but a Doll; in spite of every obstacle, public Sentiment is unquestionably slowly veering round, and it depends on women themselves to bring it altogether to their favour. In this, as in all other things, however, to *be* is a much more important matter than to *do*. The walls of modern Jerichos do not fall down by any trumpeting outside, and the more women shriek for the franchise, or for anything else, the less will men be disposed to open their ears to that extremely unpleasant sound. Let us cease to be silly, and affected, and idle. When we are ignorant, let us cultivate the grace of silence; and when we adorn ourselves, let us do so by the light of the "Lamps" of Truth and Simplicity. This achieved in the first place, let us become steady, diligent sharers in the world's work, creeping up by degrees as we prove our fitness for one higher task after another; never for a moment asking or wishing to have allowance made for our defects, or over-estimation of our success "because we are women." When a sufficient number of us have taken this method of gaining public Sentiment to favour the claims of our sex, the victory will be assured. We may lay by our darts and catapults. The Simoon will blow quite in the opposite direction.

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WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE.

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SIXTH ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

EDINBURGH NATIONAL SOCIETY

FOR

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE.

*Adopted at a Public Meeting held in the Bible Society Rooms,  
5 St Andrew Square, 25th February 1874.*

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EDINBURGH : PRINTED BY JOHN GREIG & SON.

MDCCLXXIV.

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*This Society consists of all friendly to its object, and  
who subscribe to its Funds.*

EDINBURGH NATIONAL SOCIETY FOR WOMEN'S  
SUFFRAGE.

ANNUAL MEETING.

The Annual Public Meeting in connection with this Society was held in the Rooms, No. 5 St Andrew Square, on February 25, 1874. There was a crowded attendance, composed almost entirely of ladies. The gentlemen present included—the Lord Provost, M.P.; Mr Duncan M'Laren, M.P.; Professor Kelland, Dr Donaldson, Royal High School; Mr Fothergill of Keswick, Councillor Wellstood, Mr George Hope (late of Fentonbarns), Mr R. A. Macfie: and amongst the ladies were—Mrs M'Laren (Newington House), the President; Miss Agnes M'Laren, Miss Wigham, Mrs M'Queen of Braxfield, Mrs Wellstood, Mrs Macfie, Miss Taylour, Miss Stevenson, Mrs Robertson, Miss Craig, Miss Hunter, &c. &c.

On the motion of Professor KELLAND,

Mrs M'LAREN, President of the Society, took the chair. After a few preliminary remarks, and reading a note of apology on behalf of Professor and Mrs Masson, regretting unavoidable absence, she said—Our agitation has arrived at a point where we think we can anticipate the early crowning of our efforts with success. Very large and important meetings are being held in the principal towns in England. Last night, there was one in the large Free Trade Hall in Manchester. I think there never was an agitation which has proved more calculated to throw light upon a variety of social questions than the one in whose interests we are here met together. It has thrown a flood of light upon the position of women. It has opened our eyes to a number of questions that concern the wellbeing of both men and women; for whatever affects the one affects the other, for good or evil. We have been led to see many deficiencies in our social and political system, owing to the status of women being lower than that of men. Duties that are most obviously fit for women have been withheld from them. There is a large amount of light respecting their capacity for work in this city. One black cloud still hovers over our University, which must sooner or later be

dispelled; but whenever this may take place, "memory will lie heavy on the atmosphere around;" for the fact that the women who sought to learn the healing art within her walls, with an ability so unexpected, that I am not sure whether it did not prove adverse to their success, and being refused, were forced to seek instruction elsewhere, will remain a dark spot on the historic page of that noble institution. It is to Parliament that the women of this country must now appeal for the right to enter our universities; and I need hardly say to an intelligent audience like the present, how much much more readily their claims would be listened to could they urge them through the means of the suffrage. It would seem as though light did not logically attend upon high culture; for I read with surprise the other day that in Boston, in the United States, which is the centre of literary refinement in that great country—a country, too, where women-teachers prevail in their schools—two ladies had been appointed to sit at the School Board, and the men who were elected along with them had refused to allow them the position to which they had been raised by the electors. We may conclude, also, that light and logic do not necessarily attend upon wealth. I saw in the *Manchester Examiner* yesterday that the School Board there were in want of four officers to act as visitors among the children's parents, and the committee recommended that one of them should be a woman. The lady member of the Board, as a matter of justice, proposed that two of the four visitors should be of the gentler sex. But Alderman Lamb, who, I fear, is only a lamb in name—(laughter)—"scented mischief in the air," and moved an amendment that all four should be men. This was carried by a majority of one—Canon Toole, Canon Whitelegge, and the Rev. J. Munn voting with the majority. I have no doubt these clergymen regularly employ ladies to visit the poor of their congregations. But they had some undefined notion that because a Board was to appoint these ladies to such work, it would put them quite out of their sphere. If I were a Scotch lady I might prove what I am going to say—but English people are not expected to "prove all things" quite so much. I have an *intuition* that if women had the same political status that men have, these worthy canons would also have had an intuition that these ladies might have performed the task with propriety, of hunting up little children to go to school, even though appointed by a Board. Within the last month we have witnessed a great change in our political relations. The Conservatives are now in power, and I am sorry to say that we have to choose another leader to carry on our cause in Parliament. Manchester has unseated my brother, Jacob Bright, and although I am his sister, I trust you will pardon me when I say, that a nobler man did not sit in the House of Commons. (Applause.) He bore the brunt of the battle in the heat of the day. He was our leader when it required moral courage to lead, and having carried our question with confidence and dignity beyond the region of ridicule

and false arguments, he has now handed the leadership over to another, who may perhaps win the laurels he so much deserved to wear. The standard on which Justice is inscribed may, from force of circumstances, pass from one hand to another, but it is not permitted to fall to the ground. Having been disappointed in obtaining help from the Liberal Ministry, we have now, owing to the great changes which have taken place, to look to the Conservatives to join those Liberals who have stood fast by us in our movement; and as the Premier is with us, we have more hope of gaining our cause this session. (Applause.) I am sorry Mr Gladstone, whose high moral nature led him to confess from the Treasury bench how unjust the laws were towards women, had not the courage to confess that they ought to have the franchise on the same conditions under which it is given to men. (Hear, hear.) Whether man's intellect be higher than woman's, I am not here to dispute. Some say the spiritual nature of woman is higher than that of man, but it will only be when the fetters which law and custom have wound round *her* shall be broken, that it will be known to what excellence *she* can rise, or what really are the faculties with which God has endowed her. ("Hear, hear," and applause.)

Miss WIGHAM read the Report of the Executive Committee and the Statement of Accounts.

Mr DUNCAN M'LAREN, M.P., moved the adoption of the report. He congratulated the members of the Society on its success, as shewn by the steady increase of its supporters, both in and out of Parliament, since the question was first introduced. It was true, he said, that during the late general election some of their distinguished leaders of the cause in Parliament had lost their seats; but they might hope that, though they did not get men so good in all respects, the cause was so just that even though the new men were not so distinguished, they would be able and willing to carry forward the measure. (Hear, hear.) They were aware that the present Prime Minister, Mr Disraeli, many years ago distinctly declared himself in favour of the principle which they (the Society) advocated; and if as a Minister he felt at liberty to give effect to the opinions he expressed as a private member, that would give it a great impetus, if, indeed, it were not the means of carrying the measure at once. (Hear, hear.) Mr M'Laren then touched on some of the objections which had been advanced to women exercising the franchise. He held that the extremely quiet manner in which the elections of the school board and of the members of Parliament had passed over, amply proved that there was no foundation in the objection that the scenes and the rabble at the polling booths would be such that no lady would venture to go through them in order to record her vote. The scene at the polling booths at the recent election was one of perfect quietness, and such that the most fastidious lady could not have hesitated to go forward and exercise the privilege of voting, if she had been entitled to do so. Then it had been

objected that the admission of ladies to the franchise would be a Conservative measure—that it would strengthen the Tory party in the country and in Parliament. He (Mr M'Laren) did not see how any man could either prove or disprove that opinion. It was a matter that admitted of debate. But if it were the settlement of a question of justice, he did not see what they had to do with party considerations at all. (Hear, hear, and applause.) He held it was a right and proper measure; and they had no right to do an injustice by depriving the whole female householders of the country of the power of voting, lest it should have a particular effect—a strengthening effect on one political party, and an injurious effect on another party. (Hear.) It was said, for example, by many, that the passing of the Ballot Act would strengthen the Liberal party; that it would keep down coercion on the part of the landlords; that, in fact, the effect of it would be to give much greater influence to the Liberal party. For his own part he (Mr M'Laren) never believed that. (Hear, hear.) And the result of the first Parliamentary election by ballot had blown to the wind all these theories, because it proved that the Ballot Act had strengthened the Conservative party if it had done anything. (Hear, hear.) And it might be the same in the case of the measure, if once passed, for the enfranchisement of women. (Hear, hear.) He held, however, that justice ought to prevail, no matter what might be the consequences to any party. (Applause.) Mr M'Laren concluded by again moving the adoption of the report.

Dr DONALDSON seconded the motion, which was carried.

The LORD PROVOST moved that the following Memorial be forwarded:—

*“To the Right Hon. Benjamin Disraeli, M.P., First Lord of the Treasury.*

*“The Memorial of Inhabitants of Edinburgh, in Public Meeting assembled*

*“Showeth,—That in grateful remembrance of the fact that you were the first Member of the House of Commons to declare within its walls your assent to the justice of the claim of women to representation, and remembering that under your leadership the House of Commons recognised household suffrage to be in accordance with the constitution of this country, we beg to remind you that this principle was not carried out in its integrity in the Reform Bill of 1868, as the franchise was only conferred upon those householders who were men.*

*“As it did not include women who are householders or owners of property in their own right, we venture to hope that you who were a pioneer in the cause of women's suffrage, will take the earliest opportunity of remedying this injustice, now that you are again leader of the House.*

*“We feel that it would be a fitting and graceful conclusion to our agitation that you should bring your powerful aid to crown it with success.*

*“And also that this meeting resolve to petition both Houses of Parliament to pass a measure extending the suffrage to women ratepayers on the same conditions as it is extended to men.”*

The LORD PROVOST then remarked that the country must congratulate the ladies at the prospect of bringing this movement to a happy conclusion, for the House of Commons must soon grant this act of justice to women. He proceeded to point out that women, with the same qualifications as men, could be got for about half the money to act as clerks in connection with the Post Office telegraphs, and to this cause was due, he was ashamed to say it, a large amount of reduction in the expenditure!! Those female clerks who were employed in the Post Office were so efficient and so imbued with the *esprit de corps*, that the service was never better performed than at present. He had been told on authority, that in the telegraph service there had never, on the part of one of the women, been one single breach of secrecy in regard to telegrams. (A laugh.) He hoped they would not look upon that as a joke. It was a fact that out of two thousand female clerks, there had never been one complaint. (Applause.) He went on to remark that there were about five thousand women in Edinburgh who occupied houses in their own right, and had no votes. He asked in vain for a valid reason why they should not have the privilege which their occupancy of houses and payment of taxes entitled them to. He congratulated them on having a Minister in the country who, whatever his politics were, was pledged to endeavour to carry this movement out, and from the great weight and power which he must necessarily have in Parliament, they might reasonably expect their efforts to be crowned speedily with success.

Mrs STEPHEN WELLSTOOD seconded the motion. She said the memorial to the Prime Minister would, she was sure, commend itself to all the friends of the movement for obtaining female franchise, and she could not but feel very hopeful that its forcible, just, and temperate tone, would appeal convincingly to the heart and understanding of that eminent statesman who has so long declared himself a warm friend and advocate of the measure therein set forth. Their claim seemed to her such a simple and just one, that they could not but marvel that it was not at once conceded. They merely asked that all women who pay an equal amount of rent and taxes with men should share with them in the election of municipal and parliamentary representatives. If women have no part in the formation of the laws, surely they ought to have a voice in the selection of those to whom this power is entrusted, especially when so many of these laws relate to women, their persons, their property, their time, and their labour. (Applause.) The agitation for removing the electoral disabilities of women has been a long and earnest one, but when success shall have crowned the efforts put forth, those who have worked the hardest will reap the fullest reward, and enjoy the greatest amount of happiness and satisfaction. (Hear, hear.) Women themselves have been impelled by a strong feeling of justice and righteousness in the cause to come forward and plead their own question. They do not desire the franchise

merely for the sake of possessing a right to vote. They are actuated by nobler and clearer motives. They believe that their voice in the legislature would be an important element; that upon many questions their knowledge and instinctive penetration would be of great service. In finance, sanitary, and educational measures, religious and moral reforms, their opinions would be useful, weighty, and intelligent. Are there not many women, by their education, position, and natural cleverness, far more capable than some men of judging of the merits or demerits of opposing candidates? These men may be drunkards, idle, vicious—bad husbands and fathers, bad brothers, bad members of society—helping on no reforms, but drags upon them. They, nevertheless, possess a right to vote. Their near neighbour may be respectable, sober, and industrious, training up sons to be useful citizens and good helpers to their country. She may pay a much larger amount of rent and taxes; but then, being “only a woman,” she is little considered, because she has no vote to make her of importance. Is not this unjust? Then, too, women are classed together with lunatics, imbeciles, idiots, infants, and felons. The sooner this classification is dissolved the better, and they looked to all true men and women to do all in their power, and not to rest until both sexes have an equal share in elective prerogative. (Applause.) In conclusion, she would repeat a sentiment which she had recently met with from the pen of the late Joseph Mazzini, that friend of all true liberty. In an autograph book he thus wrote, “Women’s emancipation must now be the watchword of all those who believe in the oneness of God’s children.” (Applause.)

The motion was passed.

Miss BURTON moved—“That this meeting warmly thank our members of Parliament for the support they have already given us, and for their promises of future support.” She reminded the meeting that they had also those friends to thank whom the sudden tide of affairs had excluded from the present House of Commons, particularly their great champion, Jacob Bright. She had every confidence that those friends would be as watchful out of the House as they had proved themselves in it, to give their valuable aid as opportunity might offer. But coming nearer home, they had much reason to be thankful for the assistance they had got; in particular, she must say, from their tried friend and representative, Mr Duncan M’Laren. She expressed her satisfaction that the new member for the city of Edinburgh had come forward so readily on this occasion to their assistance.

The motion was unanimously carried.

On the motion of Mr GEORGE HOPE, late of Fentonbarns, a vote of thanks was then passed to Mrs M’Laren for presiding, and the meeting separated.

## REPORT.

THE conclusion of our financial year finds the country occupied by the almost overwhelming interest of a General Election, the results of which must have a material bearing on the prosperity of many of the measures which have been brought before the late Parliament, and must involve our position for the present in some degree of indefiniteness. But our question has never been one of *party*; for it has been ably supported by the most advanced Liberals in the House, as well as by leading Conservatives. It may be recollected that before the first motion was introduced by John Stuart Mill, Mr Disraeli had arrived at the logical conclusion, with which his course has been consistent. We quote his words:—“As far as abstract reason is concerned, I should like to see anybody in this House get up and oppose the claim (of the other sex to the suffrage). I say that in a country governed by a woman—where you allow women to form part of the other estate of the realm—peeresses in their own right, for example—where you allow a woman not only to hold land, but to be a lady of the manor, and hold legal rights—where a woman, by law, may be a churchwarden and overseer of the poor—I do not see, where she has so much to do with the State and the Church, on what reasons, if you come to right, she has not a right to vote.”

But although thus the Woman’s Suffrage Question is not one dependent on the general political opinions of Electors, yet we cannot but deeply feel the absence from Parliament of some of our most faithful and tried friends who have ably and fearlessly advocated our cause from year to year. Chief among these is Mr Jacob Bright, to whom our warmest gratitude is due. We trust his absence from the House may be only temporary; and we feel assured we shall still have his aid and influence operating on the country and its representatives, both in and out of Parliament, whether for the present his voice is heard in the House or not. We should also wish gratefully to mention the names of our unfailing friends the late members Messrs Miller and Macfie and Sir A. G. Maitland. We cannot, as yet, estimate our general strength in the new Parliament; but the returns from Scotland shew 31 pledged friends, 17 doubtful, and 12 opponents. We have much satisfaction in recording that the members for our City and University and for Leith, are pledged

supporters, and that our most decided antagonist is excluded from Parliament, namely, the leader of the Opposition, the late member for the Kilmarnock Burghs, the Right Hon. E. P. Bouverie.

And now it is right we should review our last year's operations, and give a little sketch of them to our constituents. These operations have been similar in character to those of previous years. Meetings have been held, addresses given, petitions prepared, committees formed and stimulated, and efforts made in every direction to enlighten public opinion as to the justice and expediency of our cause. Members of our Committee have travelled throughout Scotland, and have laboured earnestly and faithfully; 91 public meetings have been held; and 188 petitions, signed by 34,967 persons, have been prepared for Parliament; and there are in Scotland 62 allied Committees.

Our past year commenced with a very successful and interesting Annual Meeting in Queen Street Hall, on the 27th of January 1873. This year, instead of having *one* large public meeting, we have adopted the plan of ward meetings, eight of which have been held in different parts of the city. These have been presided over by the Magistrates or Town Councillors of the various districts, and have had the effect of diffusing interest and information, and in many cases local sub-committees have been formed to aid in the canvas for signatures to petitions, &c. We are very anxious to have well-signed petitions ready to support the next parliamentary action on this question. An extension of Household Suffrage to the Counties has been proposed, and Mr Gladstone has admitted that petitions in favour of that measure have been so important, that these claims of the agricultural population must receive attention. Now the petitions referred to on that matter were signed by 1,889; while those for women's suffrage had last year alone 329,206 signatures. The former measure was only brought to notice last year, while Women's Suffrage has been eight years before the House. The one would require a very large alteration in the distribution of seats, while the extension of the suffrage to women requires only the explicit consent of Parliament that *all householders* should be placed on the electoral roll, as women are already registered as rate-payers; so we would submit, that in any extension of the suffrage, the claims of women rank first.

Although hitherto the *Bill* has been rejected in the House, the *principle* of extending the electoral right to women is rapidly gaining ground. The Education Act for Scotland came into force during last year, entitling women to vote for members of the School Board. The elections proved not only that women were able and willing to vote, but that they encountered no practical difficulties in exercising this right; and it is of significant importance, that these elections shewed the popular confidence in the fitness of women to fill places of trust, for no fewer than eighteen women were elected as members of School

Boards in Scotland, and in eight instances they were placed at the head of the poll, while one woman was chosen to preside over the School Board of which she is a member.

Another concession to the principle of the eligibility of women as citizens, has lately been witnessed in the conferring of the freedom of the city, by the vote of the Town Council, and with the popular sanction, on the Baroness Burdett Coutts. She is the first woman who has been thus enrolled as a citizen of Edinburgh, and we hope it will not be long before full citizen rights will be extended to others.

As in previous years, we have to make record of loss to our cause by the removal of those who have stood firm in its defence. Chief among those of whom death has deprived us, is John Stuart Mill, whose appreciation of the right of women to share in the popular representation, and of the value to the nation of the co-operation of women in legislative and responsible positions, excites the gratitude of all who are interested in the development and advancement of women.

Standing as we now do between the old Parliament and the new, it is natural we should take a backward glance over the parliamentary progress of our question.

In 1866 Mr John Stuart Mill presented a petition signed by 1500 women of England and Scotland. In 1867 the same member brought forward the first motion for the enfranchisement of women, and presented petitions in its support signed by 13,457 names of men and women. This motion was pressed to a division, and eighty-one members, including tellers and pairs, voted for it. In 1868, 50,000 signatures were attached to the petitions, praying that the new Reform Bill, on its own principles, should include women in the extended representation of the country. Of these signatures 14,000 were from Scotland. In 1867 Women's Suffrage Societies began to be organised throughout the country, and public meetings were held, and ladies themselves came forward to plead the justice of the cause. London, Edinburgh, Dublin, Manchester, Bristol, and Birmingham, were early prominent in such organizations, and their efforts have met with much sympathy and support from the general community. In 1869, 126,475 signatures appealed to Parliament, and of these 19,000 were from Scotland.

In that year the municipal franchise was extended to women in England. This measure of justice was gained mainly by the tact and perseverance of our Parliamentary leader, Mr Jacob Bright. In 1870, petitions, signed by 134,566 names, of which 24,805 were from Scotland, were sent up in support of Mr Bright's Bill, which was carried on the second reading by a vote of 124, but was afterwards rejected on a motion to go into Committee, only 119 voting for it. In that year Mr Forster's Education Bill entitled women to vote in the election of the School Boards, and not only so, but to be themselves eligible for election on these boards.

In 1871, when Mr Jacob Bright, in a telling speech, moved the second reading of his Bill, 151 members voted for it—209 against it. The petitions were signed by 186,976. In 1872 the division shewed a still larger number in favour of the Bill, when 163 voted for it. The petitions in support were signed by 350,093, including 44,749 from Scotland. In that year the passing of the Ballot Act, and the extension of the Education Act to Scotland, were each important measures, and by their coming into operation, as we have already shewn, examples and proofs of the good sense of our demand are furnished.

Last year, when Mr Jacob Bright moved the second reading of the Bill, in an admirable speech, he was supported by Mr Eastwick, Mr Sergeant Sherlock, Lord John Manners, Mr Fawcett, Right Hon. J. W. Henley, and other influential members of Parliament. The speeches in opposition were, as usual, neither forcible nor dignified in character. The division shewed 170 members, of all political opinions, voting in favour of the Bill. Twenty-seven of the thirty-one friendly Scotch members were included in this vote, while only thirteen were included in the 222 against it. There were 949 petitions sent to support it, signed by 328,206.

It is of course to us matter of regret that the late Parliament had not the honour of carrying this measure of justice, but with such evidences of rapid progress as we have detailed, we have no ground for discouragement. The educational influence of our movement is manifest, and we look forward with confidence in the hope that it will not be long before women will have conferred on them the electoral right and privilege, and that in exercising it they will always bear in mind that it is to be used as an instrumentality for the promotion of that Righteousness which alone exalteth a Nation, and of that impartial Justice which can alone secure the confidence and prosperity of the People.

NOTE.—Just as we are going to press, we are informed that Mr FORSYTH, Q.C., Conservative member for Marylebone, has kindly consented to lead the Women's Suffrage Question in the House of Commons.

TREASURER'S STATEMENT FOR YEAR ENDING 31st JANUARY 1874.

INCOME.		EXPENDITURE.	
Subscriptions and Donations . . . . .	£478 16 6	Balance due Treasurer . . . . .	£10 9 3
Collections at Meetings . . . . .	13 9 5	Printing and Publications . . . . .	69 1 0
Publications Sold . . . . .	6 5 0	Expenses of Ninety-one Public Meetings . . . . .	202 5 7
		Expenses of getting up Petitions . . . . .	49 13 0
		Expenses of Secretary . . . . .	100 0 0
		Testimonial to Miss Beedy, in consideration of services rendered . . . . .	20 0 0
		Stationery, Postages, &c. . . . .	21 5 5
		Rent of Committee Room . . . . .	1 7 6
		Balance in Treasurer's hands . . . . .	24 9 2
	£498 10 11		£498 10 11



ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS AND DONATIONS DURING 1873.

Alston, Miss, Collected by .	£1 0 0	Friend, A . . . . .	£0 2 6
Anderson, Mrs G. G. . . . .	0 5 0	Friend, A . . . . .	0 1 0
Anderson, Mrs W. . . . .	0 5 0	Fullerton, Bailie . . . . .	0 10 0
Apthorp, Mr A. . . . .	0 2 6		
Armour, Mr H. . . . .	0 10 2	Gerard, Mrs . . . . .	0 5 0
Ashworth, Misses . . . . .	10 0 0	Gibson, Miss . . . . .	2 0 0
Auld, Miss . . . . .	0 2 0	Gibson, Mr . . . . .	0 5 0
		Gordon, Mrs Scott . . . . .	10 0 0
Bankhead, Mrs . . . . .	1 0 0	Gordon, Mrs . . . . .	0 2 6
Bartholomew, Miss . . . . .	5 0 0	Grace, Miss . . . . .	0 1 6
Black, Miss . . . . .	0 2 6	Gray, Mr A. F. . . . .	0 1 0
Blackie, Mrs . . . . .	1 0 0	Greig, Mr . . . . .	1 0 0
Brown, Mr . . . . .	0 2 6	Grieve, Mr D. . . . .	0 5 0
Brown, Mrs . . . . .	0 10 0		
Brownlie, Mr . . . . .	1 0 0	Haddington Committee . . . . .	1 0 0
Buchan, Countess Dowager of . . . . .	3 0 0	Henderson, Mrs D. W., Col. by . . . . .	1 0 0
Burnet, Mrs . . . . .	0 5 0	Henderson, Mrs . . . . .	0 2 6
Burrell, Miss . . . . .	0 2 6	Hodgson, Mrs . . . . .	1 1 0
Burton, Mrs Hill . . . . .	1 0 0	Hood, Provost . . . . .	0 5 0
		Hood, Mr J. . . . .	0 2 6
Caldwell, Messrs . . . . .	1 1 0	Hope, Mrs, of Drylaw . . . . .	2 0 0
Caldwell, Miss A. . . . .	1 0 0	Hope, Mrs, of Bordlands . . . . .	1 0 0
Caldwell, Mrs . . . . .	0 5 0	Hope, Miss, do. . . . .	2 0 0
Caldwell, Mr W. . . . .	0 10 0	Hope, Miss, Collected by . . . . .	0 11 4
Caldwell, C. C. . . . .	0 5 0	Hunter, Misses . . . . .	10 0 0
Campbell, Miss, Collected by . . . . .	1 2 6	H., Mr J. L. . . . .	0 5 0
Carfrae, Miss . . . . .	0 5 0		
Colquhoun, Mrs . . . . .	1 0 0	Inglis, Mr . . . . .	0 5 0
Craig, Misses . . . . .	12 0 0	Innes, Mr . . . . .	0 2 6
Craig, Mrs, . . . . .	0 5 0	Inverness, Provost of . . . . .	1 1 0
Crowe, Miss . . . . .	1 0 0		
Crichton, Councillor . . . . .	0 2 0	Jex-Blake, Miss . . . . .	5 0 0
Cross, Mr J. . . . .	0 10 0	Johnstone, Bailie . . . . .	0 2 0
Crudelius, Mrs . . . . .	1 0 0		
C. S. S. L. . . . .	1 0 0	Kemp, Mrs . . . . .	0 2 0
		Ker, Mrs . . . . .	0 2 6
Davidson, Mr Donald . . . . .	0 5 0	Kessen, Mr J. . . . .	0 2 6
Davie, Mr . . . . .	0 10 0	Kinnelmont, Mr Alex. . . . .	0 10 0
Davie, Mrs . . . . .	0 2 0	Kippen, Misses . . . . .	2 10 0
D. E. A. . . . .	0 2 0		
Dick, Miss . . . . .	1 0 0	Lade, Mr . . . . .	0 5 0
Dixon, Mr S. . . . .	0 10 0	Laidlaw, Miss . . . . .	0 10 6
Dodd, Mrs . . . . .	1 0 0	Lang, Mr . . . . .	6 10 0
Douglas, Mr W. . . . .	0 2 6	Lauder, Miss Dick . . . . .	2 0 0
Drew, Mrs . . . . .	0 10 0	Lawrie, Mr J. S. . . . .	0 10 0
Du Prè, Miss . . . . .	2 0 0	Lawrie, Mrs . . . . .	0 1 0
		Lillie, Mrs . . . . .	0 5 0
Eddington, Miss . . . . .	0 10 0	Livingstone, Mr Josiah . . . . .	0 10 0
		Lochgilphead, Collected at . . . . .	0 10 0
Ferguson, Mrs . . . . .	0 5 0	Lochwinnoch Committee . . . . .	1 0 0
Flint, Mr J. . . . .	0 10 6	Low, Mr and Mrs . . . . .	0 10 0
Forbes, Mrs . . . . .	0 2 0	Low, Mrs J. . . . .	0 2 0
Frazer, Miss . . . . .	0 2 6		
Friend, A, in Lancashire . . . . .	50 0 0	Marr, Mrs . . . . .	0 2 6
Friend, A . . . . .	1 0 0	Marshall, Bailie . . . . .	0 10 0
Friend, A . . . . .	1 0 0	Masson, Mrs . . . . .	3 3 0
Friend, A . . . . .	0 5 0	M'Adam, Mr . . . . .	0 10 0
Friend, A . . . . .	0 3 6	M'B., Mrs J. . . . .	0 3 0

M'Callum, Mrs . . . . .	£0 10 0	Richardson Mrs . . . . .	£0 1 0
M'Crae, Miss . . . . .	0 5 0	Ritchie, Mrs . . . . .	0 3 0
M'Culloch, Mrs . . . . .	1 0 0	Robson, Mr W. . . . .	1 0 0
Macdougald, Mrs . . . . .	0 5 0	Robertson, Mrs T. . . . .	0 10 0
M'Dougall, Mr . . . . .	0 2 6	Rose, Mr . . . . .	5 0 0
Macfadzen, Mr . . . . .	0 5 0	Ross, Mr J. . . . .	0 5 0
Macfie, Mr R. A. . . . .	3 0 0	R. B. . . . .	0 2 6
M'Gregor, Mr J. . . . .	0 2 6		
Mackenzie, Mr R. . . . .	0 5 0	Scott, Bailie . . . . .	20 0 0
M'Kinnel, Mrs . . . . .	1 0 0	Scott, Mrs . . . . .	0 5 0
M'Laren, Mrs . . . . .	30 0 0	Shephard, Mr W. . . . .	0 2 6
M'Laren, Miss Agnes . . . . .	5 0 0	Shennan, Rev. A. . . . .	0 2 0
M'Laren, Mr D., jun. . . . .	2 0 0	Simpson, Mrs . . . . .	0 2 6
M'Lardy, Mr . . . . .	0 5 0	Simpson, Mrs R. . . . .	0 2 6
M'Lelland, Mr . . . . .	0 2 6	Smith, Miss Ramsay . . . . .	1 0 0
Macleod, Mrs . . . . .	2 0 0	Smith, Miss M. . . . .	1 0 0
M'Micking, Mr . . . . .	0 5 0	Smith, Mr G. . . . .	0 2 6
M'Queen, Mrs . . . . .	6 0 0	Somerville, Mr R., . . . . .	0 2 6
Meikle, Mr J. . . . .	0 2 6	Spalding, Mrs W. . . . .	0 2 6
Meikle, Rev. G. . . . .	0 2 6	Spalding, Miss . . . . .	0 2 6
Mein, Mrs B. . . . .	0 10 0	Stevenson, Miss E. . . . .	19 13 0
Melrose, Mr . . . . .	0 10 0	Stevenson, Miss L. . . . .	10 0 0
Menzies, Mrs . . . . .	0 5 0	Stevenson, Miss F. . . . .	1 1 0
Menzies, Mr . . . . .	0 2 6	Stevenson, Mr A. S. . . . .	1 1 0
Millar, Mr and Mrs . . . . .	3 0 0	Stewart, Miss, Ashcraig . . . . .	0 10 0
Millar, Mr Whyte . . . . .	2 0 0	Stewart, Mr J. S. . . . .	0 2 6
Miller, Mr, London . . . . .	5 0 0	Stirling Committee . . . . .	0 18 0
Miller, Mrs . . . . .	2 0 0	Stoddart, Miss . . . . .	0 10 0
Milne, Mr J. D. . . . .	1 0 0	Stromness, Collected at . . . . .	0 4 6
Mitchell, Mr Joseph . . . . .	1 1 0	S., Mr. J. . . . .	0 2
Mitchellhill, Mrs . . . . .	0 1 0		
Moffat, Mr W. . . . .	0 2 6	Tait, Mr J. . . . .	0 5 0
Moore, Mr G. . . . .	0 5 0	Taylour, Miss . . . . .	5 0 0
More, Mrs . . . . .	0 3 0	Tennant, Mrs . . . . .	2 0 0
Morrison, Mrs Duncan . . . . .	3 0 0	Tennant, Mrs R. . . . .	0 2 6
Morrison, Mr . . . . .	0 10 0	Thomasson, Mr T. . . . .	100 0 0
Morrison, Mr Alex. . . . .	0 5 0	Thomson, Dr . . . . .	0 5 0
Morton, Mr . . . . .	5 0 0	Thomson, Mr T. . . . .	0 2 6
Mossman, Mr A. . . . .	0 10 0	Thorne, Mrs . . . . .	1 1 0
Mundy, Miss S. Massingberd . . . . .	0 10 0	Trevelyan, Mr A. . . . .	4 0 0
Murray, Provost . . . . .	1 0 0		
Murray, Sir John . . . . .	0 10 0	Ure, Mr James . . . . .	0 7 0
Murray, Mrs . . . . .	0 5 0		
Neill, Mr J. . . . .	0 3 0	Walker, Mr A. . . . .	0 2 0
Nelson, T., & Sons . . . . .	1 0 0	Walls, Miss . . . . .	1 0 0
Nichol, Mrs . . . . .	10 0 0	Walls, Mr . . . . .	0 10 0
Noble, Mr . . . . .	0 2 0	Walls, Mr James . . . . .	0 5 0
Norton, Hon. Miss . . . . .	10 0 0	Wallace, Mrs . . . . .	0 5 0
		Warren, Mr and Mrs . . . . .	1 11 6
Oliver, Mr J. S. . . . .	1 1 0	Wellstood, Mrs S. . . . .	1 10 0
Ord, Mr and Mrs . . . . .	2 0 0	Wellstood, Mrs J. . . . .	1 0 0
Orme, Miss . . . . .	0 2 6	Western, Mr P. . . . .	0 7 6
		White, Mrs . . . . .	2 0 0
Paisley Committee . . . . .	3 3 0	Whitelaw, Mr J. . . . .	0 5 0
Paterson, Bailie . . . . .	0 4 0	Wigham, Mrs . . . . .	1 0 0
Paton, Miss . . . . .	0 2 6	Wigham, Miss . . . . .	0 10 0
Paul, Mr M. . . . .	0 5 0	Wilson, Bailie . . . . .	0 10 6
Peat, Rear Admiral . . . . .	5 0 0	Wilson, Mr, Cowley Hill . . . . .	0 10 0
Peat, Bailie . . . . .	0 2 6	Wilson, Miss . . . . .	0 10 0
Peters, Mrs A. M. . . . .	0 10 0	Wright, Mrs, Collected by . . . . .	0 7 6
Porter, Mr M. . . . .	0 2 6	Wright, Mr J. . . . .	0 2 0
Port-Glasgow, Collected at . . . . .	0 3 6	Wright, Mrs . . . . .	0 2 0
		Wyld, Miss A. . . . .	0 7 6
Raleigh, Mr S. . . . .	2 0 0	W. N. . . . .	0 2 6
Renton, Mrs . . . . .	5 0 0		
Renton, Mrs J. H. . . . .	3 0 0	Yeaman, Mr, M.P. . . . .	1 0 0
Richardson, Mr J. . . . .	0 10 0	Young, Captain . . . . .	1 0 0

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# The Women's Advocate.

"Equity knows no difference of sex. The law of equal freedom applies to the whole race—female as well as male."—HERBERT SPENCER.

No. 1.

DUBLIN.

April, 1874.

## WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE.

It is a reproach to our Metropolis that the claims of women to a more positive legal status have not received a cordial recognition from our Press. Those claims are manifestly just in themselves; no valid argument has been produced against them; they are the claims of the weaker sex upon the stronger; and they appeal with especial force to the generous sentiments which are supposed to be inherent in our national character. There must surely be some cogent reason for this reluctance to support a cause which has so many weighty arguments upon its side. We are not aware of any ground for such reluctance, except, perhaps, the defective taste in which the rights of women have been sometimes championed by imprudent advocates. Now, granting that some over-zealous partisans have transgressed good taste in their platform utterances, is that a reason why our countrywomen should be defrauded of their just rights? We put this query frankly to every candid Irishman; is it right that women should be denied all participation in the blessings of self-government, because a few enthusiasts in the United States have been too emphatic in the assertion of their equality with men? This appears to be the substance of the issue between us. The moral right of properly-qualified women to some share in the enactment of the laws which they are required to obey, as well as in the imposition of the taxes of which they have to pay their full quota, is so clear that no plausible objection has ever been raised against it. If we were not led astray either by self-interest, or by prejudice, we could not hesitate for an instant as to the justice of their claim.

No doubt we hear it said that women degrade themselves by stepping out of their natural sphere of unobtrusive modesty, and *claiming* political privileges. Allow us to ask you,—are you in earnest in this objection? or is it only offered as an excuse for

your neglect of duty? If you are sincere in the expression of this opinion; if you are grieved to see so many of our best and noblest women "unsex themselves,"—as you affect to call it,—what have you done to prevent the necessity for their so demeaning themselves? Why have you not come forward, and insisted on their enfranchisement, before they were constrained to enter into the field of controversy on their own behalf? Is this in accordance with your conceptions of true chivalry? Do you seriously believe that so many of our accomplished women,—not a few of them brought up in the lap of luxury, and holding an honoured place among the brightest ornaments of our country,—have willingly subjected themselves to all this obloquy for the sake of any personal gain that will ever accrue to them from the privilege of dropping their voting-paper once every four or five years into the ballot-box? If you can give a moment's credence to so base a thought you certainly do not know them. They move in a sphere of exalted motive into which your coarser nature permits you not to enter. These ladies have been drawn,—may we not say *dragged*,—from the privacy of their firesides by an overpowering sense of duty, not merely to themselves, or their own sex, but even to the very men who scoff at their "want of delicacy." And it is a cowardly thing for any man to ridicule them for the public action which has thus been forced upon them against their inclination by *his* neglect of duty. It is your indifference to their just claims, that has constrained them to face the opprobrium which they foresaw would greet them, and which is often as painful to them as martyrdom would be to you. They are acting under a supreme sense of public obligation; and they may not shrink from the consequences however hard to bear.

We ask you, if you have any true chivalry of feeling, to come forward manfully, and assist them in their uphill battle. They assert their inalienable right to a voice in the enactment of the laws by which this great Empire is governed. They ask to be released from the vexatious restrictions which the unwisdom of our forefathers has placed upon the free development of their powers. They claim an equitable share of our educational appliances, so that ignorance may no longer disqualify them for the performance of their varied duties. They ask to be treated as reasonable beings, who are personally responsible for the talents which have been confided to their care. They feel that in the regeneration of the world they have a work to do which men are unable to perform. They do not despise their home duties; on the contrary, they wish to become more capable wives and mothers than their stunted education has ever yet

permitted them to be; but none the less do they desire to take an earnest part in the stirring movements which are going on around them. They want in fine to be true women in the highest meaning of the words,—thoroughly fitted to discharge the trusts which God has laid upon their shoulders, and which no restrictive legislation can annul. And they look to you for honest fellowship in the attainment of these aims. It is not a selfish battle they are fighting. Our whole future race will be blessed by everything which raises them in knowledge, in intelligence, in self-help, in capacity of every kind. This is the scope of their aspirations; and nothing less will satisfy them. Will you not assist them in their generous struggle?

At the present moment you may render them substantial help by giving a vigorous support to the "Women's Disabilities Removal Bill." The measure of enfranchisement contemplated by this Act may indeed appear small; nevertheless it will be of service in a variety of ways. It will concede the principle that women have a right to some direct participation in the legislation of the country. It will enable them to carry useful measures hereafter by making it for the interest of Members of the House of Commons to consult their wishes. And still more, perhaps, it will stimulate them in their efforts; it will assuage the sense of injustice under which they are smarting; and it will reward you with the consciousness that you are doing something to alleviate their burdens.

The object of this Bill is the extension of the Suffrage to the small number of women,—whether widows or spinsters,—who happen to be ratepaying householders; who possess property of their own; and whose ability to manage that property is sufficient guarantee of their capacity to give an intelligent vote. You will say, perhaps, that many of those householders do not seek enfranchisement. This is not improbable; there are plenty of men as well as women who from natural timidity are averse to every untried course. But then remember that while the Bill in question will enable such women to exercise self-government, if so disposed, it will not compel anyone to vote against her will; so that practically it will only affect those who are desirous of a vote. And on what principle can you deny them this just right? Because they do not wish for it? You cannot affirm this with any semblance of truth. There are thousands of women who are looking forward to the passing of this Bill with intense solicitude. During the last Session of Parliament more than three hundred thousand persons petitioned the House of Commons in its favour, by far the larger proportion of whom were probably women. Are the strenuous appeals

of these petitioners, repeated thus from year to year entitled to no respect? . . . Because it is *unwomanly*? Surely you are not sincere in this objection! Is it womanly to pay rates and taxes; to employ carpenters, masons, plumbers, when repairs are needed; to conduct the operations of a complicated business; purchase goods; provide for bills when due; take legal proceedings for the recovery of debts; with a hundred other details which women in this position cannot evade if they would maintain their families in honest independence? Do you not see that these objections are frivolous pretexts devised to excuse the hostility of those who are opposed to all reform? No one objects to the imposition of servile drudgery upon women, so long as power or privilege is not attached to its performance; it is not the degradation, therefore, but the attendant privilege, to which they except. It is time that men should renounce these sophistries, and perform an act of justice, the delay of which reflects no credit upon the chivalry of our generation.

There is another measure in which *Irishwomen* are especially interested, and in respect of which they look to you to redress a palpable wrong. Englishwomen who are ratepayers possess the *municipal* franchise; *our* countrywomen do not. This is surely an injustice to the latter. And Mr. Butt's Municipal Franchise Bill, the second reading of which will probably come before the House of Commons in a few days, will afford an opportunity for its correction. Provided the friends of Women's Suffrage *lose no time in writing to Mr. Butt and to their own Representatives*, entreating them to insist upon this act of reparation, there is considerable ground of hope that the present Session will witness its accomplishment. In itself the boon may be a small one, but as the practical recognition of a right its importance can hardly be overrated.

T. J. H.

Copies of this sheet can be obtained from Mrs. Haslam, 91, Rathmines Road, at sixpence per dozen, or one penny for a single copy. The second number, on "Methods of Action," is intended to appear in May.

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WISS 48806

## The Women's Advocate.

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No. 2.

DUBLIN.

May, 1874.

### METHODS OF POLITICAL ACTION.

MUCH cannot be expected from the present session of Parliament. Women and their friends must act with promptitude if they would accomplish any of the objects upon which they have set their hearts. A glance at the methods of action which lie nearest to their hands may not be unseasonable. It may assist, in some degree, in calling their resources into play, without needless waste of strength.

The first and most imperative condition of success is organization. Wherever three or four supporters of any women's cause reside, they should form themselves into a local Society, place themselves in communication with one of the central Associations, and procure THE WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE JOURNAL, THE ENGLISHWOMAN'S REVIEW, and other publications devoted to these interests. Women are proverbially weak; united effort is their mainstay in the wearisome struggle upon which they have entered.

Wherever such a branch Society exists, or wherever three or four such individuals reside, they should lose no time in petitioning the House of Commons in favor of the "Women's Disabilities Removal Bill," and such other legislative measures as they wish to actively promote. The efficacy of Petitions has no doubt been over-rated; they do not wield the magical powers with which they are sometimes credited; still they have their weight with Members of Parliament; and when the numbers swell to an aggregate of several hundred thousand, they exercise a potent influence on the public mind. During the session of 1873, more than three hundred thousand persons subscribed their names on behalf of the Disabilities Removal Bill. This is a telling fact for public meetings, and for the newspapers;—especially when it is remembered that nine hundred separate Petitions, from all parts of the Kingdom, were included in the array. The amount of energetic work embodied in these figures is at once seen to be

enormous, and the movement is felt to be an earnest one. There are two precautions, however, which it is well to keep in mind. The signatures of persons who are indifferent to a cause, and who only yield to importunity, are of no moral value; they throw a cloud of doubt upon the veracity of the fairest agitation, and they foster a spirit of unscrupulousness which is a source of weakness not of strength. And, again, petitioning should be a steady, not an intermitting effort. When signatures are allowed to fall away during successive years, through a relaxation of zeal in the collectors, observers infer that the cause is losing ground in that locality. Persistent steadiness of action from one year to another is the thing most wanted.

It is by the conversion of individual Members of the House of Commons, however, that the battle is to be won. If every woman-suffragist in the Three Kingdoms were to address a private letter to his (or her) Representatives, entreating them to give a strenuous support to the Disabilities Removal Bill, that measure would speedily become law. No stolid apathy, and scarcely any hostility, could resist such an onslaught. And there is no reason why every one who is able to put two sentences together should not adopt this course. We would recommend our readers to lose no time in testing its efficacy. It does not matter in the least degree how incorrect as literary compositions your communications may be; their force will not depend upon their syntax, but on the proof of earnestness which they supply. Your Representative may smile at your calligraphy, but by the time he has digested a score of such communications, warm from the pens of as many resolute constituents, he will feel that there is reality in a cause which inspires so much enthusiasm. Take the three hundred thousand petitioners of last year; suppose that even one-fourth of the number were to adopt this simple expedient; and try to picture to yourselves what the probable effect would be. On the average it would give a hundred separate appeals to every Member of the House,—or one every day for a period of three or four months. In the case of some of the larger constituencies they would reach a total of many hundreds. What opposition could resist this incessant stream of practical logic? It would be such a demonstration of political capacity as no intellect could withstand. And that is all that is now required in your case. You know that your demands are just; the only matter that is doubtful is your earnestness in their enforcement. If you once establish your sincerity to the satisfaction of your Representatives, the victory is achieved. And no Member can offer any reasonable objection to so constitutional a course. He has no legitimate function in the House except to

render service to his constituents and the country. We would strongly urge upon every reader of this sheet not to lose a day in making up his (or her) mind as to the Bills which he wishes to push forward, and to write at once to his Representatives, requesting their support, without reference to their political creed. They are bound, as honourable men, to do their duty by their constituents irrespectively of party considerations; and, unless their ears are open to such appeals, the House of Commons is not their rightful place.\*

A vigorous deputation to the Members is a still more forcible expression of opinion. Unfortunately, it involves far greater practical difficulties. Members are not always within reach; or you have no spokesman who can adequately state your case; or you cannot collect a sufficient number of influential friends at the proper time; but when you can surmount these obstacles, the result will amply repay the exertion. Whatever be their personal views, Members are never deaf to arguments enforced by an earnest body of constituents. They may not be immediately convinced by them, but they will reflect upon them at their leisure; and you may fairly expect that sooner or later the justice of your claims will dawn upon their minds.

Public Meetings, when practicable, are the most effective popular demonstrations. But they are feasible only in exceptional cases, and in somewhat large constituencies. In the first place, they cost too much money; a good meeting can seldom be called together in the smallest country town, and well reported, under an expenditure of five pounds. And then the difficulty of obtaining fluent advocates is at times insuperable. But when these and other obstacles can be surmounted; when either the local Association includes one or two ready spokesmen, or sufficient help can be procured from the Central Body, there is no other agency which is half so effective in rousing up the zeal of dependent sympathizers, or in forcing the consideration of the questions at issue upon an apathetic public.

Reverting to these various modes of operation, it will be seen that personal communications addressed to the individual Members of the House of Commons, are by far the promptest and most widely available. They have these immense advantages: they necessitate no waste of time, of money, or of effort; *you can write by this day's post if so inclined*; they are tolerably sure to reach their destination; and they will count for their full value with your Representatives. A similar course should be pursued with your local Press. A constant fire of telling

\* Where the Borough Representatives are already *sure*, this process of education should be brought into play with the County Members; and vice versa.

facts and paragraphs should be maintained. The subject should never be allowed to sink into oblivion. Every branch Committee should depute at least one qualified member for this work. A quick eye and a fluent pen are the chief requisites; literary finish is by no means indispensable. An apt practical illustration, or a few pithy figures, will often tell far more effectively than pages of faultless argument.

We are aware that these are elementary truths, but we are writing for the thousands of women to whom such teaching is the great desideratum. They have never addressed a public meeting; have never, perhaps, assisted at one in their lives; they are longing to take part in the movements in which their sex is so deeply interested; but they have not been taught the A B C of political action; and the simplest teaching is therefore what they need. With a little practice they will learn the measure of their own capacity, and will find out many other paths of service in which their zeal may usefully expend itself.

It is an old, but by no means obsolete, saying that nothing valuable can be purchased without sacrifice. We have occasionally met with individuals who, after a good deal of entreaty, would sign a Petition in favour of Women's Suffrage, or some other useful measure; but who would fall back so exhausted by the effort that they would need a twelvemonth's rest before they could repeat it; and yet the same men would write a score of letters in the day, provided they could make a few pounds by it. It is, perhaps, superfluous to remark that enthusiasm of this quality will never set the world on fire. Unless we are prepared to sign our names a hundred times within the year, should any righteous purpose seem to call for it; unless we are prepared to spend both time and money in the cause; we are not the stuff of which Reformers are made; we may make up our minds that we shall accomplish nothing.

T. J. H.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

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## The Women's Advocate.

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No. 3.

DUBLIN.

July, 1874.

### WOMAN-SUFFRAGE *versus* "THE SPECTATOR."

FOLLOWING in the track of Mr. Goldwin Smith, the *Spectator* has pronounced authoritatively upon Woman-Suffrage. And that pronouncement is substantially as follows. Women outnumber men. They are constitutionally gregarious; that is to say have an irresistible tendency to follow a common impulse in periods of excitement. If endowed with voting power they could not withstand the temptation to enact laws which would be repugnant to men, and which the latter, being physically stronger, would refuse to obey. Woman-Suffrage, therefore, would render stable government impossible. And, consequently, statesmen who prize good government will never grant it. Quod erat demonstrandum. Women will never obtain the franchise.

Now, personally, we attach some importance to the opinion of the *Spectator*. It is a journal of high aims, is conducted with conspicuous ability, and is a powerful organ of moderate Liberalism. It is not, however, infallible; and when it virtually assures us that the moral law must everlastingly remain in abeyance in the case of women; that in the interests of good government they must be held in political thralldom to the end of time; however highly we may esteem its sagacity, we feel constrained to demand some unequivocal proof of so extraordinary a thesis. We cannot accept so immoral a doctrine even upon *its* authority. We ask for proof of the most convincing kind; and, unless that proof be irresistibly cogent, we must abide by our ancient faith that the moral law will triumph in the end,—*Spectator*, and Goldwin Smith, and *Saturday Review* notwithstanding.

*Women outnumber men.* This is unhappily true of the United Kingdom, but is irrelevant to the question of Mr. Forsyth's Bill. The supporters of that measure are not at present asking that all women should have votes, but only that the few hundred thousand who are rate-paying householders should no longer be disfranchised because of their sex. But, waiving this objection, if women do outnumber men, what is the natural inference? That they may justly claim a large, not to say preponderating, voice in our legislation? Precisely the reverse, replies the *Spectator*. If they were only a minute fraction of our population they might have some title to the franchise; but as they constitute a numerical majority,

their claim is forfeit; they must submit to be governed by the less numerous, but stronger, sex. For, as he reminds us "man is the stronger when all is said"! And this is the argument on which a Liberal journalist relies as "the one unanswerable objection to female suffrage"!

*Women have an irresistible tendency to follow a common impulse.* This is the key-stone to the *Spectator's* whole position. Till this is proved, his argument that women cannot be trusted with the franchise has no validity. And neither he nor Mr. Goldwin Smith has produced any evidence to substantiate it. They do not point to any crisis in our history in which our countrywomen sacrificed their individual or family prepossessions to a common impulse. They do not specify a single instance in which women as a rule did not take sides with their fathers, and brothers, and husbands. As a matter of fact they assume the point at issue, and that for a very simple reason. So far as the United Kingdom is concerned, the bovine unanimity of which they make so much does not exist, and never has existed, outside of their own imagination. All through our history women have taken their political sentiments from their male relatives, and have never shown any disposition to combine for objects of their own. Their present struggle for electoral enfranchisement, so far from being a blind, unreasoning impulse, is the auspicious first-fruits of their awakening intelligence; and every true Liberal must rejoice to witness it.

*Women, if enfranchised, would enact laws intolerable to men.* As applied to the United Kingdom this is a marvellous prognostication truly. It is known to everyone that our countrywomen are as divided in their sentiments on all important subjects as human beings well could be; they are diverse in their nationality,—English, Irish, Scotch, and Welsh; they are at variance in their religious belief,—Anglican, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Wesleyan, Independent, Unitarian, Secularist, and what not; they stand upon different social planes,—noble, gentle, professional, mercantile, operative, &c.; their views upon every legislative topic are largely colored by their nationality, their religious belief, and their social status; and there is no conceivable question upon which they could be persuaded to make common cause, unless the object were supremely rightful. The notion, that in the closing decades of this Nineteenth Century, under the full blaze of free discussion, our whole female population could divest themselves of every inherited sentiment, and enter into an insane conspiracy to force distasteful laws upon their husbands, and sons, and brothers,—is so extravagant that we cannot comprehend how any balanced mind could give it credence. Is our oracle indulging in a solemn joke? Let us see how he strives to make good his apprehensions:—

"It may be quite true that women, who are the majority, are, on most points, as divided in opinion as men, but there are questions on which they are not so divided, and sooner or later some one of these questions would come up. Whether it was the kingship, as Mr. G. Smith thinks might be the case, women sympathising more strongly than men with a personal ruler; or the freedom of the press, *which most women at least hate, wanting journals always to agree with them*; or clericalism, or the relation of the sexes, or the liquor laws, it would come up, and would be settled according to the women's will. Then would the men submit? In all human probability no, any more than on certain questions they submit to women's opinion now, and their very first revolt would either make government ridiculous, too ridiculous to go on, or *the women would be disfranchised summarily by being slapped away from*

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*Women outnumber men.* This is unhappily true of the United Kingdom, but is irrelevant to the question of Mr. Forsyth's Bill. The supporters of that measure are not at present asking that all women should have votes, but only that the few hundred thousand who are rate-paying householders should no longer be disfranchised because of their sex. But, waiving this objection, if women do outnumber men, what is the natural inference? That they may justly claim a large, not to say preponderating, voice in our legislation? Precisely the reverse, replies the *Spectator*. If they were only a minute fraction of our population they might have some title to the franchise; but as they constitute a numerical majority,

their claim is forfeit; they must submit to be governed by the less numerous, but stronger, sex. For, as he reminds us "man is the stronger when all is said"! And this is the argument on which a Liberal journalist relies as "the one unanswerable objection to female suffrage"!

*Women have an irresistible tendency to follow a common impulse.* This is the key-stone to the *Spectator's* whole position. Till this is proved, his argument that women cannot be trusted with the franchise has no validity. And neither he nor Mr. Goldwin Smith has produced any evidence to substantiate it. They do not point to any crisis in our history in which our countrywomen sacrificed their individual or family prepossessions to a common impulse. They do not specify a single instance in which women as a rule did not take sides with their fathers, and brothers, and husbands. As a matter of fact they assume the point at issue, and that for a very simple reason. So far as the United Kingdom is concerned, the bovine unanimity of which they make so much does not exist, and never has existed, outside of their own imagination. All through our history women have taken their political sentiments from their male relatives, and have never shown any disposition to combine for objects of their own. Their present struggle for electoral enfranchisement, so far from being a blind, unreasoning impulse, is the auspicious first-fruits of their awakening intelligence; and every true Liberal must rejoice to witness it.

*Women, if enfranchised, would enact laws intolerable to men.* As applied to the United Kingdom this is a marvellous prognostication truly. It is known to everyone that our countrywomen are as divided in their sentiments on all important subjects as human beings well could be; they are diverse in their nationality,—English, Irish, Scotch, and Welsh; they are at variance in their religious belief,—Anglican, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Wesleyan, Independent, Unitarian, Secularist, and what not; they stand upon different social planes,—noble, gentle, professional, mercantile, operative, &c.; their views upon every legislative topic are largely colored by their nationality, their religious belief, and their social status; and there is no conceivable question upon which they could be persuaded to make common cause, unless the object were supremely rightful. The notion, that in the closing decades of this Nineteenth Century, under the full blaze of free discussion, our whole female population could divest themselves of every inherited sentiment, and enter into an insane conspiracy to force distasteful laws upon their husbands, and sons, and brothers,—is so extravagant that we cannot comprehend how any balanced mind could give it credence. Is our oracle indulging in a solemn joke? Let us see how he strives to make good his apprehensions:—

"It may be quite true that women, who are the majority, are, on most points, as divided in opinion as men, but there are questions on which they are not so divided, and sooner or later some one of these questions would come up. Whether it was the kingship, as Mr. G. Smith thinks might be the case, women sympathising more strongly than men with a personal ruler; or the freedom of the press, *which most women at least hate, wanting journals always to agree with them*; or clericalism, or the relation of the sexes, or the liquor laws, it would come up, and would be settled according to the women's will. Then would the men submit? In all human probability no, any more than on certain questions they submit to women's opinion now, and their very first revolt would either make government ridiculous, too ridiculous to go on, or *the women would be disfranchised summarily by being slapped away from*

*the polls*, till the law which entrusted them with the vote was repealed. In England there is scarcely a doubt the question brought up would be the Maine Law, which the whole body of lower-class women would welcome with delight; it would be settled their way, and the settlement would be resisted by a force against which soldiers, who would ardently sympathise with the men, could not be employed. The fabric of government would in fact fall to pieces just as much as it would if we had female police or female soldiery. Another and still stronger case is that of war. Women are much more ready for war than men." etc., etc.

Passing over the ill-concealed cynicism which flashes through the phrases that we have italicised, is it possible to imagine a more flagrant assumption of the argument? *The Kingship.* What question respecting the kingship would unite the working-women of our manufacturing towns with those of the upper classes,—in opposition to their own class feelings and traditions? *The freedom of the Press.* Would our Catholic women vote for a Protestant Censorship? Would our Nonconformists bow to an Anglican Expurgatorius? Would the Radicals of Yorkshire allow a bridle to be put upon their own free speech? *Clericalism.* What clerical interest,—Ritualistic, Evangelical, or Broad Church,—would array our Irish Catholics, the English Nonconformists, and the Scotch Presbyterians, on the same side with the undivided hosts of Anglicanism? Has the writer any distinct conception of what he means? *The relation of the sexes.* This is portentous phraseology, but what does it convey? How many women are there, belonging to any Christian communion in these islands, who would support a bill establishing unlimited freedom of divorce, or tampering with the sanctity of marriage? *The liquor laws.* Can the writer prove that any considerable number of our women are in favor of a Maine Law? We thought it was the Permissive Bill to which a section of them lean; and by a fundamental clause in that proposal, it cannot become operative in any district until two-thirds of the rate-payers are determined to enforce it. And lastly *War.* Women, it appears are more belligerent than men. But war implies an enemy; and will the *Spectator* name the power that our Amazons are burning to engage? *France?* What would Irish Ladies say to that? and remember Ireland sends a hundred members to the House of Commons. *United Germany?* Would Exeter Hall consent? *America?* There is hardly a matron in the Three Kingdoms who has not some dear personal friend in the United States. *Russia?* Our Russo-phobia has always been a male sentiment. In truth there is no manner of ground for the allegation that women are likely to goad us into hostilities with these or any other power. And this is the substance of the *Spectator's* plea! These are the chimeras on the strength of which this Bayard of the London Press would condemn the entire body of his countrywomen to permanent political extinction! Tell it not in Gath!

*Men would rebel against laws emanating from women.* It is not easy to reply seriously to such prognostications. Can this writer have forgotten that under our constitution women cannot obtain the franchise except with the approval of the majority of the male electorate; and that they are certain not to obtain it until a large proportion of that electorate are resolved that they shall. But the men who will attach so much importance to female suffrage will take good care that the franchise shall not remain a dead letter; but that whatever laws may be enacted in the interests of women shall receive as loyal an obedience as any others on the



Statute-book. It is not a question, therefore, whether our male population will submit to laws which have been passed by the representatives of our womanhood; such an issue would not arise in a hundred centuries; but whether a minute faction of political profligates will resist a statute which has received the sanction not merely of the female vote, but likewise of the great body of the conscientious and determined of their own sex. Is it not strange that so simple an issue should prove a stumbling-block to one of the acutest of our journalists?

There is a key to the mystery. Like the *Saturday Reviewer*, the *Spectator* has been led astray by his supercilious disbelief in women's common-sense. He takes for granted, as a thing of course, that they could not fail to exercise their power in silly and vexatious ways; and so blindly is his mind preoccupied by this ungracious prejudice, that he overlooks the most essential features of the case. A moment's reflection might have convinced him that, under our slow and cautious system of reform, women in preponderating numbers can never obtain the franchise until men are satisfied that power may be safely entrusted to them, or indeed until the political education of both sexes has advanced considerably. And, in like manner, a superficial glance at current movements would have shown him that the education which women are everywhere receiving is in the direction, not of *more*, but of *less* legislation; not of vexatious, but of equitable laws. Indeed a large share of their political action is directed towards the *repeal* of vexatious statutes; and all their more trusted leaders are on principle opposed to inter-meddling legislation. Can the editor be unaware that the "Vigilance Association," which is doing such excellent work in opposing the enactment of oppressive laws, and stirring up our torpid love of constitutional freedom, has been mainly due to female inspiration? That such women as Mrs. Butler, and Mrs. Fawcett, and Miss Becker, and Miss Wolstenholme, could ever countenance the sort of interference which he deprecates, is simply inconceivable; the supposition does not call for confutation.

What the *Spectator* needs is a more consistent faith in human character and motive. In his lower moods he would seem to have no belief in the justice or good sense of either sex. That men are lawless, and that women are fools, appear to be the final words of his philosophy. We cannot assent to either dictum. We have no sympathy with this political cynicism. We believe the time is drawing near when our countrymen will be incapable of withholding any one of their natural rights from their wives and daughters; and when our countrywomen will be as incapable of abusing them. And, in spite of present appearances, we cling to the hope that, at no distant period, the *Spectator* will be fighting our battle with that vigor and felicity of style which his bitterest critic must acknowledge are among his most striking characteristics.

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NATIONAL SOCIETY FOR WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE.

CENTRAL COMMITTEE.

OFFICE:—

294, REGENT STREET, LONDON, W.

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ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

PRESENTED AT THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING,

HELD AT

THE WESTMINSTER PALACE HOTEL,

July 6th, 1874.

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LONDON:

DUNLOP & CO. 7 & 8 NEW STREET, CLOTH FAIR, E.C.

1874.

# ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

CENTRAL COMMITTEE

OF THE

*National Society for Women's Suffrage,*

*Presented to the General Meeting, July 6th, 1874.*

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In presenting their Annual Report your Committee feel that they have reason to congratulate the Society on the advance of the movement. The Bill to remove the Electoral Disabilities of Women not having been voted on this year, only an approximate estimate of our strength in the House of Commons can be made, but the large number of new Members of Parliament who are understood to be favourable to the measure, and the interest in the question shown by the public during the recent elections, justify the statement that our position is better than it has ever yet been.

During the General Election candidates to Parliament were generally questioned by their constituents on the course they would take with regard to this measure, and many, either at that time or subsequently, gave a distinct promise to support it. The result of the elections has been that 161 members who have previously voted for the Bill in the House of Commons have been returned, and also 72 members who have newly declared themselves in its favour. Of these 31 are Scotch, 40 Irish, and 162 English members.

Among those gentlemen who have supported this measure are 15 members of the present Government, including the First Lord of the Treasury, the First Lord of the Admiralty, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Postmaster General, the President of the Board of Trade, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and the Lord Advocate for Scotland. 117 former opponents of the Bill have not been re-elected; your Committee have, however, to regret the loss of the services in the House of Commons of 77 of the former supporters of the Bill, either from having retired from Parliament, from being defeated in the elections, or other causes. Among these they have especially to regret the loss of Mr. Jacob Bright and of Mr. Eastwick, the mover and seconder of the Bill, who have, during four years, conducted it through five divisions in the House of

Commons, each year with steadily increasing support. They take this opportunity of recording their deep sense of the devoted exertions of these gentlemen on behalf of the measure.

On the meeting of the new Parliament, Mr. W. Forsyth, Q.C., M.P., undertook to bring forward a Bill to remove the Electoral Disabilities of Women. He was supported by Sir R. Anstruther, M.P., the Right Honourable Russell Gurney, M.P., and the Right Honourable J. Stansfield, M.P. Thus two Conservative and two Liberal Members gave their names to the Bill. Mr. Forsyth added a proviso to the Bill, and it now runs as follows:—

“Be it enacted by the Queen’s most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament Assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

“1. That in all Acts relating to the qualification and registration of voters or persons entitled or claiming to be registered and to vote in the Election of Members of Parliament, wherever words occur which import the masculine gender, the same shall be held to include females for all purposes connected with and having reference to the right to be registered as voters, and to vote in such election, any law or usage to the contrary notwithstanding.

“Provided that no married woman shall be entitled to vote in such election.”

A deputation from your Committee waited on Mr. Forsyth with reference to this addition, and he agreed to modify it as follows:—  
“Provided that nothing contained in this Act shall entitle any woman under coverture to be registered to vote at such election.”  
Your Committee, seeing that the proviso merely stated in plain terms what was understood to be the actual effect of the Bill as originally introduced, were of opinion that the addition of the proviso as amended formed no sufficient reason for withholding their support from the Bill.

The Bill was read for the first time on March 21st, and was set down for second reading on Tuesday, June 23rd; but this day, in common with other Tuesdays, has since been set apart for Government business. Owing to this postponement no division has yet taken place this year.

On April 23rd Mr. Chaplin, M.P. for Mid-Lincolnshire, gave notice of his intention to oppose the Bill.

The supporters of the enfranchisement of women have to regret during the past year the loss of several warm friends to the move-

ment, among these, your Committee would especially notice the death of Mr. Gore Langton, M.P., who had given the measure his earnest support both in the House of Commons and elsewhere; of Sir Joseph Cowen, M.P., who had also voted six times for the Bill; of Lord Marjoribanks, who, whilst he was in the House of Commons, was its consistent supporter; of Mrs. Robert Feast, who, as Miss Johnson, had been one of the earliest workers in the movement; and of Miss Mary Dowling, who was last year appointed secretary to your Committee, and whose short tenure of office gave reason to all connected with it to regret her loss.

Last of all, we have just received the intelligence of the death of a lady whose gifts and goodness added honour to the cause of which she was so enthusiastic a supporter, the late Viscountess Amberley, President of the West of England Branch of our Society.

Since our last Report, the number of Public Meetings and Lectures, which have been held in the United Kingdom, through the efforts of the various societies, have been above 200; of this number we may mention as the most important the meetings in the Free Trade Hall, Manchester; in Birmingham, Leeds, Huddersfield, Sheffield, Belfast, Bedford, Bristol, Cork, Derry, Exeter, Gloucester, Limerick, Waterford, and York. The Meetings more especially held through the efforts of your Committee and its Friends were 41 in number, namely,

Abingdon	Great Malvern	Sandown
Andover	High Wycombe	Shoreham
Aylesbury	Horsham	Southwich
Basingstoke	Ipswich	Southampton
Bedford	Lewes	St. Leonard’s
Bournemouth	Lymington	Stafford
Bow	Maldon	Stockwell
Chelmsford	Margate	Tunbridge Wells
Chelsea	Newport, Isle of Wight	Ventnor
Chichester	Poole	Winchester
Colchester	Portsmouth	Worthing
Christchurch	Peterfield	Wolverhampton
Dudley	Ramsgate	and
Dover	Ryde	Woolwich.

Resolutions have been adopted at all these Meetings in support of the Bill.

Numerous Petitions have been sent to Parliament in support of the Bill. Up to June 23rd, 1,270 Petitions (186 of which were signed officially) containing 389,412 signatures were presented. Of these 227 Petitions, containing 128,000 signatures, have been sent in, more especially by the friends and members of your Committee.

359 Petitions, containing more than 58,000 signatures, were sent from Scotland; and 176 Petitions, with over 15,000 signatures, from Ireland.

There have been three Petitions against the Bill, from the Town Councils of Elgin, Linlithgow, and Dundee; but, on the other hand, 26 Town Councils have petitioned for the measure, 14 of these being Scotch.

Although not strictly in connection with the work of your Committee, the fact of the presentation to Parliament of Memorials to Mr. Disraeli and Mr. Gladstone, signed by 18,000 women, deserves special mention. A Memorial, signed by 10,000 women of Scotland, has also been sent to Mr. Disraeli.

Your Committee have distributed during the past year the following pamphlets, among others:—

“Speech of Professor Fawcett, M.P., April 30th, 1873.”

“Speech of Jacob Bright, Esq., M.P., April 30th, 1873.”

“Ought Women to Learn the Alphabet?” by T. W. Higginson.

“Right of Women to Exercise the Elective Franchise,” by Mrs.

H. D. Pochin, (reprint.)

“Woman’s Political and Social Rights,” by John Scott, (presented by the author.)

“Opinions of the Press,” (leaflet.)

“Opinions of Women,” (leaflet.)

“Household Suffrage for Women,” (leaflet.)

Your Committee felt the necessity of having larger offices in a more central position, and have therefore removed to 294, Regent Street, (Langham Place.)

Your Committee wish to point out the great extent of the work accomplished, as compared with the amount subscribed for its accomplishment. That so much has been possible is owing to the persevering and efficient help given by the many zealous friends of the movement, and your Committee confidently trust that this help will be continued during the coming year; at the same time they must urgently remind you of the vital importance of an ample fund with which to carry on and to extend operations. And they once more appeal to those who are interested in the movement to further it by inducing their friends to become contributors to the funds of the Society. Your Committee heartily thank those who have so liberally aided them, but further efforts are needed, and they wish earnestly to impress upon their friends the necessity of increased exertions, not only in this, but in all ways, to carry this movement to a triumphant close.

## National Society for Women’s Suffrage.

### CENTRAL COMMITTEE.

#### Receipts and Payments from June 20, 1873, to June 18, 1874.

Dr.	RECEIPTS.			
	Ledger Folio.	£	s.	d.
From Balance in Bank .....		240	9	7
“ “ “ Petty Cash.....		20	0	0
		260	9	7
“ Donations .....	9	1,037	5	6
“ Subscriptions.....	121	149	16	0
“ Sale of Publications .....	275	15	11	4
“ Rent from Berner’s Club .....	349	5	0	0
“ Reserved Seats at Meetings.....		0	13	0
“ Ditto, not passed through Bank.....		2	17	9
		1,211	3	7
		£1,471	13	2

EXPENSES.				Cr.
	Ledger Folio.	£	s.	d.
By Grants to Local Committees.....	156	50	0	0
“ Election Expenses.....	42	268	10	11
“ Expenses of Provincial Meetings, including salaries of organising agents and special advertisements .....	362	350	13	5
“ Payments to Agents in London, Berkhamstead, Southampton, Reading, Portsmouth, Maidstone, Canterbury, Guildford, Windsor, Woolwich, Greenwich, Rugby, Wycombe, and other places .....	172	263	16	7½
“ Women’s Suffrage Journal and Newspapers .....	224	19	4	5½
“ Expenses of Annual Meeting (1873)...	252	5	5	0
“ Printing .....	280	125	15	6
“ Postage, Carriage, Telegrams, and Omnibuses .....	130	39	3	3½
“ Salaries of Secretary and Assistants..	4	171	14	7
“ Rent of Office (to Lady-day) .....	350	62	10	0
“ Stationery and Office Books .....	88	17	0	7½
“ Coals, Gas, and Attendance.....	200	6	3	0
“ Subscriptions returned.....	308	2	2	0
		1,381	19	5
“ Balance in Bank .....		68	15	11
“ “ Petty Cash .....		29	0	0
“ “ Fund for payment of agents .....		0	17	10
		89	13	9
		£1,471	13	2

Vouchers examined and Balance found Correct,

H. HAY HILL,

Auditor.

2nd July, 1874.

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

*Of the Central Committee, held at the Westminster Palace Hotel, on  
Monday, July 6th, 1874, at 3 P.M.*

Mr. W. FORSYTH, Q.C., M.P., in the Chair.

The Secretary read the Report of the Executive Committee, and Statement of Accounts.

### THE CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS.

RESOLUTION I.—Moved by the Rt. Hon. J. Stansfeld, M.P., seconded by Miss Frances Power Cobbe, supported by Lord Talbot de Malahide and Jacob Bright, Esq. :—

“That this Meeting adopt the Report and Financial Statement just read, and direct that they be circulated.”

RESOLUTION II.—Moved by Mrs. McLaren, seconded by Miss Isabella Tod :—

“That the Executive Committee for the ensuing year consist of the following persons\* and of delegates, the same being members of Local Committees, appointed by Local Associations to represent them.”

RESOLUTION III.—Moved by Miss Caroline A. Biggs, seconded by Miss Sturge, and supported by Miss Becker :—

“That this Meeting offer cordial thanks to Mr. Forsyth, Sir Robert Anstruther, Mr. Stansfeld, and Mr. Russell Gurney, for introducing a measure to remove the Electoral Disabilities of Women, and pledge themselves to support their further efforts by every means in their power.”

RESOLUTION IV.—Moved by Miss Reeves, seconded by Miss Liliashworth :—

“That the thanks of this Meeting be given to Mr. Forsyth for presiding on this occasion.”

\* For List of Executive Committee, see pages 11—13.

*Office of Central Committee,—294, REGENT STREET, LONDON, W.*

*Treasurer,—ALFRED W. BENNETT, ESQ., M.A., 6, PARK VILLAGE EAST, N.W.*

*Bankers,—LONDON AND WESTMINSTER BANK, 217, STRAND.*

*Secretary,—MISS HELEN BLACKBURN.*

## ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS AND DONATIONS.

	Annual Subscriptions.	Donations.
Addison, Mrs. Chathill	0 5 0	
Allen, Miss, Tenby		5 0 0
Amos, Professor and Mrs. Sheldon, Barnet	1 1 0	
Anderson, Mr. and Miss, London	0 5 0	
Arnold, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur	2 2 0	
Ashurst, W. H., Esq.		5 0 0
Ashworth, the Misses, Bath		100 0 0
Babb, Miss C. E., London	1 1 0	
Babb, John Staines, Esq., London	1 1 0	
Baines, Miss, Yalding	0 5 0	
Banks, J. C., Esq., London	0 5 0	
Banks, Rev. R., Scarborough	1 1 0	
Barry, Mrs., Sydenham	0 2 6	
Bastard, T. H., Esq., Charlton Marshall	1 0 0	
Bayne, Miss, London	0 2 6	
Bayley, Edric, Esq., M.A.	1 1 0	
Bennett, A. W., Esq., M.A.	1 1 0	
Benham, Mrs., Colchester	0 10 0	
Benham, James, Esq., London		1 0 0
Biggs, Joseph, Esq., London	1 1 0	
Biggs, Miss Ashurst	1 1 0	
Biggs, Miss C. A.	1 1 0	
Bird, Miss Lucy	0 5 0	
Blackburn, Mrs., Southport		100 0 0
Blackburn, Miss, London	0 5 0	
Bolton, Mrs., Terquay	0 5 0	
Bonus, Miss, Penge	0 5 0	0 2 0
Bostock, Miss, London	1 1 0	
Boucherett, Miss L.	2 0 0	
Bowring, Lady, Exeter		1 0 0
Briggs, Miss, Cheltenham		0 10 0
Brooke, Rev. Stopord A., M.A., London	1 1 0	
Brooke, Miss Edith, Honley		10 0 0
Brown, Samuel, Esq., F.R.G.S., London	1 0 0	
Browne, Mrs. S. W.	4 0 9	
Browne, Miss		0 10 0
Bruce, Mrs.	1 1 0	
Bunting, Mr. and Mrs. Percy	1 1 0	
Burr, T. A., Esq.	0 5 0	
Burr, Mrs. T. A.	0 5 0	
Canning, Hon. Emmeline		1 0 0
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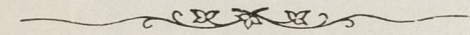
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15548867  
Justice and Co-operation for Women,

✓ By a LADY RATEPAYER OF HASTINGS.



We Women wish to have a Voice in the National Affairs because all our property and houses are taxed in exactly the same manner as those which belong to men.

We try to understand politics, and believe that the justice we claim will be granted to us.

Some of the laws affect us especially. Women, as a class, must be the best judges of their own interests. Let us then unite in trying, by all fair means, to obtain a voice in the Election of Members of Parliament, who make the laws.

Is it fair and just, that un-married women and widows should be turned out of farms, inns, &c., simply because they have no vote to give their landlord?

Is there justice in punishing wife beating very lightly, and poaching or picking pockets severely?

Is it right that the charities of public schools should be spent entirely on boys, to the exclusion of girls?

Let each woman know that she can help this just cause by signing her name to all petitions asking parliament to grant the privilege of a vote to women, and by educating her mind, that she may know how to use the power of voting when granted, for the good of herself, her neighbours, and her country.

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# W H Y

## Do Women Householders want to Vote for Mem- bers of Parliament?

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1. Because Women have no power to alter hard or unjust laws which they are forced to obey: Men have power to do so, by their vote.
  2. Because it is impossible that Men (however good) can make wise laws for Women, without asking their opinion.
  3. Men householders have votes because they pay taxes. Women householders pay taxes, and therefore ought to have votes.
- 

*Let those who agree with the above sign a petition in favour of Women having the Parliamentary Vote, and beg their neighbours to do the same. This is the very best way of helping to obtain the Vote.*

W15548892

# WOMAN SUFFRAGE:

A REPLY.

BY

✓ J. E. CAIRNES, LL.D.,

EMERITUS PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL ECONOMY IN UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, LONDON.

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## WOMAN SUFFRAGE: A REPLY.

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

"Who drives fat oxen should himself be fat."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

THE END.

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# SEVENTH ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

OF THE

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