

WOMANHOOD SUFFRAGE
A REVIEW OF OBJECTIONS.

I. THAT GRANTING THE SUFFRAGE TO WOMAN WOULD INAUGURATE A "TREMENDOUS SOCIAL REVOLUTION"

It is constantly asserted that giving the ballot to woman would occasion terrible social upheaving; that it would be a risk, a dangerous experiment, the disastrous results of which it is impossible to predict. It naturally strikes one as a little singular that while it is perfectly safe to trust man with the whole power, it should be so unsafe to trust woman with half of it. If women were an ignorant or degraded class of people, unable to read the Constitution of their country, or incapable of comprehending the appreciating the spirit of its institutions, or if they were a violent or turbulent class, among whom the criminal element largely preponderated, there might be some grounds of apprehension. But since they are not, as a class, less intelligent, refined and conscientious than those, in the church, in the family, in literature, in every department of human activity into which she has thus far been admitted, is universally acknowledged to have been elevating and refining. Why the State should prove an exception to this general rule, though frequently asserted, has never yet been shown. Until this is done we must conclude that the element of danger, so greatly apprehended, cannot exist in the nature of the new power which it is proposed to introduce. It must, then exist in the supposed fact that duties hitherto performed would suffer from neglect. Let us see whether this would be the case. How large a proportion of woman's time will be consumed in exercising the duties of the franchise? And what important duty will she neglect in doing it? Voting is not, as many seem to imagine, a trade, a profession, which absorbs the entire time, to the neglect of the daily duties of life. If it were so a republican government would be impossibility. The mechanic, in voting, does not neglect his workshop, the merchant his counting-room, nor the farmer his fields. Neither would woman forsake the kitchen and the nursery. The duties of a husband and father in providing for his family are as numerous as those of the wife and mother in her position as housekeeper. Yet experience teaches that the exercise of his duties as a citizen do not interfere with them. Neither would woman's interfere with her home duties.

The time consumed in voting varies, according to circumstances, from half an hour to – possibly, in the rural districts – half a day, not oftener than once a year. This is less than one hundredth part of the time employed in attending church. Yet who ever thought of forbidding woman to observe the outward ordinances of religion, on the plea that her home duties would suffer thereby?

But it is said that much time must necessarily be consumed in reading the papers, and in preparing for the intelligent exercise of the franchise. To this we reply that the majority of intelligent women already read sufficiently to know with which party they sympathize upon all important subjects; and those who do not ought to find time to do so. Whether she ever possesses the franchise or not, it is most emphatically woman's duty to thoroughly understand public questions, so that her influence in society, in the family,

and especially in the rearing of her sons, shall be wise and judicious. In no other department is the influence of Christian womanhood more urgently needed than in political life. In positions of high trust, where a man may be a great public benefactor, or where he may sacrifice his nobler impulses, and devote himself to a selfish and corrupt ambition, the influence of woman is a power for good or evil. An ignorant, frivolous, selfish woman, with no thought or care beyond what is erroneously called "her sphere," would be a bane and a blight, while an earnest, thoughtful, intelligent woman would be an inspiration. A woman neither knowing nor caring for principles or measures, desirous only of the political advancement of husband, brother, or son, is a power dangerous to the State. Ignorance is always dangerous. So that, vote or no vote, the study of questions of national importance is so plainly woman's duty, that any other duties conflicting with them must be of the most grave and serious character, to claim the precedence. What are these "duties, cares and responsibilities," the neglect of which would cause society to fall in pieces and bury us all in its ruins? Ostensibly they are staying at home and keeping the household in order, darning the husband's stockings, mending his shirts, rocking the cradle, and training the infant mind. Really they are making bows and pincushions, crocheting tidies, going to parties and operas, eating ice cream in the middle of the night, studying fashion-plates, and holding long consultations with milliners and dress-makers, constructing frills and flounces, quilling, pleatings, bias folds, panniers, double skirts, ruffles, and similar devices of the enemy too numerous to mention, but which wear out woman's life, strength and patience, without in the least increasing her influence, or adding to her usefulness to society. Booking the cradle and moulding the infant mind do not consume nearly as much time as is generally supposed. Children over seven years of age are usually sent to school, and so are away from home a greater part of the day; and with her foot on the cradle, where there is a cradle, the mother can read the newspaper far better than the father can do so while plowing in the field, or casting up accounts at his store.

It is not the real, actual, necessary duties of home life that so completely absorb woman's time and attention, that she can give no thought to subjects of public interest. It is the unnecessary and superfluous requirements of fashion. The majority of wives and mothers – to say nothing of single women – throughout the land, make, themselves, a large portion of their own wardrobe, and that of their families. The construction of a modern dress is almost equal, in labor and intricacy, to the building of a ship. First, the various styles of architecture must be studied, grave and solemn discussions held, till, finally, the garment is planned. Then follows the mechanical execution, a work not of days, but weeks. If this were the last of it, and the dress thus constructed might be put on and worn till it were worn out, all the labor of its construction could be cheerfully and easily endured. But each returning season brings new styles, when all this delicate and complicated mechanism must be picked in pieces and put together again in some other way. The deep flounces of one year must be taken off and cut into half a dozen little ones and put on again, the next year; and then scarcely have the little flounces shown themselves in fashionable society before they are out of date, and must be made up into flutings, and then the flutings give place to bias folds, and the bias folds to box pleats, and the box pleats to something else, in endless succession. Of all the devices of the adversary to divert woman from her true duties, nothing is more utterly absurd and at the same time more completely successful than that of inducing her to take all her dresses to pieces and put them together again every few months. Yet this is a thing which is actually being done by

multitudes of conscientious Christian women throughout the country, who really believe they are doing God service.

To illustrate the amount of unnecessary labor which women perform, it is only necessary to allude to the fact that less than half a century ago sewing machines were unknown, while now one is found in nearly every household, yet with this great invention for saving labor, woman's burdens are not a whit decreased. The additional time gained is employed in the manufacture of a greater profusion of garments, trimmed in a more elaborate manner than before. Now society existed and flourished, men wooed and won, women married and were given in marriage, and households were happy, fifty years ago. Is it not, then, reasonable to believe that civilization would survive the shock of a return to simple styles? With the time which the sewing machine and moderation in dress would give woman, she might with far less labor and weariness prepare herself for the duties of intelligent citizenship. As a matter of conscience and duty, would not Christian women better serve God by taking an interest in the active, vital questions of the day, questions which affect the family, society, philanthropy and religion, than by striving to outdo their neighbors in the extent and elaborateness of their wardrobe, and that of their family? What else than this does "renouncing the world" and "espousing the cause of Christ" mean?

Among the wealthier class of women, who are able to hire most of their sewing, many either have abundant leisure, which they know not how to employ, or spend their time in a round of fashionable dissipation injurious to both body and mind, and productive of no possible good to society. These women, who are not necessarily frivolous or hollow-hearted, might be made a power for good, if led to think and act earnestly.

Others of this class are engaged in works of benevolence. But without a broad and liberal intelligence their charitable efforts would be rather an injury than a benefit to the community. Understanding, then, subjects of State and national interest, as every woman should do, casting the ballot is but the work of a moment.

The duty of filling offices of public trust is one which – as in the case of men – would fall on comparatively few; so few that capable single women, or women with families already reared, would abundantly supply them.

Therefore, since woman is not a dangerous element in society, and since she need neglect no real duty in exercising the right of suffrage, it is impossible that giving her the ballot would inaugurate any such "tremendous social revolution" as is predicted.

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