

WOMANHOOD SUFFRAGE. – No. 6
A REVIEW OF OBJECTIONS

THAT WOMAN'S INFLUENCE IS ALREADY SO GREAT A POWER THAT SHE NEED DESIRE NO OTHER

The influence of clergymen, editors, and authors, is also a great power, yet the ballot is not withheld from them in consequence. The lack of influence has never been made a qualification at the polls – influential men being refused the ballot, and only those possessing little or no influence being allowed to vote. Such a policy would at once shut out the most intelligent class of citizens in the country, and throw the government into the hands of those least capable of administering it. If the influence of woman is already great and good, as we are told, this very fact is an argument in favor of granting her the suffrage, that it may be more widely extended. If she has already purified the home, society, and literature, let her now perform the same office for the government. Whether woman needs the ballot or not, the ballot needs her.

But woman *does* need the ballot. The "silent home influence of woman," so often eulogized by poets and romancers, is a subtle, variable and uncertain thing. The women who possess the greatest social influence are those who need it least for the protection of their interests. They are the young and beautiful, and especially those belonging to the wealthier and most highly-favored classes, and those with kind, devoted husbands, fathers and brothers. The poor working women, the widows and orphans, whose faces are worn with care and anxiety, and whose clothing is plain and meager, possess little of this influence. These are they who need the protection of the ballot. Although social influence is a great power, it is too changeful and capricious, and too unequally and arbitrarily distributed, to be relied upon as a substitute for the more just and impartial power of the suffrage.

THAT THE BALLOT WILL BE OF NO ASSISTANCE TO WORKING WOMEN

It is frequently objected that the suffrage would be of no assistance to working women, since wages are not regulated by the ballot. It has even been asserted that, the suffrage would be prejudicial to their interests, although no reasons for this singular theory are given, and it still remains an unsolved problem why that which is a benefit and protection to the laboring man should not be equally such to the laboring woman.

It is true that, as a rule, wages are not affected by the ballot. To this rule, however, there is one important exception. This is in the case of government employes. While woman has already found employment, to a certain extent, in positions within the gift of the government, and while in a creditable number of cases justice is now done her, still it is obviously true that the ballot in her hand would secure for her many other suitable openings, and a surer and prompter justice. That as a matter of fact the best offices are given to voters, is too well known to be disputed. Many of these offices could be quite as well filled by women as by men, and the result would be a relief to departments of female industry now overcrowded. This is one way in which the ballot would aid working women.

The vast army of women in public schools would also be aided by the ballot. Their salaries are appointed by officers, chosen, either directly or indirectly, by the suffrages of the people. If the women public school teachers had a voice in the election of these officers, that voice would doubtless be given

for the candidate pledged to secure them justice. The probability is that candidates would vie with each other in their promises to this numerous class of voters, and that self-interest would cause them to fulfill their promises. Here, then, is another class of working women who would be benefited by the ballot.

Superintendents of the poor are elected by the direct suffrages of the people. In many cases they are more or less influenced in the distribution of the public charities by a regard for their own personal interests. If they desire to retain their office they will show consideration for a man with a vote, while a woman without one will be neglected. An instance of this came to the knowledge of the writer some time since. During an unusually severe winter, an honest and hard-working washerwoman, with a family depending upon her for support, became enfeebled by privation and exposure, and was unable to provide adequately for their comfort. She was advised, and finally persuaded, to apply to the superintendent of the Poor, for supplies of coal. Notwithstanding repeated statements of her case, she received no assistance, while a perfectly healthy and able-bodied man, her neighbor, who did little or no work through the winter, was abundantly supplied. The reason of this was that the man could vote the Superintendent into office again, and the woman could not. A lady employer, to whom this poor woman confided her trouble, visited the public functionary in question, herself, to urge his special attention to the case. A polite promise, which was never fulfilled, was the result. This is but one of many instances where not only "the silent home influence of woman," but even the speaking and visiting influence, were unavailing, when a vote in the hand would have been all powerful.

In many ways, less directly, the ballot is a protection to working women. If an employer aspires to public office or has a special interest in any political measure, how considerate will he be of the interests of those of his employes who hold a ballot! He will see justice and mercy where he never saw them before, and will be so gentle and amiable that the spectacle will be both edifying and refreshing!

The necessary reading, thinking and investigating which the exercise of the franchise would involve, will be another benefit to working women. Ignorance is always a great disadvantage to the worker. Intelligence and thought, a knowledge of the laws and institutions of the country, would not only qualify her for more valuable service, but would enable her to guard her interests more wisely and effectively. Working women, it is true, have less time than women of wealth and leisure, for the investigation of such subjects as shall qualify them for the intelligent use of the franchise. The same may be said of working men. In either case, however, the few precious moments of leisure daily, or hourly, would be spent to far greater advantage to them, as well as to the State, in the intelligent reading of the newspapers, than in gossiping, or poring over sensational literature.

Political power is always an assistance to those who hold it, in securing their objects. In proof of this we have only to observe, in the movements of political parties, the modifications which are constantly being made in their platforms, to conciliate "the German vote," "the Irish vote," or the "working man's vote." If it were necessary also to conciliate the woman's vote, can anyone doubt that her interests would be more studiously and anxiously consulted than they have ever been before?

THAT WOMAN DOES NOT DESIRE THE BALLOT

Without resorting to the ballot it is impossible to ascertain whether the majority of women desire it or not – a conclusive argument in its favor! Since it would be "unjust and oppressive" to "thrust" the ballot into unwilling hands, and since it would be equally unjust to withhold it if a majority of women desire it, nothing remains but to submit the question to a popular vote of the women of the country. If they decide in favor of the suffrage, so be it! If against, an important precedent will have been established;

for if one political question affecting the interests of women may be submitted to them for decision, why not another, and another, and all? And this would be womanhood suffrage!

Those men who say, "We are willing the women should vote if they want to," virtually concede the whole principle which they imagine themselves opposing. They unconsciously acknowledge the justice and the expediency of woman deciding, herself, upon public questions affecting her interests. This is all that the most radical of us have ever asked.

Lavinia Goodell