

## MRS. CREIGHTON'S APPEAL.

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[Mrs. Creighton is the wife of the Bishop who has recently been translated from the diocese of Peterborough to that of London. She is noted for her executive ability, as well as her literary talent. Her History of France and England and her historical biographies are well known. The following extracts are taken from her article on Female Suffrage in the Nineteenth Century :]

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The advocates of female suffrage seem to labor under two delusions : First, that the vote is a good in itself ; and, secondly, that change is necessarily progress, and must be welcomed, at any price, by all who do not wish to remain hopelessly behind. Mrs. Ashton Dilke, indeed, acknowledges that the vote is not an end in itself, but only a means to an end. But she does not say to what end ; she only says that, without a vote, we "risk the loss of all those improvements in the position of our sex" which have been obtained. Such a statement implies a hostility between the sexes from which society seems to be happily free ; and it is not easily to believe that the day will ever come when men will take away from women what has been proved to be good both for them and for the whole community. There is surely no need to feel that we have won a position from an active foe, which we must maintain at the risk of our lives.

The vote is supposed to have a certain magical power. Mrs. Dilke even knows why it was originally given, and when she says that the vote "was certainly originally intended to give effect to the opinions of the quiet orderly citizen instead of leaving power in the hands of the strong and warlike," she has solved a problem which has long baffled the ingenuity of the constitutional historian. The attitude of many of the advocates of female suffrage seems to suppose an ideal woman, working side by side with an ideal man in an ideal system of politics. But we have to do with realities ; there is a great deal of work to be done, and the practical question is how to do it. It has yet to be proved that giving women the vote will enable them to do better in the future the work which they have neglected in the past.



There is no magic about the vote ; it is merely a necessary part of the machinery of government. The act of voting is not, as some would wish to make it, the chief way in which the individual can share in the work of the State for the good of all. The question is not whether women are not as qualified to vote as men. We are very tired of the rich and cultivated lady who may not vote whilst her coachman may. If the vote was the privilege of the wise and the educated, many women might justly claim it. But it is the propelling power of a part of the machinery of government which has always belonged to one sex.

The present organization of society offers an abundant field for the energies of women. The fields are white for the harvest, and the reapers are few. The pursuit of female suffrage as the first aim offers a wrong ideal to women ; the desire to play an active part in politics make them neglect their own work. It is perfectly true that women in the last few years have formed political organizations for the purpose of influencing public opinion ; but many of them regard such organizations as only a temporary nature, justified by a period of exceptional difficulty. I am not concerned with defending the wisdom or expediency of such societies ; but it is no discredit to those who have joined them if they frankly admit that their experience of the results of their activity does not make them wish to extend it universally. There is much to be said for women discussing amongst themselves political and social questions, investigating points concerned with the labour and education of women, and suggesting grievances to be remedied. Their formulated opinion will be sure to meet with respectful attention. But the more women stand apart from the machinery of party organization, the more weighty and influential will be the expression of their opinions.

The more women take an active part in politics the more considerations of sex will be used as one of the means of obtaining political influence. We may try to change society, we cannot change nature ; sex will remain. The advocates of female suffrage, indeed, speak of women as a class, and as such demand that they be represented in Parliament. We answer that they are not a class but a sex, and that our representative system knows nothing of classes as such. We urge that women should be content to continue working side by side with men, possessing their own duties and their own opportunities. We think that the questionable advantage of a direct representation of such interests as women may be supposed to have made peculiarly their own, would be dearly bought by an experiment which would shake the very basis of human society.

The present need is that women should do their own work better. For the married and the mothers the path is comparatively plain, but no one could say that they have yet risen to a full sense

of their responsibilities in training useful members of the community. For those who, from circumstances or choice, are compelled to carry on their struggle alone the opportunities of doing useful work are unlimited. I am not speaking now of paid work ; there the question is more difficult, and the possession of the franchise would not solve it. But the community can never have too large a number of devoted and unselfish workers in every line. The women who show their capacity for such work never fail to get it. But women need to train their practical abilities, to show their capacity. We want more women guardians, more women on school boards, more women who will investigate the existing conditions of society. What the future may need we cannot say, and it would be rash to say that the time may not come when in an ideal political system the ideal woman may work side by side with the ideal man.

The power of woman's influence cannot be measured. When I speak of influence, I do not mean a conscious, definite desire to guide another in some particular direction, but the effect produced upon man by a nature which he believes to be purer, nobler, more unselfish than his own. Sex is a fact—no act of Parliament can eliminate it—and woman, as woman, must be a power for good or evil over man. In her hands rests the keeping of a pure tone in society, of a high standard of morality, of a lofty devotion to duty in political life.

It is given her to make or mar a man's life ; she may not care for the power—she may wish she did not possess it ; but she cannot escape from its responsibilities. Would not the wise course be, to try to make herself such a woman that her influence may lift all those with whom she comes in contact ? She need not have wealth or position to do this. Beside the struggling, toiling women are struggling, toiling men ; each lonely worker is a power in her little sphere ; she will be a greater power if she is not struggling for her rights, but is trying to live her own life nobly and unselfishly.

Mrs. Dilke says that we who do not want the vote are like those who will not open the door to go into a concert hall to hear beautiful music, but content themselves with the faint echoes that reach them through the windows. We might retort by saying that those women who, not content with what they have, still demand the franchise, are like those who, deaf through misfortune or their own fault, stand within the concert hall but cannot hear the music.