

Woman Question

*Should We Ask  
for the Suffrage?*

*By*

*Mrs. Schuyler Van Rensselaer.*

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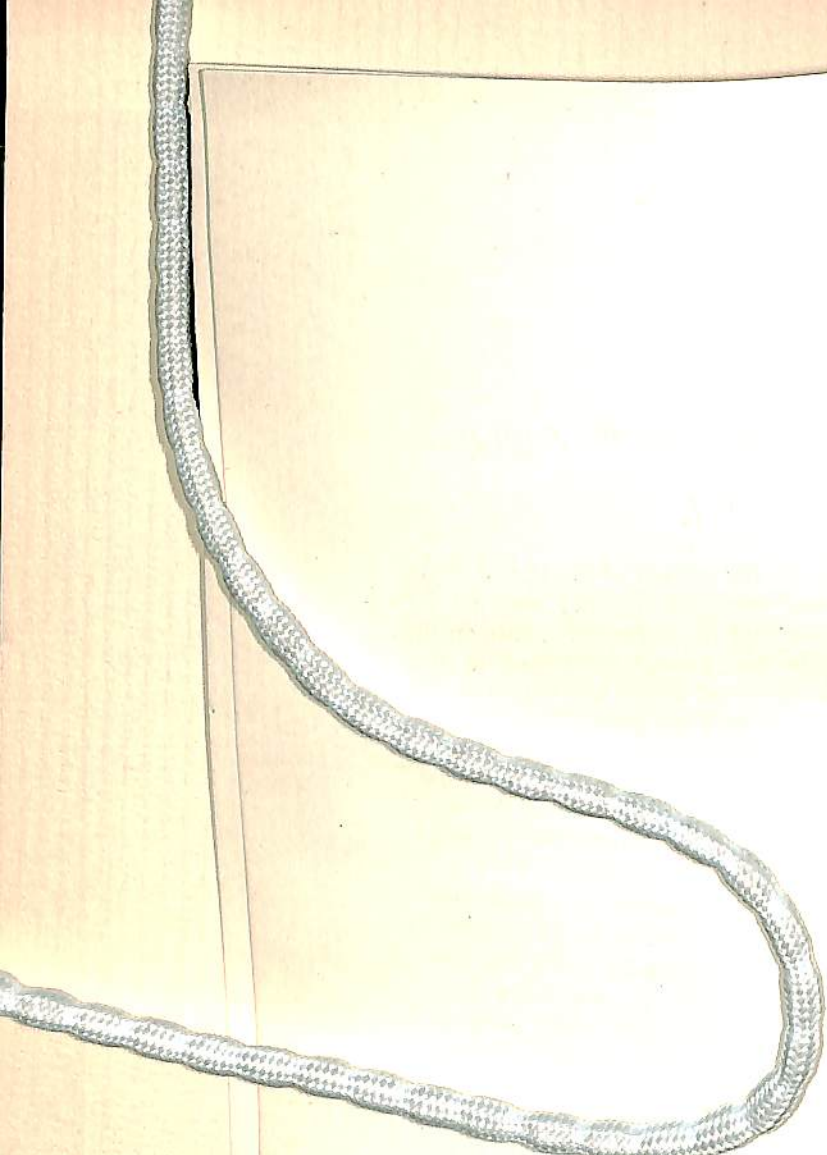
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### *Note.*

These chapters were written very hastily for publication in the New York "World," and have been as hastily revised in answer to a wish for their immediate issue in pamphlet form. They do not profess to treat the woman-suffrage question from every point of view, or fully to discuss it from any point of view. But I trust that, fragmentary as they are, they may lead some of the women of my state to consider more seriously than hitherto the right relations of men and women to the country and the government we love.

M. G. VAN RENSSELAER.





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### *I.*

“WHENEVER the women of the United States really want the suffrage, they will get it.” This has long been said by all reasoning men in the United States. It has proved itself true in two of our commonwealths, and if the test comes it will prove itself true in New York State. Indeed, as I should like to have space to explain, the women of Colorado were granted the suffrage before they really wanted it; and just now it seems to some that the women of New York need to be careful lest a similar experience be theirs as well.

It is perfectly certain that whenever we, the women of the Empire State, ask to be allowed to vote — unanimously or in any determinant majority — we shall get what we ask. Therefore it behooves us to know thoroughly well just what our demand would involve, whether we veritably wish to make it, and whether we should be justified in making it at this present time. And therefore, as a New York woman, but one who has lived in other countries and other parts of our own country, and has compared the condition of women there and here; as a working-woman who for many years has been thrown much with other working-women



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and with men of various classes and kinds; as a woman who now holds property in her own right, and has no relative who immediately "represents" her at the polls; as one who has carefully considered the woman-suffrage question for a long time, listening respectfully to the arguments of its advocates, and as one who recently voted in Colorado — on all these counts I ask the women of New York, and especially its working-women, to look with me a little into the matter. Let us take up in succession the chief points it presents, and briefly examine them one by one.

The first point of all is this: Need every conscientious woman make up her mind decidedly whether or not she "believes in woman suffrage" as an abstract question? No. But we have recently been implored to say that we do believe in it so firmly that we wish for its establishment here and now. We have been implored and challenged in such a way that our silence will assuredly be quoted as consent. Therefore, if any one of us does not believe in woman suffrage thus firmly and definitely, as a measure of immediate desirability,—if in any manner or degree she is doubtful with regard to its advisability here and now,—then she ought clearly to make known the fact.

If we do not feel certain that it would be advantageous, then we must feel certain that its establishment would be a risk. And at this particular time our city and state and country have risks enough to deal with. We are passing through a period of disturbance and uncertainty — social, political, and economic — which has had no parallel since the days that immediately fol-

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lowed the civil war. It is not a time for new risks, for additional uncertainties, for probable or even possible disturbances which can in any way be avoided.

There is a homely proverb: "Do not swap horses while you are crossing a stream"; wait for a quieter time, and then very carefully examine the proposed horse, especially if it is a horse of an utterly unknown breed, with no one to vouch for its character in peaceful hours, much less in hours of violent agitation.

Woman suffrage is an utterly unknown horse. It has never been tested in any way which indicates how it would work in a city and state like ours. Colorado and New Zealand are being held up for our imitation. But their experience has been too brief to prove anything. The experience of Wyoming has not been so encouraging as the advocates of suffrage here desire us to believe. And even if it had been, it would still prophesy little with regard to the State of New York, the Island of Manhattan. Not one of those three communities includes a city even remotely approaching the size of ours. Not one has a population at all resembling ours. Not one has problems to deal with such as are most prominent, most insistent, with us. Surely we must feel that it would be a fresh experiment, in the fullest and gravest meaning of the term, to establish unlimited feminine suffrage just here and just now.

Some people are passionately asserting that they know it would work well just here and now — even that they know just how it would work well. But they have no right to assert this unless they claim the gift of inerrant prophecy. They have no proved reasons,



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no tangible indorsements, to give for what they call their knowledge. They say more with regard to the women of New York, who have never possessed political power, than they would dare to say with regard to the men of New York, who have possessed it for more than a century, and been severely tried, variously tested, and minutely studied during that time. They say that good women, intelligent women, would vote, and vote more wisely than the men of their kind; and they say that ignorant women and bad women would not vote (or would vote in comparatively harmless numbers), or that they too would vote more conscientiously and wisely than the men of their kind. Some people boldly declare this, and all who ask for woman suffrage imply that they believe it. For unless the average of intelligence and conscientiousness is to be raised at the polls, certainly no sane person can wish to see the suffrage in any way extended.

For myself I do not think that these predictions are plausible, and bit by bit I shall try to tell why. But what I want to insist upon now, is that no one can *know* anything with regard to the matter—that any person who says he or she does know, or can make more than a plausible guess, has never learned to appreciate the difference between knowing and guessing. What he or she calls knowledge is merely a personal opinion based upon data which are almost altogether of theoretical sort.

The men of New York, I say, have been tested and minutely studied for a hundred years. Who can predict, from year to year, how they will vote? It is al-

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ways uncertain, even to the eyes of the most widely instructed and keenly interested politicians, with which political party, toward which economic dispensation, in which moral scale, they will throw their votes. And it is still more uncertain how many of them will vote at all. After almost every recent election the general feeling has been one of surprise with regard to the outcome of all these uncertainties. And yet we are assured that when, for the first time, more than a million entirely untrained and hitherto uninterested women are called to the polls in our state we shall not be surprised—we shall foresee just how they will act, and shall know that their action will distinctly be for good.

We should not know. We cannot dare to predict. We can only guess. And we cannot even plausibly guess without considering a hundred different points and balancing contradictory signs very carefully one against the other. And when a thing is a matter of guesswork, risk is, of course, involved.

In this case it would be hard to overestimate the magnitude of the risk. It would mean an innovation of unparalleled significance with regard to the future of our women and of our men, with regard to our political course, our social conditions, and the status of the home and family. And it would mean an innovation affecting not merely our own state but the country at large. What Wyoming does the rest of the states may disregard. But what New York does the rest of the states must at least consider and most probably would imitate. We must think of the tens of thousands of illiterate and vicious women in New York city, and just



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as carefully of the scores of thousands of ignorant negroes at the South. All told, the women of the United States very nearly equal the men in number. Think of the enormous burden of responsibility for the welfare of our whole fatherland which we, the women of New York State, are asked to assume.

Are we prepared, just here and now, to assume it? Are we prepared to throw into political life all the women, good and bad, intelligent and unintelligent, of the whole United States, including the swarms which belong to Europe but have been adopted here? Are we thoroughly, rationally convinced that such an innovation, sudden but irrevocable, would inevitably work for good? And if not—if we feel that it would to any degree be a risk—ought we not to raise our voices against it?

Silence, as I have said, will be cited as consent. Every new recruit for the "movement" will be counted, and all the rest of us will be pronounced merely weak, cowardly, indifferent, or as yet unawakened. The world will be told that at the bottom of our hearts we all think the suffrage desirable, else we should have said that we did not. Signing the protests which were prepared to counteract the appeal to be made to the Commissioners now in session at Albany, did not commit any one to the assertion that she "did not believe in woman suffrage." It merely declared that she was not convinced that unlimited woman suffrage is desirable here and now. And, unless we are thus convinced, it is our duty to sign a protest, or in any clear and forcible manner that presents itself to say, "I am not sure that our country should run this enormous new risk at this particularly disturbed and critical time."

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### II.

It is not necessary that every woman should make up her mind to-day with regard to the abstract desirability of woman suffrage. But there is a danger that, if they do not think the matter out now, many women will remain in a state of vague interest and uncertainty, distressed perhaps by the thought that they should have asked for their "rights," and perchance made discontented by the idea that, had we all done so, woman's lot would have been improved and our country as a whole would have been benefited.

"I have taken the suffrage side," one of my friends recently told me, "not because I am convinced that woman suffrage is desirable, but because I think that it is bound to come some day, and therefore it is best not to fight against it." But no events dependent upon human action are bound to come, like earthquakes or comets, or the changes of the seasons. We may say that some such events are bound to come, if existing conditions do not change; but who can predict positively that any human conditions will not change? And we may say that some things are all but certain to come—like greater freedom in Russia, for example. But even then, if we disapprove of them, it is better to fight against them. If we do not stave them off we shall profit the world by helping the growth of courage, constancy, public spirit, and the reasoning power.

Far from believing that woman suffrage is bound to come because of the present increase of interest in it, many of us hope that just this increase will give it its



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death-blow. Opposition to it has hitherto been passive, and to a great degree merely instinctive. No one has strongly felt the need to give her reasons against it. Therefore no one still uncertain upon the subject has had the chance to hear both sides and intelligently make up her mind, and few have even been prompted to think about it at all. But if the negative side is now faithfully presented, the current excitement, we feel, is likely in the end to do more to hurt than to help the "cause."

Therefore it is well to ask ourselves a second question: Upon what grounds do its advocates base their demand for woman suffrage?

Many of them do not explain how they think that its possession by the whole of our sex would affect the welfare of the community. They simply declare that we have "a right" to it, and state or imply that the securing and active exercise of any right must result for good.

Even the latter proposition is, however, far from logical. It is not a proposition which conscientious people act upon in private life. When a woman or a man perpetually insists upon personal rights, without considering the expediency of their assertion, she or he is recognized as a discordant element in family life, as a member of society whose influence is pernicious. All family life, all social life, is a system of compromises between the rights of different individuals. And civic life, political life, is a system of compromises between the rights of different individuals and those of different sexes, classes, and communities of people.

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The most indisputable personal rights may be infringing for the benefit of a community as a whole. A man may be forced to sell his house if the people need a railroad or a park. That great bulwark of personal liberty, the *habeas corpus* act, may be thrown down in troublous times. And even the right to safeguard one's life is done away with in times of war; men are then righteously called upon to face certain death itself. If the power to vote could be proved the indisputable right of every woman, nevertheless no woman should demand it without a firm belief, based upon definite reasons, that its exercise by her sex as a whole would benefit her country as a whole.

But the power to take direct active part in political life is not a right in the true sense of the word; it is not on a par with the right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Our present laws do not recognize it as such with regard to men; the corporate intelligence of the country does not interpret it thus. The instant a child, male or female, is born, the law undertakes to protect it in its life, its liberty, and its pursuit of happiness. It is protected even against its own parents, should need arise, and the murder of a day-old infant is counted a crime as much as the murder of a Lincoln or a Garfield. Of course what the law thus professes and attempts to do it does not perfectly accomplish; it never can perfectly accomplish it as long as individual human beings are imperfect in so many ways. But its theory is clear and its practice steadily improves: men and women, adults and children, all are to be equally well protected by the Government



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in so far as the recognized rights of humanity are concerned.

The question whether progress might be swifter, details of legislation and practice might be more rapidly improved, if women could vote, may be left aside for the moment. What I want to show now is that our constitutions, our systems of law, our political beliefs, do not include the power to vote among the indisputable rights even of masculine humanity. If they did boys would be born with the right of suffrage. They would not have to wait until they were twenty-one to get it. They would vote by deputy until they had reached years of discretion, just as now, if they are born to an inheritance, they own their property from birth and control it by deputy until they come of age.

Expediency, not right, is the basis of the suffrage. It is inexpedient, our legislators think, that all men should vote before they are twenty-one. Therefore no man votes until then, and none thinks of protesting or claiming his "right," no matter how rich, how intelligent, how "grown-up" he may be at nineteen or twenty. The same arguments might be used here which are so often used with regard to women. Surely the well-trained, educated, intelligent boys of New York city, even though they be not more than ten years old, would make better voters than vicious tramps or stupid foreigners all but wholly ignorant of the English language. But it is felt that more harm than good would result if the suffrage were universally granted to boys or youths, and therefore the most intelligent contentedly stand aside until they come of age.

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And thus should we contentedly stand aside all our lives, unless the most careful examination of a most complicated problem, to which past history affords not the slightest guide, seems to assure us that it would be for the greatest good of the greatest number of Americans that all women should vote. Expediency must here again be consulted — upon different grounds, of course. Immaturity is the ground in one case, feminality in the other. But in the one case, as in the other, no fundamental human "right" is involved except the right of the greatest number of Americans to the greatest possible measure of life, liberty, and happiness.

The possession of the suffrage and the possession of freedom are too often confounded in popular thought. An individual is free when he is checked in his pursuit of personal happiness as little as is consistent with the existence of a like freedom for all his countrymen. Universal masculine suffrage has been established in this country because our legislators have thought that by its means this state of things might most surely be brought about. The innovation was a practical expedient, a business experiment, so to say — not a recognition of inborn personal rights. Nor was it everywhere adopted. In Massachusetts utter illiteracy is still excluded from the polls. Yet the illiterate man is surely as free in Massachusetts as here — nay, freer, since he is free from the interference of the political "boss." The time may come when masculine suffrage will be limited in New York. If so, the change will be made in the interests of the truest freedom of the greatest number — in the interests of real liberty, as against the



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interests of license in some directions, of oppression in others. To-day the suffrage is denied to women — on different grounds, I repeat, but with the same great and righteous end in view. We who conscientiously and thoughtfully oppose its granting, believe that the majority of Americans, women and men, are more truly free to-day than they would be were it granted; that they are less painfully checked in the enjoyment of life and liberty, and in the pursuit of happiness. It is not in the name of the subjection of our sex, it is in the name of the true freedom of our sex, that we demand that men shall continue to do the work of governing our country, themselves, and ourselves.

Why we take this ground I shall try to show in another place. Now I may add that our general attitude with regard to the ballot being an expedient, not a "right," would be more often understood were it remembered that governments themselves are nothing but expedients. Were human beings perfect no governments would be needed. And until they become perfect they do not live that governments may exist; governments exist that they may live as comfortably and happily as possible. Life is the sacred thing, not government, which is merely the safeguard of life. There is nothing sacred about governments, except in so far that they are needful engines for the protection of individual life, family life, social life. When these are protected the race has a chance to advance, the world has a chance to improve. But the mere fact of protection does not assure improvement. The real work of furthering it is done outside of politics.

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It is the duty of every man and woman in our country to help the world grow better. But it is not the duty, still less the right, of every one to help it by actually assisting to protect individual, family, and social life. Even if it could be proved that American women in the mass are more intelligent than American men in the mass, still we ought not to ask for the ballot unless we are sure that if any measure of our energy is given to political life, the loss in other directions will not be greater than the gain in this direction.

### *III.*

It was recently said by a prominent woman that "the state has a right to regulate suffrage, but it has no right to refuse it to any American citizen." But what can confer it upon any American citizen except the state? Public opinion — the voice of the people — lies behind the state in some countries, but in ours public opinion is the state. Not merely the men who vote, but every man, woman, and child in the United States plays a part in moulding public opinion; and the part that women collectively play, without possessing votes, is shown by the fervid declaration of the woman suffragists themselves: "Whenever we all ask for votes we shall get them."

But until at least a determinant majority of us do ask for them, and until a majority of men are willing to give them to us, until public opinion favors the innovation, it is grossly illogical, misleading, disingenuous, to



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talk of our "right" to them—to talk of anything except the expediency of our getting them. Those have a right to vote whose votes public opinion thinks likely to advance the public welfare; other people have no rights in the matter at all.

What stands behind and above public opinion except the moral law? And does the moral law prescribe direct participation in active political work for all members of both sexes, or of either sex? It prescribes no more than that the greatest good of the greatest number shall be secured, no more than that public opinion shall carefully, conscientiously concern itself with questions of political expediency. Look at the condition of most of the South American republics if you think the moral law—which must be the same for all men everywhere—prescribes universal masculine suffrage. Or look even at the negro vote of our Southern States, or at the voting record of New York city. I do not say that universal masculine suffrage has proved itself a hopeless failure anywhere in our country, but I do say that in many places it gives a bold lie to the statement that the moral law prescribes anything whatsoever with regard to the voting power.

The Constitution leaves the power to extend or limit the suffrage to the several states, saying only, in its fifteenth amendment, that no state shall make a difference between colored people and white people. Yet it is careful to secure and protect the genuine inborn rights of human beings as such. Each state acts in the matter of suffrage just as it sees fit, and has legal and moral power to do so. If a genuine human "right" is

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in question, why is there no outcry over the voteless illiterate men of Massachusetts? Why none about voteless youths of nineteen or twenty? Why none—and this is a specially instructive point—about the adult male citizens of territories?

As a more sparsely populated, less experienced region than its neighbors, a territory is not thought entitled to full self-control. Consequently, the franchise of its citizens is limited. To vote for their local officers, but not for their own governor, and to send no full tale of senators and representatives to Washington—is this equal suffrage for the men of a territory? And if not, why do they not claim their inalienable human right to votes like those of their neighbors?

Again, a state deprives a man of his right to a vote if he has recently changed his residence; and each state enforces such a term of residence as it prefers. For the moment a new-comer is everywhere disfranchised; and if any moral principle underlies the matter, this is as true a grievance, although not as great a one, as that a woman should be deprived of the franchise all through her life. In short, there cannot possibly be any such thing as state regulation of the suffrage without full power on the part of the state to give it or take it away, just as it may think expedient.

This leads up to the fact that the first war-cry of the still unborn republic, "No taxation without representation," is falsely quoted now as a war-cry for woman suffrage. There is no true connection, historical or ethical, between representation as our forefathers then meant it and universal suffrage. Their cry had no ref-



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erence to individual powers or privileges. It was a collective cry from an oppressed people, practically enslaved because their interests — not themselves individually — were not represented in the British Parliament. If the interests of the women of America, collectively considered, are not represented at the polls, then they too may consider themselves oppressed and enslaved, and refuse to pay their taxes.

The true basis of the justice of taxation is not the permission to take active part in the Government. "The protection of the Government," says Judge Cooley in his "Law of Taxation," "being the consideration for which taxes are demanded, all parties who receive, or are entitled to that protection, may be called upon to render the equivalent." If our Government does not recognize the equal claims of men and women to receive its protection, or if, when it fails to give equal protection in certain respects, we can show that only woman suffrage is likely to induce it to, then, and then only, we may rightly raise the old cry, "No taxation without representation," and give it a new meaning.

This would be more generally understood if certain people had not got into the habit of calling women a separate "class" of citizens. They are not a special, distinct class of citizens, with corporate interests unembraced in the corporate interests of the community as a whole. Physiologically they differ from men, and this fact has brought about certain differences in legislative action with regard to the two sexes, notably as affects participation in the work of running our Government.

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But as social factors, as children of the state, they are inextricably mingled with men — as inextricably as they are in family and business life. And the great majority of legislative acts must hurt or help men and women in equal measure. When negroes are legislated for, or farmers, or bankers, or fishermen, are not the women of the class as nearly, as directly affected as the men? Women do not go to sea for codfish or whales or seals. But the wives and daughters of the men who do are as keenly interested as themselves in the laws which protect their lives and labors. And, conversely, American men are as deeply concerned as American women in legislation which affects the property rights of women, the moral safety of young girls, the welfare of the children of the poor.

Are we prepared to say that this is not so? Or do we desire to say that it ought not to be so — that women must specially care for their own interests, which implies, of course, that men may specially care for their own? Do we wish to evolve into separate "classes," saying, "The best interests of American women are not identical with those of American men"? Is this what we do in our families, in society, in the church, or in business or professional life?

To my mind nothing more dangerous could be said to American women to-day than that they need, as women, specially to care for the interests of women. These cannot be separated, except in certain minor points, from the interests of men. Our men have never desired to separate them. And the blood of the happiness of our country will be upon our own heads if we



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set them the example and they are tempted to follow it. The ruin of our country will lie at our doors if we do aught to cultivate this, the most horrible and pernicious kind of selfishness — antagonism between the sexes. For from the growth of woman's love and respect for man and of man's love and respect for woman, resulting in the consciousness that their best interests are indeed and in truth identical, all the progress, all the happiness of the world have grown.

I do not pretend to say in how far these feelings might be fostered or injured by the establishment of woman suffrage. But I do say that the tenor of the propaganda in favor of woman suffrage has often done much and is now doing very much to injure them, at least among our own sex. And I could say nothing more strongly accusing those responsible for this tenor of exerting an evil influence.

## *IV.*

BEFORE we examine whether it is true that our men have thus far considered our interests equally with their own, there is one more question of so-called "right" to be touched upon.

Any intelligent book on the history and government of our country will show you that the "right" of universal suffrage has never been recognized in this country even as regards the male sex — not by the law nor by public opinion either. It will show you that the protest "No taxation without representation" has never

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meant no personal taxation without a personal vote, except in the mouths of unintelligent or disingenuous agitators. And it will likewise show you how little ground there is for those to stand upon who say, "Whether or no all women should have votes, certainly a woman who owns property, or at least an unmarried woman who owns property, ought to have the power."

The more property a man has the more he is taxed. But whether he owns ten million dollars or nothing at all, he has only a single vote. Although he may own property and pay taxes in a dozen different states, he may vote only in one state, in one town. Paying taxes in California and paying none in New York, he must vote in New York if he resides there, or not vote at all. Moreover, a man may have paid ten thousand dollars a year in taxes since the year in which he was born, but he has no vote until he has lived for twenty-one years, nor do those who are meanwhile responsible for his property vote in his name. This is enough to show how alien from the spirit of our laws and our habits of political thought is any relationship between property and the suffrage.

Do those who advocate suffrage for property-holding women only, desire to begin a wholesale reversal of these laws and habits? Or is what they want unequal suffrage — one scheme of political thought, one system of government for men, and a different one for women? The question is not with regard to a single special law affecting women differently from men. It is with regard to one social, political ideal for men and another



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for women. The demand to-day is for full suffrage in the town, county, and state, and therefore in national elections too. And it carries with it, of course, the demand that women shall be allowed to hold office as well as vote. To say that a woman who owns property is by that fact, and that alone, entitled to run for Governor or President, means that the speaker can have no slightest idea how our country is now governed, or else desires to inaugurate novel ideas and methods which would end by upsetting the whole system of our laws, local, state, and national.

An advocate of woman suffrage writes to me that, nevertheless, "it is a mockery to call those free who have no voice in framing the laws they are forced to obey." Of course this statement is true. But the manner in which the writer construes it is typical, I am sorry to say, of the manner in which a great many true statements are being construed just now. When we pronounce axioms we should be careful to respect the genuine sense of the words which compose them.

Is it needful that in this connection "a voice" should be understood as meaning "a vote"? Every person has a voice in the making of our laws who plays a part in influencing any individual voter, or in helping to form that deep and strong voice called public opinion which influences all voters, and the collective result of which is the collective vote of a community.

By their fruits ye shall know them — ye shall know those who visibly act and also those who mould the course of their action. In no way can we so well understand how much voice the women of New York

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State have had in making its laws as by examining how they are treated by those laws.

For more than thirty years all the women of New York have been able to enjoy their own property, whether inherited or acquired, without control or interference from any man. A married woman may carry on a trade, business, or profession and keep her earnings for herself alone. She may sue and be sued and make contracts as freely and independently as an unmarried woman or a man. She may sell or transfer her real as well as her personal property just as she chooses. And she is not liable for her husband's debts or obliged to contribute to his support. Meanwhile, a husband is obliged to support his wife and children. He is liable for the price of all "necessaries" purchased by her, and for money borrowed by her for their purchase; and "necessaries" are liberally construed as "commensurate with her husband's means, her wonted living as his spouse, and her station in the community."

A man who obtains a divorce cannot ask for alimony; a woman who obtains one is entitled to it, and to continue to receive it even if she remarries. A woman in business cannot be arrested in an action for a debt fraudulently contracted, as a man may be. Every woman enjoys certain exemptions from the sale of her property under execution, but only a man who has and provides for a household or family is exempt in the same way. A woman is entitled to one third of her husband's real estate at his death, and cannot be deprived of it by will; and no real estate can be sold by



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him during his lifetime unless she signs off this dower right. A husband's right to a portion of his wife's property begins only after the birth of a living child, and even then she need not have his consent to sell it during her lifetime, and may deprive him of it altogether by will.

A life-insurance policy in favor of a wife secures the money to her, no matter how many creditors her husband may have at the time of his death, unless he shall have paid annual premiums exceeding \$500. Nor can its proceeds be seized for the debts of the woman herself.

A married woman has equal rights with her husband in regard to their children, and he cannot appoint a guardian for them without her written consent. Only the best interests of the children themselves are to be considered when parents separate, and, moreover, the practice of the courts is to lean strongly in the woman's favor. So it is with regard to suits for breach of promise, or betrayal, or any matter in which a woman as such appears as the adversary of a man as such. And the rooted objection of juries to hang a woman in cases where they would certainly hang a man has almost obtained the force of an unwritten law.

These are not all the distinctions made by our laws and the customs of our courts in favor of greater freedom, independence, and security for women than for men. If our factory laws, for instance, could be examined here, or those with respect to debts owed to female employees, they would make the case a great deal stronger. Have women really had "no voice" in the

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making of laws like these? Are they justified in feeling that they must "protect their own interests" by means of the ballot-box? May they not believe that, if further legislation specially favoring them is needed, it will come in the established way—through the votes cast by men whose conscientiousness it lies so largely in their own power to develop, whose thoughts and actions are so largely determined by their own influence, consciously or unconsciously exerted? And should they not see that *their* task, which no man can take away from them, and in which no man can replace them, is to mould public opinion, to form and train, inspire and reward the executive sex?

It has been said that only ignoble minds can be content with indirect action in the political field—with power at second instead of first hand, with influence instead of a share in control. But why is this true of politics more than of other things? And if it were true of everything, could any good work ever be done? No one works to himself or herself alone, and no one's mind and life is trained or guided by himself or herself alone. Behind all people who do worthy things stand others to whose help their power of action is due. In some noble tasks it is men who thus stand behind a woman, in others it is women who stand behind a man. And in both cases the rôle of the Aaron and the Hur is as important as the rôle of the Moses.

Of course the word "influence" has an ignoble meaning, and this seems to be the only meaning perceived by the women who are asking for what they



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call "true power." It would be ignoble to go about persuading men to vote according to our ideas whether they shared them or not. But would it be ignoble to think more clearly and seriously of the future citizens when we are training our young sons? Or to let all the men we know perceive that we expect them to be good citizens—to vote, and to vote conscientiously; to take an unselfish share in public work rather than to clamor for a share of public honor and emolument; to serve their country as steadily and loyally in time of peace as in time of war, and to fit themselves conscientiously for these tasks? Is the influence of women ignoble when they encourage and sustain their men in defending a country attacked by another nation? Would it be ignoble did they show the same interest when it is attacked by enemies within its gates—which, so long as human beings are human beings, must be everywhere and always? Would our country have been as proud of its men thirty years ago had its women then showed a less noble spirit? Would it not be far prouder of our men to-day if we showed the same noble spirit—that spirit of enlightened patriotism which it is an insult to American womanhood to say can be awakened only by a threatened war, or by the power to vote. I believe it is awakening in us now, and that the ultimate result of the present "agitation," so mistaken in its actual purpose, will be to show us that we have our own specially feminine duties toward the state to perform, and that thus far, except in some intense crisis of a strikingly emotional sort, we have performed them badly.

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The great truth which goes unperceived in the present dust of discussion is that the work of the world must be divided, and that in many respects sex forms a natural, ineradicable line of division. Neither sex need complain that it has not enough of its own proper work to do for the state, or boast that it now performs it all so well that it has surplus energy and intelligence left to devote to the tasks of the other. Nor need either complain that it is not paid a full equivalent by the state.

Women pay taxes like men, and the government returns to them the same equivalent in the way of personal freedom and of protection for life and property; indeed, in New York, at all events, it returns a more generous equivalent to them than to men. Then women bear and rear the children of the state, and therefore, the state says, a man must support his wife and children, even when he has so far transgressed certain laws that he has no longer the right to live with them. And then, as women form the physically feebler sex, and as they must perform the nation's domestic tasks, men do all the work of organizing and running the state, which means executing as well as making the laws, and protecting individuals at the risk of their own persons in time of danger. Thus to them is rightly reserved the duty or privilege of voting—that is, of saying how the state shall be run; while women are specially exempted by law from military and jury duty, and from the obligation to answer any call for help from sheriff or peace-officer.

This seems a pretty fair division of labor and privi-



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lege. It is not a logical method of comparison to say that women should vote, but should not be expected to perform military or police duty because they spend and even risk their lives in bearing children; this service is offset by the service man is compelled to render by spending his life for the support of his family.

Nor is it wisdom or logic or common sense to talk as though voting were a special, peculiar function, rightly separable from other public labors. There is no reason and there can hardly be any expediency in disassociating the making of the laws from their execution. Some men cannot help to execute the laws or preserve order or repel an enemy, but the majority of them can. Some women might be able to, but the great majority of them never could. And legislation of this kind must consider majorities, not exceptional cases.

### V.

TURN now from the "right" of woman suffrage (which is no right at all) to the question of its expediency. This is the true problem, and of course the best way to approach it is at the very foundation.

Is there indeed good reason why women, simply because they are women, should not take active part in political life?

Women are physically much weaker than men. It matters nothing that here and there a woman may say, "Lo! I am physically as vigorous as a man." Averages must rule when millions of men and women are

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concerned. No sane person believes that the average woman equals the average man in vigor, any more than that the exceptionally strong woman equals a Corbett or a Sandow.

Nature has made us weaker than men, not merely by giving us smaller skeletons and tenderer muscles, but by fitting us for the rôle of motherhood. Of course, in being fitted for this rôle a special kind of strength has been conferred upon us, and no kind could be more valuable to ourselves or to the world. But we have to pay for it in weakness in other directions—not only in lesser muscular power, but in lesser ability to withstand strains and exertions of many kinds, and especially of nervous kinds. Those of us who become mothers pay very heavily for a time before and after our children are born, and with some this means during ten or even twenty of the best years of our lives. And all of us pay in some measure all through our lives. The very few who do not realize that they are paying should be compared with exceptionally strong men, although they are apt to compare themselves with average men.

This relative physical weakness is simply one sign of a radical unalterable difference between the sexes as regards not only the physical strains they can bear, but the kinds of work they should engage in, the duties and obligations they should recognize as their own, the privileges and exemptions they have a right to claim. It is no misfortune that such a radical difference should exist. It is a necessary part of nature's economy. If it were not, it would have been les-



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sened during the advancement of the race and of the world. But in fact it has been increased. We differ more in every way from our men than do savage women from their men. There is less difference between the sexes among the higher animals than among human beings, and less still among the lower animals. The likeness between the sexes steadily increases as we descend the scale of animate life, until species are reached which have no sex-characteristics at all.

This fact disposes of the cry that woman suffrage would be "not revolution, but evolution." A pretty catchword, but none has ever been more untrue! Evolution has meant the growth of differences, the specialization of forms and functions. Herbert Spencer defines it as "a change from an incoherent homogeneity to a coherent heterogeneity." These are big words, but they mean simply that it is a change from a condition where many functions are poorly performed by the same organism to one where a few functions are better performed by each organism. A barbarous tribe, he explains, "is almost if not quite homogeneous" in the social functions of its members. And if, as I have said, we look farther down in the scale of life, we find even physical functions the same in all individuals.

Of course, specialization may be carried too far. If a race of animals is too narrowly adapted to a certain set of conditions, a slight change in these may exterminate it. And over-specialization in social functions has often been pernicious. For example, political power was concentrated in so small a number of hands just before the French Revolution that a reaction into anarchy

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was the natural result of its abuse. Our forefathers recognized that the actual executive work of government must be done by comparatively few hands; but they thought the best way to check abuses was to allow all male citizens a voice in their selection and a chance to figure among them.

It is now for us to decide whether, from the way this experiment has worked, and from our knowledge of the unalterable difference between the sexes, and between their normal, necessary kinds of labor, it seems wise to extend the duty to all women also. Some fancy that this would mean "progress." Others believe that it would be a relapse toward the incomplete organization of barbarian societies. And in this connection it is well to note that only barbarous or semi-barbarous peoples have as yet so far confounded woman's work, woman's power, with man's as to divide political responsibilities between them. The most civilized of ancient nations, the Athenians, discussed the question, but decided not to imitate the example of barbarians. And the Germans and other old-time races abandoned their original customs as their civilization grew.

Man's greater physical strength is not merely a reason why he has hitherto done all the work of government. It is also a sign and proof that this is part of his natural work. By nature he is the protector of his family, whether it be attacked by wolves, by human individuals, by the fear of poverty, or by the dread of public calamities. And by nature a woman is a being to be protected. Her physical weakness is a sign of this. So is the great fact which necessitates it — the



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fact of her motherhood. So are the domestic and social cares which the probability of motherhood, and the absence of the working males from their homes, make the business of our sex as a whole. And so is the fact that while man needs to safeguard his life and property only, she needs to safeguard her chastity as well.

Woman is the home-maker, the home-keeper; man is the home-supporter, the home-protector; and government is only one form of home-protection. Often to-day a woman must assume part of a man's work of protection. But this is a misfortune, not an "opportunity." We must make the best of it by educating our girls better, and by teaching our men to realize, even more thoroughly than they do now, that it is their business to protect all women in so far as they can. But it is as foolish, as against nature (which means common sense), to think that it would be well if women should share equally in the hard outside work of money-making and of organizing and protecting society as it would be to think that the world would be improved if men could bear and rear half the children. Any doctrine which tends toward a general reversal of the great rôles of the two sexes, or toward their confusion, or toward the growth of the idea that they may be confused without danger to society, must be distinctly pernicious.

If you think that I am thus assigning an "inferior" rôle to women, you have very little idea of relative values. You do not say that the bird on the nest plays an inferior rôle while her mate brings her food, fights off her enemies, and sings for her pleasure. You would not say she was "emancipating" herself if she tried to

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share all his labors. It is simply and solely for the safeguarding of the home, and of woman as the centre of the home, that governments exist, that men labor and fight and strive and try to rule. Fancy a nation composed only of men — how long do you think they would care how it was governed?

Woman needs more liberty, truly — at least in intellectual directions. She needs to know more, to think more, to have a deeper sense of responsibility. But she needs this to do her own work more thoroughly, to teach her what had better be left to man to do, and to teach man how he may do it well. She is the world's educator, he is the world's executive. Her work is really more important than his, for it is the making and moulding of human character and of social characteristics — which means *the making and moulding of public opinion* — while man's work is to support and protect her as she does this, and to give public opinion shape in that practical form which we call government.

We cannot say that we do not do this feminine part of the world's work. We always do it — well or badly, as the case may be. If women were different to-day men would be different. If we do not think that they bear their responsibilities well, let us teach ourselves how to teach them to do so. Let us not lessen their sense of responsibility by taking part of their rightful tasks off their shoulders, and at the same time lessen our own power and influence by saying: "We do not know how to do our own work of teaching, inspiring, and rewarding you; therefore we must assume half of your executive labors." Would this be "working in the line of evolution"?



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### VI.

BUT, it has been objected, these same arguments were used in former years to deter women from entering the learned professions, from engaging in business, even from gaining the higher education. And to-day all sensible people rejoice that they were not heeded then — that woman was not kept confined within her "traditional sphere."

Very true. But the fact that an argument was fallacious when applied in one direction does not prove that it is fallacious when applied in another. There is no analogy between what may now be called the question of yesterday and what has recently been made the question of to-day.

To begin with, women enter professional or business life as individuals, not as members of a vast corporation. They act for themselves alone; they are responsible only for their own or their families' lives and happiness. But government is the vastest of corporations, managing the business of the whole people, affecting the lives and happiness of all. And therefore the men of the country are as intimately interested, as responsible, when it is proposed to give a half share in its direction to women as we are ourselves. They have no right to say, "When a majority of women want to vote, we shall let them vote." They ought to say, "We shall let them vote if we too think it is best that they should." And certainly no woman has the same

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right to ask for political — which means public — power as for personal, private freedom of action.

In the second place, when the question of yesterday was gradually decided in the affirmative, new permissions were given to women, new opportunities were opened in front of them. But if the question of to-day is decided in the affirmative, new duties will be laid upon women, new and very heavy obligations will be forced upon them. No woman need blame herself who now prefers a strictly domestic life; but every woman will need to blame herself who remains absorbed in such a life if the suffrage is given her. If she then takes no interest in politics, or if she confines herself to casting the votes which make laws, and refuses to share in executing them, she will be a bad citizen. There will be no difference between her and the men who now pursue these courses. The great majority of women will nevertheless be forced to pursue one or the other of them; and thus their consciences will be distressed, or will be seriously weakened. And anything which, on an extensive scale, works this result among the mothers of the race, must be pernicious.

Would our sons, our husbands, and our friends be more impressed by our counsels of political conscientiousness had we the same rights and duties as they, yet were forced perpetually to excuse ourselves from their performance? Even if we all voted, should we be in a better position than we are now to convince men that they should do much more than vote? *Tu quoque* is a bad weapon to put in the hands of those whom we wish to guide and improve; yet, try as we might, we



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should still be women, and this would always mean that we should not have the strength or the time to do what we think our men should do. Let us not deliberately put ourselves into a glass house from which there would be no means of escape while woman's body, woman's heart, and woman's necessary duties remain as nature through evolution has made them.

I have actually heard women say, and with much decision and fervor, "Certainly we should not hold office; the men ought certainly to do the work of governing. But it is our duty to see that good men are put into office. It is our duty to vote, because this is the best way to show what we think ought to be done by the men who govern."

Surely this would be very unequal suffrage — half the controlling power to be ours, all the work and responsibility to fall upon the men. It would be interference — not influence; it would be irresponsible dictation — not education, direction, help, and counsel. How of course it would be impracticable. How could we vote for good men unless good men were all ways nominated? And how are men nominated except through difficult, exacting work which is heaviest just before an election, but must be persisted in more or less all the time? Going to primaries, pulling wires, and influencing voters in favor of the nomination of good men is not very hard work in little country places. But it is work that needs time even there, and needs knowledge of a particular kind — special knowledge with regard to the qualifications of special men. And in big cities the work is so difficult, disagreeable, and

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harassing that, just because of it, very many men lose their interest in politics altogether. Yet in this work at least we should positively be obliged to share if we wished to vote those whom we might consider the best men into office.

To say, "We ought to vote, but there is no reason why we should help to govern in other ways," is as though a woman should say to her husband and sons: "You must run the big factory, or the great commercial house, or the law business, or the medical business upon which my life and happiness depend. But these do depend upon the manner in which it is run; I cannot trust you to look after my interests; and therefore, while I do not wish to interfere with your actual work of manufacturing, or selling, or managing law cases, or doctoring, nevertheless I must have my say about how you shall do it. I must help in the selection of your workmen and your clerks. I must have a voice in the regulation of wages and the making out of bills. I must share in your control of the men under you, in the expenditure of your capital, in the investment of your gains." All the things which correspond to these in the running of government are implicated in the mere power to cast a vote.

No one can simply vote for "the best man" without regard to anything but his personal trustworthiness and ability. Behind every man who stands for an office lies a principle of one kind or another — legal, financial, or economic. Choice must be made between principles and choice must be made between men; and then the claims of the one and the other must be balanced



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against each other. No problem is more frequent or more difficult than that which confronts the voter obliged to choose between a "good man" representing principles or expedients of which he disapproves and a less good one representing principles or expedients he thinks right. Thus no intelligent vote can be cast without a knowledge and consideration of abstract political, financial, or economic ideas. The best man when political office is in question, is the one who will have the most power to legislate for us toward the best result; and this necessitates considerations with regard to his ideas and beliefs, his wisdom and tact, his influence with other politicians and with the people, as well as with regard to his knowledge and conscientiousness.

And this all means that women would have to take an earnest part in political thought, an active part in political life, if they wished simply "to see that the best men are put into office." Otherwise they could only vote with blind eyes for men whom they had had no share in selecting, or else duplicate the votes of men whom they esteemed intelligent. And I think a woman need ask for the suffrage who desires to be an ignorant voter or a mere echo.

## *VII.*

"THIS is why I want woman suffrage," says another friend of mine. "The work of government is badly accomplished now because so many people take

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interest in it. If it is to be thoroughly well accomplished, in a democratic state, every one must take an interest in it. And the only way to interest people in anything is to give them a *personal* interest in it—a personal sense of privilege, duty, responsibility."

Does this sound plausible? I think it is illogical in several different ways.

In the first place, if it is the sense of responsibility that breeds interest, would it be well to lessen by one half the responsibility for the making of the laws that our men now bear, seeing that even now they do not feel interest enough, and that upon them must always fall by far the largest share in the execution of the laws?

In the second place, if responsibility excites interest, why are our men now so indifferent to their political duties? And why do we think that, granted the right to vote, women will be less indifferent? The answer to this question seems to be: Because women in the mass are by nature much more conscientious than men. No slight excess of conscientiousness would suffice; for it would be counterbalanced by woman's relative physical weakness, by the frequent demands of domestic duties at variance with any form of public activity, and by the fact that political affairs do not lie so nearly in line with the private affairs and habits of thought of women as of men—so nearly in line with those private interests and occupations which, no matter how greatly the present "status" of women may be changed, must continue to absorb the great majority of them if society is to exist at all.

Are we indeed bold enough to assert this great moral



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superiority of our sex as a whole? Is it proved, as some people declare, by the fact that there are a great many more men than women in our prisons and penitentiaries?

Our prisons and penitentiaries give us a partial record only of those sins which are called crimes because some definite human law has been transgressed. But that multitude of other sins and shortcomings of which human laws do not yet take account, or of which they never can take account, weigh just as heavily as crimes when we try to make up balances with regard to conscientiousness. Man's sins are more apt to be crimes than woman's sins, partly because he is physically stronger. He is tempted to deeds of violence where woman is tempted to deeds of quieter evil, or to sins of omission merely. The man who jumps on his wife and breaks her ribs is put into jail, but the woman who scolds and torments her husband until she makes him a drunkard, or who grievously neglects her children's education, is not put into jail. And so it is outside the family as well as within it.

Moreover, men's occupations, duties, and habits of life bring them much more constantly into conflict with others, and thus into temptation. Break down the barriers which protect the virtues of our sex, and who can tell what the result would be? There is, for example, no woman sitting at Sing Sing beside John V. McKane and the "heelers" whom their "bosses" abandoned. But no woman has yet had McKane's opportunities, a "heeler's" temptations. Can we confidently predict our greater resistance to political evil once we are as fully exposed to it as men? In any class of

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crime where the temptation is stronger for women than for men, how does the balance stand? As regards infanticide, for example, or shoplifting?

Again, do we as a sex perform the duties which have always been ours distinctly better than men perform theirs? Almost every mother loves her children, just as almost every man takes a certain sort of interest in current political events. But how many women really do their whole duty by their children? Do you not know some who seem to think of their children chiefly as ministrants to their own pride and pleasure, just as you know men who think more of what the Government should do for them than of the duty they owe to the Government, the public? Even when a woman is wholly unselfish, and gives all her time to her children for their sakes rather than her own, how often does she do this conscientiously in the higher sense? How often has she conscientiously tried to learn how she may most wisely care for their physical, intellectual, and moral well-being? Do not multitudes of good women think that good intentions will suffice, that letting things run in easy grooves, doing as "other people do," is all that is demanded of them—just as many men show the same temper with regard to political matters? Ask any public-school teacher, or any teacher of a high-priced private school, how much real training for good his pupils get in their homes. The answer will, perhaps, not be very different from that you would receive if you asked any experienced public man how many men in New York really care for the public welfare.



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Men have made our laws wholly of their own motion, as some declare, or largely influenced by women's expressed or implied wishes, as I and many others believe. But all must agree with me that public opinion as it shows itself, not in law-making, but in social habits, customs, and manners of thought, is formed by men and women together, and that women have a preponderant share in forming it. They have this, it must be granted, not only by virtue of their social status, but by virtue of their influence as the early educators and as the life-long intimate companions of the men of their families. Therefore in a country where, judged from the moral point of view, legislation lags behind the customs and opinions of society, we may fairly say that women are not fully represented in the Government, and it may be fairly argued that to give them political power might result for good to the statute-book, if not to themselves as individuals, to men as individuals, and to the character of the home and family.

But in any country where the laws are more rigorous with regard to crime and immorality than is social opinion, we cannot fairly speak and argue thus. Look at the statutes of New York State, and then consider its social opinions, and see whether the former lag behind the latter. For example, our laws make no distinction between a man who breaks his marriage vow and a woman who does. But what does social opinion say? How do the women of New York judge in such matters? And if the women as a whole judged as impartially as the law judges, would the private opinion

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of the men long remain as it is, or suffice to control social customs, standards, and ideals?

I do not say that women are "less good" than men. I am very sure that in many respects the majority of them are better than the majority of men. But it is important to remember that statistics of crime are not statistics of sin, much less of unconscientiousness; and to remember that conscientiousness itself is a complex thing, often strong in one direction, weak in another, as regards the same individual.

What solid ground have we for saying that, given political responsibilities, our women would bear them more conscientiously than men? And if we have no such solid ground how can we say that political apathy would be decreased, high public spirit would be increased, if millions of women voters were added to our present millions of men voters? A very large proportion of our political questions to-day are financial or economic questions. Is it probable that women would be more generally stirred than men to think seriously and vigorously about these? I leave out of sight for the moment the allied question: Is it probable that their private lives would prepare them to think more wisely and acutely about them?

In the third place, did my friend really show cause why the suffrage should be given to women when she said that only direct personal political activity could awaken their real interest in political things? Do good women thus disassociate themselves from the duties and responsibilities of their husbands and sons in other directions? Do they not feel a personal concern in the



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progress of their sons' college education, even though they may have had none themselves? Or in their athletic education? Or in the professional success, the business rectitude and diligence of their husbands? Or in the councils and affairs of their churches? Is it true that we feel we cannot take an active interest in public affairs unless we take an active personal part in them? And if so, is this indeed a proof that we are well fitted to serve the public good? Or is it a proof that we are vain and proud and selfish—that we must audibly "have our say" in the same manner as men, or else will sulk in our corners and declare that we wash our hands of the nation's interests, of our men's interests, of our own interests? I have already said that I cannot believe it is so—I cannot believe so badly of the women of America. They are not generally interested in public affairs to-day because their true education has only just begun. But they will gradually grow interested, without the bribe or the lure of votes; and then we shall see what woman's influence may mean for good.

### *VIII.*

ONE of the most frequent arguments in favor of woman suffrage is that women of the better class would be more certain than others to use their privilege, and that more weight than at present would thus be thrown into the scale of morality and wisdom. Let us think just how this might be in our city of New York; for, confessedly, the most difficult of our political prob-

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lems is the management of large cities. Anything that would not work well in large cities cannot, in the present condition of affairs, be advocated for our state at large or our country at large.

Among women of the better class are many with sufficient money to give them sufficient leisure to perform at least the one isolated political duty of voting. The great trouble with our city politics to-day is that the men who correspond to these women will not vote in due numbers. The great trouble is to "get out the up-town vote." If this could be got out, and kept out, the city would be governed well enough. A rainy day conspicuously cuts it down. Would bad weather have less effect upon the corresponding class of women? Or are they less prone to idleness and self-indulgence, which means the shirking of the moment's duty when possible? Are they (in our America) less given than their men to seek pleasure instead of duty? Are they more certain to recognize duty when it is of a remote and abstract rather than of a narrow and personal or domestic kind? Is there no reason to believe that at every great election, and still more at those lesser elections which are as vitally important in a city like ours, it would be quite as hard to "get out" the feminine vote in the "kid-glove districts" as the masculine vote—if not a good deal harder?

Think next of the multitudes of women who are the wives and daughters of shop-keepers, clerks, artisans, and prosperous laborers. We may presume them, as a class, conscientious possible voters. They are more conscientious, probably, in a general way, than their



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richer sisters who have been trained to a sense of duty in a less stern school of daily service and self-denial; and their men form, as a whole, the best class of our present voters. But we can hardly fancy them very eager voters. We can hardly fancy that they would take as much general interest in public questions, or as much special interest in any one public question of the average kind, as their husbands, fathers, and sons. For they live at home and associate chiefly with their feminine neighbors. They lead lives which, perforce, are narrow intellectually and narrow socially. They have little chance or time to become really interested in anything but the affairs of their own and their neighbors' families, while their men (although natural ability may be no greater with them) are brought into wider circles of interest and influence through their daily contact with a wider world. And we can hardly believe that women of this class would find it as easy to get to the polls as their men. Election day means a holiday for men, but not for women engaged in domestic cares. Indeed, the very fact that the men of their household are having a holiday only makes these cares more exacting.

Workingwomen, in the now generally accepted meaning of the word — women who labor daily outside their homes — would have a rather better chance of gaining interest in political affairs and some knowledge with regard to them. But this class of women is not nearly so large as many people believe. In New York State, with over six million inhabitants, 360,000 women are recorded as engaged in money-making oc-

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cupations — that is, only about one woman in ten; and these occupations include many which do not bring the women pursuing them into contact with broadening, educating influences of a political sort. Very few, even among workingwomen, really mingle with men in their work as men do with each other, nor are they as immediately concerned with those financial and economic problems which play so very large a part in our political activity. Many of them would be free as men on election days. But would their desire for a day's outing, or a day's perfect rest, be less insistent than men's? And do we not know how large a part this desire now plays in cutting down the sum of the intelligent vote at our polls?

Then to the total of these hindrances you must add the fact of woman's inferior physical strength. We may believe that, on any given day in the year, more women than men lie on beds of actual illness. On any given day many women are expecting soon to become mothers, and many more have recently become mothers. And a much greater difference still between the sexes appears if we think of people who simply "don't feel well" or are "tired to death." Among men, we know, small excuses suffice to block the path to the polls even when great issues are at stake. Among women these small excuses would be much more numerous, and very often much more seriously valid. We must indeed believe that women are vastly "more conscientious" than men, if we believe that it would be easier to "get out" the intelligent feminine vote in our city than the intelligent masculine vote.



### *Should We Ask for the Suffrage?*

A pamphlet written by Mr. George Pellew is being widely circulated just now by the advocates of woman suffrage. It contains some words which may illumine this special question. "Few persons," he says, "and women least of all, are courageous enough to incur certain and immediate inconvenience and annoyance for the sake of contingent and distant benefit."

Probably even first elections would be no real test of how things would eventually settle themselves. Doubtless many women would vote for a year or two and then vote no more. We have no reason to think that any novelty as such, and especially any unwonted sense of power, is less attractive to women than to men. And we know how many men practically give up voting in their mature years, while we can feel sure that every one of them, almost without exception, took pains to go to the polls in the year when he became of age.

And now think of the ignorant women of New York — the low-class foreigners, the drudges of the slums. Very certainly they would not care to vote if left to themselves. But would they be left to themselves when the powers for good in our town were boldly arrayed against the powers for evil? If an ignorant man takes a dollar for his vote, is he likely to lose the chance of getting five more for his wife's and his daughters' votes? And are his wife and daughters likely to refuse what he demands? Are they likely to be conscientious enough? And if so, are they likely to be strong enough? If actual money is not in question, but merely a "pull," or a desire to have a "pull," would it be different? If

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a man wanted a certain job from Tammany, or wanted to please a Tammany "boss," would he be content to offer one vote when he might as easily offer six? Or when the "boss" himself was doing his work of preliminary persuasion, would he be likely to neglect women as less easily approached or influenced than men?

Then beneath the women of this sort, whom our city counts by so many thousands, are many other thousands, in the slums and elsewhere, the open tenor of whose lives proclaims them to be evil women. Certainly these — or at least the more miserable and wretched among them — would have no desire to register name and residence and present themselves at the polls. But if their votes were needed, would they be left aside by the local "boss," by the vile men with whom they associate, by the saloon-keeper who lives on these vile men and on them also? Or would they have either the conscientiousness or the courage to refuse to vote at all, or to try to vote against the wishes of their masculine friends?

For the reasons I have named it would be difficult to "get out" the respectable feminine vote of New York, and also for the reason that respectable men do not coerce their women. But the illiterate feminine vote, the corrupt feminine vote, the "interested" feminine vote, could be got out with as great certainty as the corresponding masculine vote, just because illiterate and corrupt men do coerce their women in one way or another. And this vote would therefore not be woman's vote at all — it would be a duplication of the vote of the



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corresponding class of men. Weather would not keep it away, nor the love of amusement, nor domestic cares, and indifference would not be allowed to keep it away, for this is not allowed to keep away the corresponding masculine vote.

These are things to consider when we think how woman suffrage would work in New York city. And as a help to decision I may note that the women in this city whose profession it is to lead evil lives are estimated by no one to be less than thirty thousand, and by many to be twice or even thrice that number.

### IX.

THINK then of what it might mean if women became active politicians in the sense of devoting their lives and energies wholly to public affairs. It is impossible to say how many women would do this; but it is certain that some would do it, both as seeking conspicuous offices and as playing the rôle of "bosses" among the ignorant of their sex. Any one who knows what the female lobbyist already is in Washington must believe this. And he will hardly believe that the female politician would often be a noble representative of womanhood. Here the innate, ineradicable distinction between men and women as such makes itself felt once more. It is natural and admirable for a man to accept or even to like publicity, even when it means bringing his person as well as his ideas into public sight, under public criticism, and means forcing him into personal association

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and conflict with a multitude of strangers. It is not natural, it is not admirable, for a woman to feel thus. Some of the best women accept personal publicity because they must earn their living or because they are willing to make sacrifices in what they think a good cause. But those who naturally love and crave publicity lack certain elements of character and feeling which, so long as women are the mothers and home-makers of the race, so long as the distinction of sex itself exists, the world cannot but think essential to a finely feminine character. As a rule, I am very sure, the best among our women of all classes would shun active political life, while many who are much less admirable would try to enter it.

And even if good women entered it, would they cease to be women? Would the fact of their sex cease to be felt by themselves or by the men with whom they would come into close alliance or into bitter conflict? The difference of sex is felt even in business relationships more frequently and unfortunately than the advocates of total "emancipation" for our sex are willing to confess. But the case would be infinitely worse in politics, for politics mean struggles and ambitions, friendships, rivalries, and enmities of a much stronger and more personal sort.

Think how it might be if those feelings which a difference in sex excites — varying from actual love to actual hate through many intermediate degrees, and so very potent for good or evil even in the retirement and placidity of private life — were brought into the political field. Perhaps they might sometimes do a little



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good, although the right sort of political influence must appeal to the reason, not the feelings. But would they not be certain to do a great deal of harm, even if all women politicians were good women, and still more if any of them were evil or frivolous or stupid women? Another powerful incentive to unconscientiousness would be added to those which already make the politician's life so dangerous. The love of duty, the love of money, the love of power or fame, and the love of woman—these, we have always been told, are the great levers that move mankind. It is difficult enough for the politician of to-day to cling to duty in despite of the temptations of money and power. Would it be wise to complicate his battle by bringing the fourth great passion into play? Or are we sure that every woman that might enter politics would be so good, and so strong in her goodness, that there would indeed be no danger from her presence there? Or no danger that she herself, and the standards and ideals of her sex, would be hurt by her being there?

### X.

If it is indeed true that the work of the world must be divided, and that nature, experience, and a sane philosophy unite in showing that the labor of government is part of man's proper share, it is hardly needful to consider any such minor arguments as that if women could vote "there would be no more wars." But I may say that most of them are on a par with

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this one as regards any basis of demonstrated or probable truth.

Does the history of the female sovereigns of Europe, or of India, show that women hate war more than men, or does it show that when their emotions are excited they are apt to be more recklessly bellicose than men? How was it with the women of France in the days of the great Revolution? And do recent instances differ from those of earlier date? Was not the terrible Franco-German war of 1870 called by the French empress "my war"? Was it not recognized as such by the French people? Do not the investigations of historians and memoir-writers show it to have been such? And which were recognized as the most bitter opponents of the Union in our Southern States during the War of the Rebellion and long after its close—the women or the men?

But the worst of all the fallacies now being used as persuasive arguments is the declaration that if American working-women could vote their wages would be equalized with men's. Those who promise this do not give their reasons, and they could not base them upon past facts with regard to rises in the value of men's labor. Even to-day women are paid much more nearly the same as men *for really equal work* than the makers of this promise would have us believe. But often what is called equal work shows some inequality, if not in the perfection of its performance then in the probability that the worker will continue permanently at her task. Although certain agitators have declared that the "law of supply and demand" is a foolish fetish, it neverthe-



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less affects the pay of every laboring individual in the world. Amid social and commercial conditions like ours, the slightest inequality in working power, the slightest difference in the relations of a supply to a demand, tell in financial results; and no laws can possibly obviate this fact. Not legislation but organization has raised the wages of men during the past two generations. And the most successful result of labor-organization — the famous strike of the dock-laborers in London a few years ago — was accomplished by men a very small proportion of whom had votes.

### *XI.*

Thus there are many things to think about, many serious questions to decide, before we can conscientiously say that we believe woman suffrage should be established. And, be it noted, the burden of proof lies with those who advocate the innovation. We are not obliged to prove that woman suffrage is undesirable; they are obliged to prove that it is so clearly desirable that, for its sake, the country should run the enormous risk involved in a political and social revolution of the most radical and far-reaching sort. This is law and justice all the world over: The *status quo*, like the human individual, must be considered in the right until we have good evidence that it is in the wrong. Otherwise there would never be any security for individuals, never any peace or safety for the State.

Therefore all I desire to do is to bid you pause —

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pause, and think, and consider the arguments of the advocates of the "movement," without passion, without prepossession, and especially without that foolish vanity of would-be imitation of men which means a great lack of true feminine pride. But above all do not be tempted to say, "We women must look out for ourselves and our own interests." It is a slander upon the men of America to say this — upon those men who have so cordially helped us to become the freest and most highly considered women in the world. And it is a defiance of the laws of nature and of common sense to declare that the best interests of the sexes are separable. To declare this is to give men an excuse, a temptation — nay, a veritable right — to say: "Then we also must look out for ourselves and our own special interests." Do you think that the country would fare better if our men said this, or that its women would fare better? Do you not think, rather, that the best way to serve our country and to serve ourselves is to do our own work as well as we can — which means a great deal better than in the past? And do you really believe that part of this work should consist in a half-share in the actual immediate power to make those laws which deal chiefly with matters that men's daily occupations fit them to understand better than we do, and in the execution of which, strive as we might, we could take but a very small share?





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