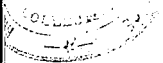


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# ELECTORAL DISABILITIES OF WOMEN.

## A LECTURE

BY

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*Chi dura vince.*

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## THE ELECTORAL DISABILITIES OF WOMEN.

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THE subject of this lecture is one which few are prepared to discuss quite dispassionately. Most people are either enthusiastically in favour of the extension of the suffrage to women, or are violently opposed to it. The former are inclined to think that those who disagree with them must be blinded by prejudice or wilfully opposed to the principles of justice and freedom; the latter look upon a "woman's rights" woman as the incarnation of all that is repulsive; and a "woman's rights" man they think must be bereft of his senses. I desire to approach the subject of the claims of women to the suffrage in a different spirit to either of these contending parties. I will attempt to state fairly and impartially the main arguments on both sides. If I fail in doing justice to the views of those with whom I differ, I shall not do so wilfully, but through ignorance. I will only add, before entering upon the general subject, that in my opinion this is not exclusively a woman's question; above all, it is not one in which the interests of men and women are opposed. If the exclusion of women from political power be right and just, women as well as men are interested in maintaining it; if it be unjust and antagonistic to the principles of freedom, then men as well as women are interested in destroying it. "If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it," is as true as regards national as individual life. Praying your indulgence for many shortcomings, I will at once proceed to give a categorical list of the principal arguments urged against the removal of electoral disabilities of women. You will probably observe that all these arguments could not be used by the same person, as some of them neutralize

others. It is, however, better to mention them all, as I am anxious not to omit anything which has been urged in objection to women's suffrage. The objections are:—

1. Women are sufficiently represented already by men, and their interests have always been jealously protected by the legislature.

2. A woman is so easily influenced that if she had a vote it would practically have the same effect as giving two votes to her nearest male relation, or to her favourite clergyman.

3. Women are so obstinate that if they had votes endless family discord would ensue.

4. The ideal of domestic life is a miniature despotism—one supreme head, to whom all the other members of the family are subject. This ideal would be destroyed if the equality of women with men were recognised by extending the suffrage to women.

5. Women are intellectually inferior to men.

6. The family is woman's proper sphere, and if she entered into politics, she would be withdrawn from domestic duties.

7. The line must be drawn somewhere, and if women had votes they would soon be wanting to enter the House of Commons.

8. Women do not want the franchise.

9. Most women are Conservatives, and therefore their enfranchisement would have a reactionary influence on politics.

10. The indulgence and courtesy with which women are now treated by men would cease, if women exercised all the rights and privileges of citizenship. Women would, therefore, on the whole, be losers if they obtained the franchise.

11. The keen and intense excitement, kindled by political strife, would, if shared by women, deteriorate their physical powers, and would probably lead to the insanity of considerable numbers of them.

12. The exercise of political power by women is repugnant to the feelings and quite at variance with a due sense of propriety.

13. The notion that women have any claim to representation is so monstrous and absurd, that no reasonable being would ever give the subject a moment's serious consideration.

The first of these arguments, viz., that women are sufficiently represented under the present system, is an old friend. Its face must be very familiar to all who took part in or remember the great agitation which preceded the Reform Bill of 1867. Those who were opposed to an extension of the suffrage were never weary of repeating that working men were quite well represented; there was no need to give them votes, for their interests were watched over with the most anxious solicitude by noblemen and gentlemen, who knew far better than the artizans themselves what was good for the working classes. We all know that this opinion was not shared by working men; they pointed to the inequality of the law relating to masters and servants, and the unjust efforts which legislation had made to suppress trade societies. They said, "These laws are unequal and unfair, they will not be amended until we have some hand in choosing the law makers." Besides this, they said, "We bear a large portion of the taxation of the country; for every pound of tea and sugar we consume we contribute so much to the national revenue, and in common justice we ought to be allowed to exercise a corresponding control over the national expenditure." For years and years these arguments were repeated in every town in Great Britain; orators like Mr. Bright, Mr. Ernest Jones, and Mr. Cobden devoted immense energy and splendid eloquence in forcing the claims of the working men to representation on the reluctant middle classes. We all know how that struggle terminated; the obstacles were at length surmounted, and the rights of working men to citizenship were fully recognised. Now I appeal to working men and to all who took their side in the great reform agitation, not to cast aside and repudiate the very arguments which they found so useful during that struggle. I would say to them, "You have reached the top of the wall, don't push down the ladder by which you have ascended." Apply your arguments to the case of women. Are women sufficiently represented? Are there no laws which press unjustly on them? Is that state of the law equitable which relates to the property of a married woman? Is the law equitable which gives a married woman

no legal right to the guardianship of her own children? Perhaps you do not know that "the married women of this country, when their children are seven years old, have no kind of power to prevent their children from being removed if their husbands choose to remove them!" Would this be the case if women were virtually represented? Finally, using the very same argument which has been so often applied to the working classes—Is it right or just that any one should be forced to contribute to the revenue of the country, and at the same time be debarred from controlling the national expenditure? Either this argument is good for nothing, or it applies to women as forcibly as it does to men. I think it does apply both to men and women, and that, therefore, it is not accurate to say that women are already sufficiently represented, and that their interests are, under the present system, fully protected.

Now let us turn to the second argument urged against the extension of the suffrage to women, namely, a woman is so easily influenced, that if she had a vote it would practically have the same effect as giving two votes to her nearest male relation, or to her favourite clergyman. This is a curious argument; if it were applied indiscriminately to both men and women, very few people indeed would have votes. For instance, it might be said that the *Times* newspaper exercises an extraordinary influence over the political opinions of thousands of people. This is perfectly true; nearly every one must have noticed how, in ordinary society, the conversation of nine people out of ten echoes the general tone of the leading articles in the day's *Times*. Now it may be said, following out the argument just quoted, the effect of giving all these people votes is only to multiply a million-fold the voting power of the editor of the *Times*, or the writers of the articles in that journal; therefore all people who take their political views from the *Times* ought to be precluded from exercising the franchise. By carrying out the principle, nearly every one would be disfranchised, except the great leaders of political thought, such as Mr. Gladstone, Mr. Disraeli, Mr. Bright, Mr. Mill, Lord Salisbury, and the editors of some of the principal papers. For

there are very few indeed whose political opinions are not biased by the views of some of these distinguished and able men. But perhaps this argument, that women's suffrage would only double the voting power of some men, can best be answered by making way for the next argument, namely, that women are so obstinate, that if they had votes, endless family discord would ensue. Now the people who urge this as a reason why women should not be allowed to exercise the franchise, seem to have an erroneous notion of what a vote is. The mere possession of a vote does not confirm or intensify any opinion. If any man here, at present without electoral power, became a voter to-morrow, would the mere possession of a vote affect any change in his political convictions? A vote is not an opinion, but an expression of an opinion. Now let us suppose the case of a family in which the husband and wife hold similar political views; their talk is probably often of politics, and I cannot see that it would make any difference to their domestic happiness if the wife could vote as well as her husband. But you say it is all very well for me to illustrate my argument by the case of a husband and wife whose political views are similar; how would it answer for a wife to have a vote if she disagreed with her husband's political opinions? I reply by asking in return—how does the present system answer? In those cases in which the husband and wife hold different political opinions, one of three things happens: either politics are suppressed as a subject of conversation—the husband goes his own way, and the wife never interferes or obtrudes her own views; or the husband and wife are sensible enough to discuss political subjects and defend their respective opinions with energy, and yet without temper; or else, finally, they take no pains to smooth over or hide their differences. The wife, for instance, fasts every 30th of January, in honour of the sacred memory of King Charles the martyr; whilst the husband hangs up the death warrant of that monarch, and treasures it as a glorious memento of British freedom. Now in each of these cases the perfect concord and sympathy which form the ideal of marriage are more or less destroyed. What is it which destroys this concord and sympathy? The

answer must be—essential difference of opinion on a subject constantly affecting every-day life. It is the divergence of opinion which destroys the harmony, not the expression of that divergence. Under the present system women cannot be prevented from having political opinions, or from expressing them, and I venture to think that if they had votes there would be more domestic harmony on political subjects than there now is; for then marriages would not so frequently take place between those who hold diametrically opposite political views. Suppose, for instance, that in order to insure conjugal harmony on religious matters, a law were passed to prevent all women going to church. The advocates of such a law might say. 'Suppose an Evangelical married a Roman Catholic, what disagreement it would lead to, if the husband went off to one place of worship and the wife to another.' As a fact such marriages seldom take place; for it is recognised that women have a right to think for themselves on religious subjects, and there is therefore a strong and reasonable feeling against marriages between people of opposite religious opinions. Would not the same feeling come into existence against marriages between people of opposite political parties, if the political independence of women were recognised. If this feeling were prevalent I believe a higher harmony than any yet generally known would gradually pervade domestic life.

Let us now consider the validity of the fourth objection raised against the enfranchisement of women, namely, "The ideal of domestic life is a miniature despotism, in which there is one supreme head, to whom all other members of the family are subject. This ideal would be destroyed if the equality of women with men were recognised, by extending the suffrage to women." I am ready at once to concede that if the truth of the premise is granted, the truth of the conclusion must be granted also. Family despotism would receive a deadly blow from the extension of political power to women. But let us inquire how and why men—Englishmen at least—have come to consider despotic national government immoral and let us see whether despotic family government differs essentially in principle



from other despotisms. First let us inquire why despotic national government has been so successfully opposed in this country, and why representative government has been set up in its place. It may be briefly said that despotic government has been got rid of in this country because it has been felt to interfere unwarrantably with individual liberty. The leaders of popular rights, from the time of Magna Charta to this day, have always insisted on the importance of reserving individual liberty. Why has the name "liberty" always had such a magic spell over men? Why has liberty been valued more than life itself by all those whose names make our history glorious? Why have our greatest poets sung the praises of liberty in words that will never be forgotten as long as our language lasts? Is it not because it has been felt more or less strongly at all times that man's liberty is essential to the observance of man's duty? A contemporary philosopher has thus analysed the right of mankind to liberty. He says "It may be admitted that human happiness is the Divine will. We become conscious of happiness through the sensations. How do we receive sensations? Through what are called faculties. It is certain that a man cannot hear without ears. Equally certain that he can experience no impression of any kind unless he is endowed with some power fitted to take in that impression; that is, a faculty. All the mental states, which he calls feelings and ideas, are affections of his consciousness, received through his faculties. There next comes the question—under what circumstances do the faculties yield those sensations of which happiness consists? The reply is—when they are exercised. It is from the activity of most of them that gratification arises. Every faculty in turn affords its special emotion; and the sum of these constitutes happiness; therefore happiness consists in the due exercise of all the faculties. Now if God wills man's happiness, and man's happiness can be obtained only by the exercise of his faculties, then God wills that man should exercise his faculties, for duty means the fulfilment of the Divine will. As God wills man's happiness, that line of conduct which produces unhappiness is contrary to His will. Therefore the non-exercise of the faculties is contrary to His will. Either way then we

find the exercise of the faculties to be God's will and man's duty. But the fulfilment of this duty necessarily supposes freedom of action. Man cannot exercise his faculties without certain scope. He must have liberty to go and come, to see, to feel, to speak, to work, to get food, raiment, shelter, and to provide for all the needs of his nature. He must be free to do everything which is directly or indirectly requisite for the due satisfaction of every mental and bodily want. Without this he cannot fulfil his duty or God's will. He has Divine authority therefore for claiming this freedom of action. God intended him to have it; that is, he has a right to it. From this conclusion there seems no possibility of escape. Let us repeat the steps by which we arrive at it. God wills man's happiness. Man's happiness can only be produced by the exercise of his faculties. Then God wills that he should exercise his faculties. To exercise his faculties he must have liberty to do all that his faculties naturally impel him to do. Then God wills that he should have that liberty. Therefore he has a right to that liberty." The only limitation to perfect liberty of action is the equal liberty of all. "Liberty is not the right of one, but of all! All are endowed with faculties. All are bound to fulfil the Divine will by exercising them. All, therefore, must be free to do those things in which the exercise of them consists. That is, all must have rights to liberty of action. Wherefore we arrive at the general proposition that every one (man or woman) may claim the fullest liberty to exercise his faculties compatible with the possession of like liberty by every other person." Never has the basis of individual liberty been more clearly explained than in this passage. It proves conclusively that despotism being antagonistic to the principle of "the perfect freedom of each, limited only by the like freedom of all," is at variance with the Divine will. How then can the ideal of family life be despotism, when despotism is proved to be antagonistic to the Divine will? If I have dwelt at some length on the importance of recognising the real basis of the rights of man, it is not to prove to you that these rights exist,—all in this room are probably willing to concede that,—but to "show that the rights of women must stand or fall with

those of men; derived as they are from the same authority; involved in the same axiom; demonstrated by the same argument." Much more could be said in defence of the assertion that despotic family government is very far removed from the ideal state. If time permitted I think it could be shown that command is blighting to the affections, and that where anything approaching the ideal of domestic happiness at present exists, the subjugation of all members of the family to the husband and father is not enforced. But it is necessary to pass to the consideration of the next objection to the extension of political power to women, namely, that women are intellectually inferior to men. I am not going to enter upon the vexed question whether the mental powers of men and women are equal. It is almost impossible from want of evidence to prove whether they are or not. It may be very interesting as a philosophical discussion, but I maintain that it is quite irrelevant to the present subject,—that is, whether women ought to have political power. Suppose it could be proved beyond the slightest doubt that on the average the intellectual powers of women were inferior to those of men. If this were fully and satisfactorily established, as a fact, it would not furnish the slightest justification for depriving women of electoral power. Suppose it were also proved that the intellectual powers of the inhabitants of the north of England are superior to those of the inhabitants of the south of England. I can assure you I have often heard very accomplished people assert seriously that this is the case. Would you recognise that as a reason why the inhabitants of the south of England should be deprived of electoral power? Would the people of Tavistock be willing to relinquish their right to the franchise if it were proved to demonstration that on an average and taking them altogether they were intellectually inferior to the inhabitants of Edinburgh? It is ridiculous to suggest such a thing, and yet this absurdity is exactly similar to what is really urged against allowing women to exercise the franchise. But the question may be looked at from another point of view. It is said that women on the whole are not the intellectual equals of men. Whether this

is true I neither affirm nor deny; but even the most ardent asserters of the inferiority of women have never said that all women are inferior to all men. In the sphere of government I need only mention Zenobia, Maria Theresa, and Elizabeth to remind you that these women's names stand pre-eminent. Let us hear what the authority previously quoted has to say on this subject. Granting for the sake of argument, that the intellect of woman is less profound than that of man, he adds "Let all this be granted, and let us now see what basis such an admission affords to the doctrine that the rights of women are not co-extensive with those of men:—

"1. If rights are to be meted out to the two sexes in the ratio of their respective amounts of intelligence, then must the same system be acted upon in the apportionment of rights between man and man.

"2. In like manner, it will follow, that as there are here and there women of unquestionably greater ability than the average of men, some women ought to have greater rights than some men.

"3. Wherefore, instead of a certain fixed allotment of rights to all males and another to all females, the hypothesis involves an infinite gradation of rights, irrespective of sex entirely, and sends us once more in search of those unattainable desiderata,—a standard by which to measure capacity, and another by which to measure rights. Not only, however, does the theory thus fall to pieces under the mere process of inspection; it is absurd on the very face of it, when freed from the disguise of hackneyed phraseology. For what is it that we mean by rights? Nothing else than freedom to exercise the faculties. And what is the meaning of the assertion that woman is mentally inferior to man? Simply that her faculties are less powerful. What then does the dogma that because woman is mentally inferior to man she has less extensive rights, amount to? Just this—that because woman has weaker faculties than man, she ought not to have like liberty with him to exercise the faculties she has?"

We will now pass to the sixth objection to women's suffrage—that the family is woman's proper sphere, and if she entered into politics she would

be withdrawn from her domestic duties. I may mention in passing—it is a fact to which I do not attach any special importance or regret—that there are some million or so of women in this country without families and without domestic affairs to superintend. The number of women is constantly in excess of the number of men, and so there must always be a certain per-centage of women unmarried, and who therefore have no families to be withdrawn from. It is all very well to tell a woman that her sphere is to be a wife and mother, when there must always be a large number of women unmarried, owing to the simple fact that there are more women in the world than men. But let us look at the case of women who are married, and see whether the objection that politics would withdraw them from domestic duties is valid. I should like to find out exactly how many hours in the year an elector in such a town as this devotes to his political duties. Do you think that on an average, taking one with another, they spend an hour a week, every week in the year, in discharging their electoral duties? I don't know whether they do, but I doubt it. I don't think an elector, unless he is engaged in some particular work, such as superintending the registration, or as secretary of some political society, need devote as much as an hour a week, no, nor half-an-hour a week, to duties which the franchise imposes on him. Then what does this objection, that the right to vote at Parliamentary elections would withdraw women from domestic duties, really come to? Why soon it will be objected that women should not go to church or out for a walk, because so doing withdraws them from their domestic duties. But it may be urged that it is not merely the exercise of the franchise, but all that an interest in political questions involves—the reading of newspapers, the attending of meetings, and the like—that would have a mischievous influence in withdrawing women from their domestic duties. But surely the wife and mother of a family ought to be something more than a housekeeper or a nurse,—how will she be able to minister to the mental wants of her husband and her children if she makes the care of their physical comforts the only object of her life? I do not say that physical

comfort is to be despised, but if there is no moral and intellectual sympathy between a husband and wife, or between a mother and her children, a permanent and life-long injury is inflicted on them all, which no amount of physical comfort can in the slightest degree compensate. It is, however, quite erroneous to suppose that an attention to domestic duties and to intellectual pursuits cannot be combined. There is no reason whatever why wives and mothers should not cultivate their minds and at the same time give proper attention to their domestic affairs. As far as my experience goes, the notion that a woman, in order to manage her house and family well, must devote her whole time and mind to it, and do nothing else, is quite incorrect. If I were asked to name the most orderly, neat, bright, and best managed houses that I am acquainted with, I should name those which are respectively presided over by women whose names are justly celebrated for their achievements in literature and science, or for their activity in promoting educational and social reform. Perhaps my experience is exceptionally favourable, but I do not think I know one distinguished woman whose home does not do credit to her taste, refinement, and love of order. I do not, therefore, think the plea that the franchise would withdraw women from their domestic duties, is a valid objection to their enfranchisement.

We now come to the seventh objection—that the line must be drawn somewhere, and if women had votes they would soon be wanting to enter the House of Commons. This objection was some years back considered a conclusive argument against removing the electoral disabilities of working men. At any rate, said the Tories, let us have gentlemen in the House of Commons—fancy sitting next a man who didn't sound his h's. They were also quite certain that working men would be great failures in the House. We all know the reply of the Reformers to such objections as these. They said, "These are questions for constituencies to decide; they are not likely to select a man to serve them in the House of Commons unless he is capable of devoting sufficient time, trouble and ability to the discharge of his duties." The selection of a fit person to

serve them in Parliament may safely be left to constituencies. At the present time there is no necessity to pass a law that a man wholly immersed in the conduct of a large business, should not offer himself as a candidate for a seat in Parliament. All these things are settled by candidates and constituencies without any legislative interference. As Mr. Mill very justly says—I quote from memory—there is no necessity to pass laws to forbid people doing what they cannot do. There is no Act of Parliament needed to enact that none but strong-armed men should be blacksmiths. And so it would prove if all the electoral disabilities were swept away. The would-be-witty caricatures of sickly women fainting in the House of Commons under the weight of their legislative responsibilities would lose their brilliancy and point in the cold light of stern reality. No constituency would deliberately choose a representative who would be quite incapable of serving it faithfully and well. All questions about who should or who should not have seats in Parliament may safely be left to constituencies.

I now turn to the consideration of the eighth objection to the extension of political power to women—that women do not want votes. Notwithstanding the obvious reply that a considerable number of women do want votes, and are continually petitioning Parliament to remove their electoral disabilities, I must confess that this objection to the enfranchisement of women appears to me more formidable than any other which has ever reached me. Of course it makes no difference at all so far as abstract justice is concerned; but still in practical politics abstract justice does not usually weigh much with statesmen, unless it is accompanied by an urgent and pressing demand for the amelioration of the law. There must always be a certain adaptation between the characters of the people, and the rule under which they live. The existence of the Irish Church Establishment was as much opposed to abstract justice in 1769 as it was in 1869, but disestablishment did not take place until the demand for it was so urgent that it could no longer be disregarded. The demand for the extension of the suffrage to women is daily growing more earnest

and more general. The Bill now before Parliament has been supported by petitions from every part of the kingdom, signed by many tens of thousands of men and women. In the presence of such facts it cannot be said that there is no demand on the part of women for the suffrage. There is also this very strong argument, which is sometimes overlooked by those who consider that the suffrage should not be extended to women, because the majority of women do not desire to exercise their electoral rights. None of us who desire the extension of the franchise to women wish women to be compelled to vote. Only those who desire political power need exercise their newly-acquired rights. Any woman who thinks that voting would be unfeminine or injurious to her health, would be quite at liberty to refrain from taking part in elections. But it seems to me very unfair that those who don't wish for political power should be enabled to deprive those who do wish for it of the right to exercise the franchise.

Let us now turn to the next objection, namely, that most women are Conservatives, and that their enfranchisement would consequently have a reactionary influence on politics. I have often heard this argument from the lips of men for whom I have the greatest respect, but I never hear it without astonishment and regret. What is representative government if not government by a national assembly chosen by the people to represent their views, and to produce a corresponding influence on the state of the laws? Do those who object to the enfranchisement of women, on the ground that they are usually Conservatives, think that all Conservatives ought to be disfranchised? Surely representative institutions require that all differences of opinion should have their due and proportionate weight in the legislature. No class of persons should be excluded on account of their political opinions. What would be thought of a Conservative who gravely asserted that he thought all Dissenters should be disfranchised because they are generally Liberals? I am almost afraid even to suggest the hard names which such a misguided person would be called by the very people who oppose women's suffrage, because nearly all women are



Conservatives. And yet the two cases are exactly parallel, and equally antagonistic to the fundamental principle of representative government. A representative system which excludes half the community from representation surely is a farce. In my opinion the question ought not even to be asked, "How would women vote if they had the franchise?" The only question ought to be, "Is representative government the best form of government that can be devised?" If the answer is in the affirmative the exclusion of women from electoral rights can in no way be justified.

The next objection which I have set down is that the indulgence and courtesy with which women are now treated by men would cease if women exercised all the rights and privileges of citizenship. As I hear this objection the old Bible story forcibly recurs to my mind, of Esau, and how he sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. Let it be granted that women would no longer be treated with exceptional courtesy and indulgence if they exercised the rights and privileges of citizenship. What do this exceptional courtesy and this indulgence really amount to? I am not going to say that they are valueless, but let us analyse them and see of what sort of things they consist. Women are usually assisted in and out of carriages; they also take precedence of men in entering and leaving a room; the door also is frequently opened for them; they are helped first at dinner; and they are always permitted to walk on the inside side of the pavement. Beside these there are more substantial privileges; such as being allowed to monopolise the seats in a room, or in a railway carriage, in those cases where, owing to overcrowding, some of those present are compelled to stand. I hope I do not unduly underrate these little amenities of social life; they are very harmless and perhaps even pleasant in their way; but I think it must be confessed that their practical value is small indeed, especially if the price paid for them consists of all the rights and privileges of citizenship. If the courtesy of men to women is bought at this price, it must not be forgotten that the sale is compulsory, and can in no case be regarded as a free contract. But now let us consider whether women would really lose all the politeness

now shown to them if their right to the franchise were recognised. At elections it is not usually the case that those who have votes are treated with the least consideration; but apart from this, how would the courtesy of every-day life be affected by an extension of the suffrage to women? I incline to the belief that some of the mere forms of politeness which have no practical value, such as always giving precedence to a woman in entering and leaving a room, would slowly but gradually fall into disuse if the electoral disabilities of women were removed; but I am quite convinced that true politeness, which is inseparately associated with kindness of heart, would not suffer any decrease from the extension of the suffrage to women. As far as my experience goes, those who are invested with political power of any kind are always treated with more deference and respect than those that are destitute of that valuable commodity. The highest political power in the kingdom is vested in a woman, and what man is inclined on that account to be less courteous to her, or less considerate of her feelings? Have the women who have taken part in late municipal and school board elections been treated more rudely since they acquired that instalment of political power? In answer to this objection to women's suffrage—that women would lose in the politeness with which they are now treated more than they would gain in political power—I reply in the first place that women are compelled to pay a great deal too dearly for this politeness, if they are forced to sacrifice for it all the rights and privileges of citizens. And secondly, there is no reason to suppose that the acquisition of political power would cause women to be treated with less courtesy and respect, though some of the mere forms of politeness might disappear, if the equality of the rights of men and women were recognized.

The next objection to the enfranchisement of women is one which has probably never occurred to any one in this room. I certainly should never have thought of it had I not noticed it in a daily paper, the writers of which have shown the greatest inventiveness and originality in their persistent attacks on women's suffrage.

Argument after argument they have advanced against it, and as no one took much notice of these attacks, I suppose the editor thought that something quite new must be tried. The following was the result. "The keen and intense excitement kindled by political strife would, if shared by women, deteriorate their physical powers, and would probably lead to the insanity of considerable numbers of them." I think if medical men were called upon to reply to such an objection as this, they could easily prove that a great many more people—especially women—suffer in regard to their health through having nothing to do, and no absorbing interest in life, than through overwork and excitement. If the editor of the journal just quoted would condescend to practical experience, perhaps he will inquire if those women who have lately taken part in the municipal contests and the school board elections have since exhibited any alarming symptoms. Such an argument as that just mentioned would be more comprehensible if women were entirely debarred from mixing with the outside world; but as it is, there is nothing to prevent women from sharing the general excitement caused by elections. It is notorious to every one that they do share it, and I have no hesitation in saying that many of them are a great deal better for it. But suppose it were satisfactorily proved that the health of some women would be injured by the excitement caused by taking part in elections, is that a reason for excluding all women from political power? The health of many men is frequently injured by excessive political work and excitement. Instances of such cases must occur to every one present. The illness from which Mr. Bright is now suffering, and the extreme exhaustion of the Prime Minister, at the end of the session of 1869, were both doubtless produced by the mental strain attendant on too much political work. But such facts furnish no argument against the exercise of political power by these eminent persons. We all hope the only practical result of their maladies may be to make them more solicitous of their own health than they have hitherto been. It may safely be left to the inhabitants of a free country to take the necessary precautions for preserving their own health; and

if any women found that the excitement of elections endangered either her mind or her body, no Act of Parliament would be necessary to induce her to withdraw from political strife. It has almost become a proverb that you cannot make people moral by Act of Parliament. I am sure it is equally true that you cannot make them healthy by Act of Parliament.

The next objection urged against the enfranchisement of women, is one which I am not perhaps wrong in saying is the one which has had the most powerful influence in producing the opposition to women's suffrage. Consciously, or unconsciously, most of us are greatly under the dominion of our feelings, even when they are directly opposed to the dictates of our reason. But let it not be forgotten that reason must be listened to sooner or later, and the feelings must ultimately submit to be modified by the understanding. This objection which I believe to be so potent with most people who oppose women's suffrage is "that the exercise of political power by women is repugnant to the feelings, and quite at variance with a due sense of propriety." In Turkey, a woman who walked out with her face uncovered, would be considered to have lost all sense of propriety—her conduct would be highly repugnant to the feelings of the community. In China, a woman who refused to pinch her feet to about a quarter of their natural size, would be looked upon as entirely destitute of female refinement. We censure these customs as ignorant, and the feelings on which they are based as quite devoid of the sanction of reason. It is therefore clear that it is not enough, in order to prove the undesirability of the enfranchisement of women, to say that it is repugnant to the feelings. It must be further inquired to what feelings women's suffrage is repugnant, and whether these feelings are "necessary and eternal," or "being the results of custom, they are changeable and evanescent." I think these feelings may be shown to belong to the latter class. In the first place a feeling that is necessary and eternal must be consistent, and the feeling of repugnance towards the exercise of political power by women is not consistent; for no one feels this repugnance towards the

exercise of political power by Queen Victoria. In the second place it has been previously shown that the equal freedom of all is a necessary pre-requisite of the fulfilment of the Divine will, and that the equal freedom of a part of the community is destroyed if it is deprived of political power. Now it seems to me in the highest degree blasphemous to assert that the Supreme Being has implanted in man necessary and eternal feelings in opposition to his own will. Again, the state of popular opinion as to what women may, or may not do, is constantly changing in the same country and even in the minds of the same individuals, and the feelings on this subject differ in different classes of the community; it is, therefore, quite impossible to say that these feelings are necessary and eternal. If they are not necessary and eternal they are the result of custom, changeable and evanescent, and are destined to be modified by advancing civilization. It may be that a great deal of the repugnance which undoubtedly exists against women taking part in politics arises from the disturbance and disorder which are too often the disgraceful characteristics of elections in this country. I should like to say a few words on this point. In the first place the adoption of the ballot and the abolition of nominations, which are almost certain to take place before the next dissolution, will, in all probability, cause elections to be conducted with perfect order and tranquillity. A distinguished statesman, whose name I could mention, lately told a friend of mine that his last objection to woman's suffrage would be removed by the adoption of the ballot. In the second place I think the danger of women proceeding to polling places under the present system is greatly exaggerated. As the result of my own experience I can testify that during the last election at Brighton I was walking about, from one polling place to another, the whole of the day; the town was in a state of great excitement; the contest was very severe, and party feeling ran high. I walked through an excited crowd just previous to the close of the poll, after having been assured that it was not safe for me to venture, and I never heard one word or saw one gesture which would have caused reasonable annoyance to the most sensitive and refined lady.

But I can give another and perhaps more striking example from my own experience. During the general election of 1865, I went round to many of the polling places in Westminster, accompanied only by a young girl. We met with no incident whatever which could have alarmed or annoyed any one. My experience on this point has always been the same, and it is corroborated by the experience of all ladies with whom I am acquainted, who, like myself, have tested by personal experience, whether it is either unpleasant or unsafe for a woman to go to a polling place. Their unanimous testimony has been that there is nothing to deter a woman from recording her vote. I, for one, have too good an opinion of my countrymen to believe that they would insult or annoy a well-conducted woman in the discharge of what she believed to be a public duty.

I now pass to the last objection, for by this time I am sure you must be getting weary of me. This objection, that the notion of women's suffrage is monstrous and absurd, and deserves only to be treated as a joke, is one which is slowly dying a natural death. You will hear of it in remote country districts, but it has received its death blow from the names of the many very eminent persons who are the warm advocates of women's suffrage. Perhaps I need only mention such names as Mr. Mill, Canon Kingsley, Mr. Darwin, Professor Huxley, and Professor Maurice, to remind you that women's suffrage is advocated by men occupying the highest ranks in philosophy, science, and literature. Mr. Mill and others have shown in their writings, the grounds on which they base their support of the claims of women to representation. It is easy to laugh; but when the leading philosophical thinkers of the day use all their weight and influence, and employ their great genius in striving to produce a recognition of the rights of women, their arguments must be met with arguments; they will never be answered by a sneer. I think I have now made a reply to all the objections previously enumerated against women's suffrage. In doing so I have perhaps sufficiently indicated the grounds on which I advocate it. I have endeavoured to show that men's rights and women's rights must

stand or fall together; their maintenance is necessary to the fulfilment of the Divine will—man's happiness. For if God wills man's happiness, and man's happiness depends on his freedom, then God wills man's freedom. "Equity knows no difference of sex. The law of equal freedom necessarily applies to the whole race—female as well as male. The same reasoning which establishes that law for men may be used with equal cogency on behalf of women." These are not my words, they are the words of a great philosopher, whose writings will probably mould the opinions of unborn generations. I refer to Mr. Spencer, and as I have, perhaps, passed rather too briefly over the objections of those who urge that women's suffrage would destroy the harmony of home, I cannot do better than quote in conclusion what he has said on the effect of the complete enfranchisement of women on domestic happiness. "Married life under this ultimate state of things will not be characterised by perpetual squabbles but by mutual concessions. Instead of a desire on the part of the husband to assert his claims to the uttermost, regardless of those of his wife, or on the part of the wife to do the like, there will be a watchful desire on both sides not to transgress. Neither will have to stand on the defensive, because each will be solicitous for the rights of the other. Not encroachment but self-sacrifice will be the ruling principle. The struggle will be, not which shall gain the mastery, but which shall give way. Committing a trespass will be the thing feared, and not the being trespassed against. And thus instead of domestic discord will come a higher harmony than any we yet know."

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