

Woman's Right to Vote

Whether the equal suffrage amendment to the constitution of New York is ratified by the voters of the state next fall will depend upon the attitude of women themselves.

If the majority of women earnestly desire the suffrage for themselves and their sex, the amendment will probably be adopted. On this question men voters are sure to be mightily swayed by the opinions of the women members of the family. If the majority of women are antagonistic or indifferent, the amendment will be defeated.

The World has made an effort to arrive at the sentiment, in a general way, of women themselves toward the suffrage. The results may be summarized in this fashion:

1. Among women who express an opinion either way, a very large majority desire to vote.

2. Most of the women to whom opportunity was given to express their sentiments had no opinion either for or against suffrage, and are presumably not yet interested in the issue.

The neutral attitude of the women who are without opinion does not affect the merits of the question, but if they maintain this attitude it will seriously affect the results at the polls.

As to the issue itself, The World is frank to admit that it knows of no valid arguments against woman suffrage which do not apply with equal force against manhood suffrage. Government is merely the expression of the political purposes of the community. The community is made up of men and women, all of whom have an equal right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. No adult woman of sound mind is subjected to a guardianship in any of the affairs of life except politics. She may buy and sell, she may sue and be sued, she may own property and convey property—she may do anything that a man may do except vote. In other words, she may do everything except exercise a direct power upon the political institutions to which she is

subject. This is a negation of democracy.

From the day of the Magna Charta down to the day of the New Freedom the genius of republican institutions has steadily sought to broaden the base of the electoral power—to make these institutions more democratic. Originally only the king had a vote. Then the barons seized the franchise and the veto. What the barons won all landholders eventually acquired. The states of the United States finally swept away property qualifications and established manhood suffrage. The negro was enfranchised, and now comes woman, the last remaining element in the body politic, to demand that a right which can not be denied to citizens of the United States on account of race, color or previous condition of servitude shall not be denied on account of sex.

The argument that government is based upon force and that women should not be allowed to vote because they are deficient in physical prowess hardly deserves to be taken seriously. Governments hire their force as they hire all their other service. Even when they resort to conscription they pick and choose—and pay. No country in modern times ever did or ever could muster its entire male population into its military establishment. Probably half of the entire German army today is engaged in duties that are practically civilian. All of war is not fighting in the trenches or goose-stepping to the front. The French women who gather the harvests and the German women who plough the fields perform a military service no less important than that of the men on the firing line. Without their efforts in providing food the men could not continue the war.

Most of the conventional arguments against woman suffrage are fantastic, but not less so than most of the popular arguments in favor of woman suffrage. All pretense that votes for women will "purify politics" may be dismissed as "clotted nonsense," to use Carlyle's favorite ob- jurgation. Women will not purify politics. They never have done so in states in which they have the vote, and they never will. As a sex, women average no better than men. They are no more honest. They are no more patriotic. Their public ideals are no higher, but rather lower, if anything. As a class they are no less wise in general affairs than men because their experience is less wide. The classes that already vote necessarily have a clearer understanding of the functions and limitations of government than the classes that are seeking the vote.

Woman suffrage will not reform government in the conventional moral sense, although in the long run it will produce a more representative and responsible government. If we may judge the future by the past, the immediate effect of woman suffrage will be to disorganize government and add to its confusion. That is what has always happened when the franchise was extended. Each new influx of voters submerged the old order, and the former standards of public service deteriorated for the time being, much to the anguish of the Brahmin classes, but not to the permanent injury of society. Enlarging the suffrage does not purify government, but enlarging the suffrage stabilizes and strengthens democracy, and hence the ultimate influence is invariably for the general good. In a democracy the people do not exist for the government, but the government exists for the people, and every adult person subject to govern-

ment may reasonably ask for a voice in ordering the policies of that government.

For women to demand the suffrage on the ground that they are purer and nobler and holier than men is to argue against their own cause. An oligarchy of virtue would only be one degree less oppressive than an oligarchy of vice. Nobody has ever obtained the franchise on the mere pretext that he was pure in heart, and nobody ever will. The franchise is not granted in order that politics may be purified, but in order that the holder of the franchise may the better protect his life, liberty, property and welfare under the government to which he is responsible as a citizen.

Votes for women will not improve the quality of government, but it will make women more intelligent and more responsible, and hence society as a whole must inevitably benefit. The ballot box is a mighty university. It has proved so in the case of men and it must prove so in the case of women, or all the experience of history is false.

Moreover, the political influence already exerted by a few women makes it highly desirable that all women be enfranchised in order to re-establish the balance. Under republican institutions power without responsibility is a grave evil. Women today have great power in government, but no responsibility. Various organizations of women, which probably do not represent 10 per cent of the sex, maintain at times a veritable reign of terror in legislative bodies by pretending to speak in the name of all women. In consequence half the country is now bedevilled by some form or another of harem government which in no respect is a true expression of public opinion. Legislators who are no better than they ought to be are forever making ridiculous concessions to women agitators on the theory that official sympathy with such moral yearnings is a shrewd method of diverting public suspicion. The statute books are loaded down with foolish laws dictated by a few crusading women and enacted in a spirit of "The ladies—God bless them!" An overwhelming majority of women have had no voice in this legislation, and they disclaim all responsibility for its results. But the statutes remain, the situation grows worse from year to year, and all laws fall more or less into contempt through this legislation bred of fanaticism and hypocrisy.

We know what would probably happen if government were in the hands of women and Anthony Comstock, Charles Edward Russell and the Anti-Saloon league were accepted as the spokesmen for all the disfranchised males. Yet something of that sort is going on all the time in state capitols in the name of women. The only antidote to the influence of some women upon government is the influence of all women upon government. When all sex limitations upon suffrage have been removed the political power of those women who are obsessed with the idea that government must assume the spiritual characteristics of a communistic prayer meeting will be restricted to their own votes and the votes of those who are actually in sympathy with them.

But if the claim that votes for women will purify politics is sentimental nonsense, the counter-claim that votes for women will wreck the home is equally absurd. Protecting the home is one of the favorite recreations of American Bourbonism. The home is the oldest of human institutions. It is older than government. It is older than religion. It is older than creeds. It protects itself. It is not government that maintains the home, but it is the home that maintains government. It was because of homes that governments were estab-

lished. An institution that has withstood the vicissitudes of centuries is not likely to collapse because the women of a community spend half an hour in a voting booth on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November. If the home could survive St. Paul, it can survive the ballot.

Eliminating from the suffrage controversy all of its cant and twaddle, the question is a straight issue of whether all the adult citizens of the state shall be entitled to a voice in making the laws to which all of them are subject, or whether this privilege shall be the exclusive property of half of these citizens who gain their political power by the accident of sex.

Lincoln once said that this republic was founded on the rule of "root, hog, or die," and women are no less amenable to that principle than are men. The amiable theory that it is man's function to provide and woman's function to be sheltered is a living lie, as millions of women wage-earners can testify. Sometimes man provides and sometimes he doesn't. The woman who is sheltered today may be working in a factory tomorrow to support herself and her children. Hunger knows no sex. Want knows no sex. Necessity knows no sex. Law knows no sex. Property knows no sex. Only the ballot box knows sex.

But the ballot box once knew rank. It once knew land and primogeniture. It once knew income and money and family. All those paraphernalia of privilege have been swept away, and the disability of sex will follow. In the steady sweep of democracy the time will come when the present opposition to woman suffrage will seem as shortsighted and senseless as the former opposition to manhood suffrage now seems.

Democracies always move forward. That is their law of self-preservation. If they stand still or retrograde they are lost.—New York World.

WOMAN SUFFRAGE CERTAIN

Within ten years or less women will be voting on the same terms as men in most of our states, and the backward remnant will be hustling to catch up. The movement has passed the stage of doubt and ridicule, and has almost passed the stage of argument. The change from the indifference of twenty years ago is amazing. Women vote in eleven states now, against four then, and the issue will be up to voters next fall in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Iowa, Massachusetts, West Virginia, Tennessee and perhaps other states. The affirmative side is active, aggressive, and confident, and includes many men who have gained their faith by fighting for better politics. In comparison, the mental bankruptcy of the antis is fairly pitiful. The suffragists can rest their case on the plain fact that women do participate in the life of our modern communities, and should, therefore, participate in the business of government. The antis can reply only with solemn and pathetic foolishness about "disorganizing society," "advanced theories," "new evils," and the like—the stale harpings of prejudice and timidity. In a contest between such forces the outcome is certain, for the United States is neither timid nor silly.—Collier's.

SHE ENJOYED IT

"How did the minister get on, the day?" an auld wife was asked on her way home by one who had not been able to be at church that morning. "How did he get on? He just stood and threw stanes at us, an' never missed wi' ane o' them. My certie, but yon was good preachin'!"—The Continent.



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