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ARTICLE VII.

"WOMAN SUFFRAGE."

BY THE REV. JOHN MILTON WILLIAMS, A. M., CHICAGO, ILL.

"FOR this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife, and the twain shall become one flesh." In this pregnant utterance the Great Teacher gives the divine conception and the true ideal of marriage. He makes it consist in the *oneness* of husband and wife. They are, he repeats, no more two, but one. What God hath *joined together*. Their home and possessions are common to both, their earthly interests inseparable, and they so complement each other as to form a complete person—the unit of society.

The beauty and rationale of this relation appear when we reflect how the identity of aims and interests it secures knits human hearts together. It brings man and wife into the closest conceivable harmony, banishes separate interests, that chief bane of the household, and renders dissonance between them a thing hardly possible.

It is a relation in which woman as the weaker party finds a refuge. She stands related to her husband as a part of himself. He feels the same interest in her welfare he does in his own; he protects, defends, and shelters her, with the same ready hand that shields and protects himself. In the gains and losses, the victories and defeats, the prosperity and adversity of either, both are equal sharers. The gladness and the tears of the home belong equally to husband and wife. Thus united, how doubly strong they are, how doubly dear and helpful to each other, and how doubly fortified against the trials and enemies of the way! Like two moun-

tain rills united, they flow along with more than redoubled strength, and more than redoubled music.

This wondrous relation is the key to the great problem of woman's sphere and rights. What are woman's rights? Precisely those, I answer, of her husband. As a matter of convenience he carries the ballot to the polls as he carries the tax to the county treasurer, and relieves her of a burden she gladly escapes. The vote he carries is not his own alone. It is the family vote, selected, it is presumed, by the united wisdom of both husband and wife, in the emoluments of which both equally share. The complaint that she is deprived of her vote is groundless. She is, in the true sense a wife, represented at the polls by her husband, as a partner in the firm, and she may as reasonably complain that he drives the carriage and feeds the horses. If she is ambitious for the publicity of voting, or if, by sickness or otherwise, he is disabled, I see no objection to her carrying the vote, unless it be the abuse which might come from such an arrangement.

But I am reminded that all women are not wives. It is true, the absolute number of unmarried women is large, but the *relative* number is not large; and as society advances in civilization and Christianity, the ratio will grow less and less. As it is, the woman who is not identified with some family, and not represented by husband, father, brother, son, or some one, is a rare occurrence; and to burden the many, for any fancied good to the few, is, to say the least, undemocratic.

I am also advised that many women pay taxes, and am triumphantly asked, whether taxation without representation is just. Certainly it is, I answer. God exacts homage, obedience, service, from those who are not represented in his counsels and from whom he never seeks advice. A tax is payment for value received, and in no government constitutes a right to the ballot. The property of the minor and the

alien is taxed the same as other property, and no one complains; and multitudes, possibly a majority, of voters never pay a tax. There is no necessary relation between tax-paying and voting.

It is farther urged, that discriminating against women at the polls is an implication of inferiority, and an indignity to her sex. Not so is it generally regarded by women. They recognize the difference between their appropriate sphere and duties and those of men, and can see no more disgrace in being denied the privilege of voting, than in being denied the privilege of driving oxen, or acting as town constable. The average woman deems her duties respectable, and about as onerous as she cares to assume, and feels no need of the honor the ballot would confer. Indeed thirty years of faithful missionary labor have failed to make her realize that she is suffering from want of it.

Woman, it is farther claimed, is a citizen, having a natural right to the ballot, and as all just government rests on the consent of the governed, it is unjust to deprive her of all share in the choice of her rulers, and to exact obedience to laws she has had no agency in making.

I unhesitatingly characterize this complaint as both absurd and atheistic, one with which the intelligent American woman has no sympathy. The right to govern does not rest upon the consent of the governed. (The divine authority, to which all rightful human authority is subordinate, rests on no such basis. God never asked permission to reign.) Nor does the right of the parent to govern rest on the consent of his children. Nor does the right to punish the criminal rest upon his consent to be punished. Governments were ordained to *govern*, not to be governed. To refuse to obey laws, moral or physical, because we have had no voice in making them, is indicative of insanity. On what then, it will be asked, does the right or duty to govern rest? On the same foundation on which every other obligation rests,

—the claims of the highest good, the supreme law of the moral world.// God's obligation to promote the highest welfare of the universe involves the obligation to govern the universe. On this foundation rests family government. Parents are best qualified to govern their children. The highest good requires that they should, and they cannot innocently refuse. On precisely this basis rests civil government. His duty, and of course his right, it is to govern, who can do it best. Or rather he is the rightful ruler whose services, as such, the highest interest of all demands. Where there are no providential indications pointing to the right man, the choice and approval of the people should be regarded as such an indication, and he on whom the choice falls should be accepted as the "minister of God." His authority to govern rests not upon the consent of the people, nor is it conferred by the people, nor by any direct divine intervention; it rests on the obligations of the moral law to contribute to the extent of his ability to "the good of being in general." All this complaint about the injustice of refusing woman a share in the choice of her rulers, and exacting obedience to laws she has had no voice in making, is based upon a theory of government utterly false and subversive of the very foundations of order. All created moral beings are born within the mighty trend of law as changeless and uncreated as God, to which they do well to conform.

No one doubts the ability of the average American woman to use the ballot with discretion. The decisive question is, Does the greatest good of the greatest number require that she have it? If the advocates of woman suffrage can show this, the ballot will not only be accorded her, but pressed upon her acceptance. If they cannot,—the burden of proof rests upon them,—it is neither wise nor womanly to insist upon having it. My long-established conviction is that the ballot in the hands of woman would not only subserve no

valuable end, but would work ill both in the family and in the state.

Would it aid woman? She suffers much from the brutality and cruelty of the stronger sex, no one doubts. Her wages in many cases are pitifully inadequate, and many have a hard lot, and none deplore it more deeply than men. Will the ballot remedy these evils? Will it tame the ferocity of a husband? Will it afford her more and better-paid employment? It fails to aid men in this respect. Probably ten men find nothing to do, to one woman. Within my observation, while men are seeking employment, employment is seeking woman. Will it give her better laws? I cannot see how, as she has but to suggest any enactment for the betterment of her condition, and our legislatures will hasten to write it in their statute-books. Woman suffrage cannot be relied upon as the remedy of woman's ills. "

While not disposed to question the sincerity of woman suffragists, I cannot regard the movement as creditable to woman's good sense. It seems to me, and I think to the great public, as a revolt against marriage in its true import, owing its genesis and inspiration largely to the absence of domestic affection. It appears more like a revenge than a reform, finding its incentives and reasons for being largely in man's alleged tyranny, selfishness, and oppression, the consequent hard lot of woman, and her need of protection. One woman, somewhat prominent, my daily informs me, recommends to her sisters the use of dynamite to bring men to a better mind. These considerations, whispered in closets and shrieked on public platforms, have not been happy in their results. They have created in many an unreflecting woman unrest, and dissatisfaction with her divinely appointed sphere; lowered her estimation of the sacredness of her position as wife, and mother, and mistress of a home; thrown the apple of discord into thousands of otherwise happy families, and

doubtless contributed to the alarming increase of divorces which appear on the records of our courts.

A committee appointed by the Senate of the United States to consider petitions forwarded to that body from woman suffragists, assert: "It is said by those who have examined the subject carefully, that the largest number of divorces are now found in the communities where the advocates of woman suffrage are the most numerous, and where the individuality of woman, as related to her husband, *which such a doctrine inculcates*, is increased to the greatest extent. If this be true, and it seems to be well authenticated, it is a strong plea in the interests of the family and of society against granting the petition of the advocates of woman suffrage."

The influence of woman suffrage on the home cannot but be divisive. As asserted in this report, it inculcates "the individuality of woman, as related to her husband;" it emphasizes the dualism, as against the unity, of husband and wife, and assumes that their interests are so diverse that two votes are necessary to represent them. The spectacle of husband and wife on their way to the polls carrying antagonistic votes suggests anything but harmony around the hearthstone. Woman, of all others, is most interested, and should most assiduously guard her home against such intrusion.

Home is the charmed spot of this world. Whatever affects it touches human interests in their most tender and vulnerable point. Amid the excitements of political campaigns, which sometimes threaten the stability of society, it should be neutral ground, the quiet retreat from battles without. To carrying the strife of politics into the sacred enclosure, intensifying it by involving women as well as men, families and neighborhoods as well as individuals, making the conflict an epidemic none escapes, and exposing women to the calumnies and shafts certain to follow, our intelligent

wives and mothers will never give their consent. It was a suggestive remark of Mrs. Coggswell, a sharp observer who had spent several years in Wyoming, "I have known very bitter feelings engendered because one woman did not vote for another woman's husband."

Woman's duties, it is conceded, are not limited to her home. She has, of late as never before, heard the cry for woman's help in the great fields of moral and religious reform, and the only plausible argument for the ballot I have ever heard is that it will make her more efficient in this work. This is exceedingly doubtful. But let us suppose it is true. She should bear in mind that her special divine call, and her transcendent duties, relate not to public reform but to her home, the spot where immortality is trained for two worlds; where on the fresh, unstained tablets of the soul are written the ineffaceable lessons which determine the direction of its journeyings forever. She should remember that the sweet, well-ordered Christian home is the generic reform, including and superseding all others, and that it admits of no rival. Anything, everything, that vitiates or mars its influence or involves a neglect of its duties should be reprobated.

Let us suppose woman suffrage would increase the relative number of temperance and reform votes, would such an increase promote these reforms? Probably not. These causes do not need woman's vote; and would receive no benefit from it. We have votes and laws enough already. There are, I think, but few States in this Union in which the people are not empowered, by law, to close the saloons on the Sabbath, and on every day of the week, just as soon as they want them closed, and all the laws and votes in creation could not close them sooner. The crying need is a rectified, elevated, Christian public sentiment which would carry with it all the votes and laws needed, and make them worth more than the paper on which they are written.

Would the ballot increase woman's contribution to such a public sentiment? I cannot think so. Woman is not improved by any effort to make herself a man. She is most influential when most womanly, and farthest removed, in her habits, tastes, and aspirations, from anything coarse, masculine, or unwomanly. I submit, that civil office, a place on the bench, in the jury box, or in the police station, the role of politician competing with coarse men for office and place, is not woman's appropriate sphere or compatible with the ideal woman, and cannot be accepted without doing violence to the feelings of the modest, refined woman: nor is it compatible with the respect and deference we love to pay her sex. "If you act like a man, I will treat you as I would a man," said an editor to a lady who was berating him for refusing to publish the product of her pen. The wondrous undefined fascination of the lady who is a lady is of great price, but, like the aroma of the flower, is easily despoiled. She cannot be too cautious.

"A rift within the lute
By-and-by, may make its music mute."

But it is by no means conceded that woman suffrage would increase the relative number of temperance and reform votes. The contrary strikes me as more probable.

1. Women who could be induced to vote, would, with relatively few exceptions, vote like their husbands, and consequently not materially change results. Mrs. Coggsell, to whom I have already referred, formerly a woman suffragist, in a letter read before the Massachusetts Legislature, says: "It looks to me like this: the man who has a wife controls two votes, and if he have grown-up daughters, controls as many votes as he has grown-up daughters. I have lived in Wyoming eight years, in a town where five hundred votes are polled, and I have looked into the matter with a good deal of interest, and, as yet, I have not known one-half dozen women vote differently from the male members of the fam-

ily. I venture to say not two women in Wyoming would vote for a Republican were her husband a Democrat, and *vice versa*. Indeed most of the women take their votes from their husbands, and without looking at them cast them into the ballot-box." Husbands and their wives are under the same general influences, and differences in political views are relatively infrequent. Where they do exist, the better class of women, with few exceptions, deeming harmony in her home of more consequence than her vote, if she votes at all will vote the same ticket her husband casts. This in effect would be allowing her husband two votes, and as all husbands would have the same privilege, woman's vote would not often change the result of an election.

2. When it would, are we certain the change would always be in the interests of reform? Women, I am sorry to say, are not all angels. Of her frailty we have had a sad illustration in Utah, where her vote proved the bulwark of polygamy, the instrument of her own degradation to an extent that made it necessary to deprive her of it in the interests of moral purity. In New Jersey woman suffrage was abolished, with the concurrence of both sexes, because her corrupt voting rendered the elections of that State a mere farce. No good would have come from the ballot in the hands of women in the South during the rebellion, as she was confessedly more violent in her hostility to the government than the men. In the circle of anarchism, and in mobs generally, she is the more exciting and volcanic element. There is more combustible and explosive material in woman than in man. She is less self-poised, and would be, with the vote in her hand, more easily influenced by the crafty politician, and more easily led captive by every wind of doctrine.

3. There is an uncounted army of women, from sixteen years old and upward, the saloons and brothels and slums of our great cities could pour forth, who, under the influence of money, would vote *early* and *often*, despite all the safe-

guards around the ballot-box yet devised. To open these flood-gates in our cities, where now an honest election is hardly possible, would swamp the ballot-boxes and fill all places of trust with a class of unprincipled and thieving demagogues. The danger is now more than imminent. What would it be with these hordes of dissolute and ignorant women let loose?

4. It is said the better classes of women are more numerous, and could easily outvote the ignorant and debased. I am thankful to believe they could, but the appalling question meets us, *Would they do it?* By some fatality the low and vicious are always on hand when voting is to be done. It is the better classes, those who are burdened with other cares, and those who shrink from strife, who are not there. Can modest, retiring, sensitive women be largely relied upon? The facts are not very assuring. "The School Suffrage Bill" passed the Legislature of Massachusetts in 1879, and was hailed as the emancipation of woman. Yet in two hundred cities and towns of that State, more than four-sevenths of the whole, during a period of *seven years*, all the efforts of female suffragists failed to secure a single vote from a woman. In 1886, out of a population of 481,310 females in that State over twenty-one years of age, but 1,911, or one in two hundred and fifty-four, could be induced to visit the polls. Just as discouraging have been the efforts of woman suffragists in New Hampshire and Vermont, where the same privileges are accorded women. In reference to Wyoming, Mrs. Cogswell says, "I have talked with many women in regard to whether they wished to vote, and without an exception, they unanimously vote it a bore, and dread election time." The fact, which the agitator of this pseudo-reform should know, is, the mass of the better class of women do not want, and will not accept, the ballot, and the relatively few who would, would as a rule vote the ticket their husbands vote, thus increasing the number of votes without

changing the complexion of the election; and woman suffrage in effect would flood the polls with a vast additional mass of corruption and illiteracy, while it would furnish very few opposing votes. Woman suffrage would aid reform, as the millstone about his neck would aid the swimmer.

Another question worthy of serious thought suggests itself: What would be the bearing of woman suffrage upon the political strength of the Roman Catholic Church in this country? An amendment to a bill before the Italian Parliament to the effect that the privilege of voting be extended to women possessing the requisite qualifications, was overwhelmingly defeated. This result was secured, in part, by the opinion of the premier, Signor Crispi, that the measure would contribute largely to the strength of the Roman Catholic hierarchy. "To give women a vote," was his language, "would imperil the free institution of Italy, for where one man is swayed in his political views by the parish priest, more than ten women are under that ghostly despotism."

The ratio is not so large in this country, but I am probably safe in saying, that where one man is under the control of a Roman Catholic priest there are two, perhaps three, women. If it be true that the Archbishop of New York controls, as he is said to have boasted, one hundred thousand votes now, what would be his political power with the ballot in the hands of women? He would be a taller figure in this republic, and wield more influence over its affairs, than the President of these States. Would it be wise to triple the political strength of a politico-religious hierarchy which is so successfully intriguing for power and place, waiting and working for the hour when the will of a foreign potentate shall be supreme in the New World? Can woman suffrage offer anything as an offset to this peril?

But a more serious peril, growing out of woman suffrage, lies in the vast and growing illiteracy among our people. The census of 1880 reports more than two million men, over

twenty-one years of age,—well-nigh one-half white—too ignorant to read the ballots they cast. To these voters, who know little more about our institutions, laws, and history, than about the Choctaw language, connected with probably as many more of the criminal and hoodlum classes, the interests of this country are measurably entrusted. The vast political power committed to these men is largely under the control of selfish, unprincipled politicians, and is a standing menace to the stability of our government. The question is on the lips of thousands of our wisest men and women, How long can our free institutions stand the strain? Volcanoes are rumbling beneath us to-day. The civil arm in many cases is powerless to protect property and life. The necessity of calling upon the military is becoming alarmingly and growingly frequent.

The census of 1880 reports three hundred thousand more illiterate women, over twenty-one years of age, than men. Should these women, who know nothing of our institutions, be entrusted with the responsibility of the ballot? Shall we add two and a half million to the present army of illiterate voters, making an aggregate of four and a half million who do not know the difference between a monarchy and a republic? To entrust these sacred legacies and memories of the past, and the awful interests involved in this experiment of self-government in the New World to such keeping, would be not only unwise, but to the last extent criminal. Every human interest requires us to curtail, rather than extend, the privilege of suffrage.

A restricted suffrage for women is suggested. This would diminish the evils somewhat, but the thing is impracticable. We have given unrestricted suffrage to men. The die is cast. The gift cannot be taken back; and now to discriminate against women would be invidious and unsatisfactory. It is doubtful whether it would even lessen the shrieks against man's inhumanity to woman. A better way

would be to discriminate against immigration, and better still, vastly to increase philanthropic efforts to elevate and christianize the stranger who seeks a home upon these shores.

While I can conceive of no benefit accruing to women, or to the public in general from the ballot, my unshaken conviction is that almost every human interest would suffer from it. Woman has no call to the ballot-box, but she has a sphere of her own, of amazing responsibility and importance. She is the divinely appointed guardian of the home, where human interests mainly centre, and where human influence reaches farthest and lives longest. She should more fully realize that her position as wife and mother, and angel of the home, is the holiest, most responsible, and queenlike assigned to mortals; and dismiss all ambition for anything higher, as there is nothing else here so high for mortals. The name *mother*, how it thrills along over human heart-strings as does no other, the dearest name in human vocabularies! Let woman dismiss all feeling of inferiority, and make herself man's equal, not by making herself a man, but by making herself man's superior in loveliness and duty.

But woman's duties are not limited to her home. She is the angel of sympathy and helpfulness wherever hearts are aching or tears are falling. Her gentle facile hands, her sweet ministries, and sympathizing heart are God's chief instrumentalities to relieve suffering and bear the burdens of the unfortunate and despairing. Her field is as wide as human suffering and want, wide enough to excuse her from all participation in the coarse rivalries of men for distinction and place.