American Women and the Ballot.

THE great Anti-Suffrage movement which is sweeping over the country, with quiet but irresistible force, is causing such agitation in the Suffragist ranks as they have never manifested before. Unable in spite of heroic efforts for the past twelve years to gain a noteworthy legislative advance, they have been at last impelled to call on the aid of the militant Suffragists of England, and in New York and Massachusetts are adopting, to a certain degree, their noisy and ill-mannered tactics.

It is time, therefore, that the claims of the Anti-Suffragists, hitherto prosecuted by quiet though persistent means, should be clearly and forcibly stated so that the public may have a true understanding of the nature of their campaign. In presenting their claims, therefore, (see accompanying documents) we ask leave to state respectfully the keynote of our contention.

The unflagging reply of men to the petitions of Suffragists has been, “When the majority of women ask for the right to vote it will be granted them!” To this we add that the converse of the proposition ought to hold true; that so long as an overwhelming majority of women for good and sufficient reasons actively oppose this revolutionary change in our social, domestic and political order, it ought not to be imposed upon them. That such opposition is felt and exercised by the great majority of American women, we propose to show in these pages.

Women Do Not Want To Vote

It is now more than sixty years since the first Woman’s Right Convention was held in the state of New York. Until after the Civil War the cause received little serious attention, being generally treated with indifference on the part of women, and ridicule from men. But the services of women in the hospitals in connection with
the Sanitary Commission during the war emphasized the civic possibilities of women, while the loss or disability of more than a million of our most active and energetic young men upon the battlefields left many women dependent upon their own exertions, and opened to them new and unaccustomed fields of labor, all of which facts were favorable to the consideration of the new doctrine about women. Many of the early Abolitionists also were believers in woman’s rights, and one of them had left a considerable sum of money for the maintenance of the cause. To this fund additions have been made from time to time so that the Suffragists have always been well supplied with money.

The opposition of the best women, educators, philanthropists and social leaders—using that term in its truest sense—to the addition of political duties, to those already borne by women, had been from the first pronounced. Such women as Emma Willard of Troy Female Seminary, Mary Lyon of Mt. Holyoke Seminary, Mrs. Almira Lincoln Phelps, Mrs. Admiral Dahlgren, Mrs. W. T. Sherman, said emphatically that the duties of wife and mother were more important than any that women could render in the political field. In 1870, only five years after the war closed, a petition, written and circulated by women was sent to Congress. Fifteen thousand women in all were enrolled, but no organization was formed, and the work was not continued, mainly because it was supposed that as the number of women signers was at least ten times greater than the number which the Suffragists could then rally, this expression of opinion would be conclusive.

The agitation however, was kept up, drawing its main energies, as is now apparent from history, from that revolutionary impulse which followed in the wake of the Communist Manifesto of Karl Marx and Frederic Engel, which, published in nearly all the languages of Europe, in 1847, had been largely instrumental in bringing about the uprisings of 1848. Against this revolutionary offshoot from the European movement conservative American women continued to struggle. A very lively correspondence was kept up between the women of different states, but it was not until 1880-85 that concerted public measures began to be taken, and committees formed to take charge of the work. When petitions were presented to legislatures, counter petitions, often with only a few well-known names appended, were presented; arguments were met with counter arguments; in certain cases newspaper and magazine articles were prepared which did good service. And so far the cause had made almost no legislative gains. Wyoming had indeed given full suf-
frage to women in 1869, but the state was of so little importance at that time that not much notice was taken of the fact. Men in general regarded it as more of a joke than otherwise. But when, under the brief but excited sway of Populism, joining forces with Mormonism, Utah, Idaho and Colorado were added to the Suffrage states, it was felt by Anti-Suffrage women that the time for decisive action on their part had arrived. In 1895-97 the three State Associations of Massachusetts, New York and Illinois were formed, and a determined and co-operative plan of action was inaugurated. Other states gathered around these three by forming committees or associations, until now every section of the Eastern, Middle and Western states is powerfully represented in the Anti-Suffrage ranks, and the movement is still increasing. Since that date not one noteworthy gain has been recorded for suffrage, while the legislatures of almost every state have again and again defeated their measures, in response to the pleas of the Anti-Suffragists, by decisive and increasing majorities. This fact alone is proof that the great body of American women is opposed to the imposition of political responsibilities upon their sex. But we have much more proof to offer.

The Massachusetts Referendum

Massachusetts was for many years the state most inclined to suffrage views, and the conservative women had for more than a decade been constantly occupied with refuting them. Year after year they had appeared before the legislatures in opposition, and the agitation had extended all over the state. At last the legislature, with a view of settling the vexed question forever, submitted the whole matter to the people, women as well as men being empowered to register and vote upon it. The result was the most general and overwhelming defeat for the Suffragists that any proposition had ever received in the state. The male majority was overwhelming, while in spite of the frantic efforts of the Suffragists to bring their forces to the polls less than four per cent of the number of women entitled to register and vote, voted “Aye.”

School Suffrage

There are now more than twenty states in the Union which have given school suffrage to women. It was supposed that their interest in education and in the facilities afforded to their own children, would ensure their vote in large numbers; that in fact they would be eager to use the privilege accorded them. It does not require statistics to prove that the reverse of this is true. School
suffrage is notoriously a failure, scarcely two per cent of the women in most states availing themselves of it. They evidently feel that their best power lies in home influence, and prefer to use it in accordance with the principles of our Constitution, which has from the beginning recognized the husband and father as the political head of the family.

Do Club Women Want to Vote?

On page 6 of the Ladies Home Journal for February, 1909, is an editorial article somewhat more than a column in length, which gives the results of a series of investigations made by the editor, to ascertain the percentage of women who really desire the ballot. It should be premised that the Ladies Home Journal is a magazine having the largest circulation among women of any in the country, amounting to more than a million of copies a month; and this enormous circulation has been built up mainly by the unceasing energy of its editor, Mr. Edward J. Bok. He has studied the nature and wants of American women, as he would study a problem in Euclid, and has reduced the art of pleasing them to an exact science. It being thus a matter of vital importance to his business, Mr. Bok has made a special point of finding out how women stand upon the suffrage question. He gives his readers the results.

The first testimony which he cites is the test made by a former president of the United States, not many years since. Receiving the customary petition from the suffrage agitators, that he should incorporate in his message to Congress a recommendation that woman suffrage should be favorably considered by that body, "as it was practically the desire of the whole body of American women," he carried the request to his wife. She replied that it was a matter to which she was wholly indifferent, but if he really wanted to know how other women felt, why not ask them? It was finally decided that he should write to fifty women of his acquaintance, impartially selected, each one a woman of good sense and high character, asking them if they wanted to vote, and be guided by their replies. He did so and received forty-six answers, four of the ladies being ill or out of the country. Thirty-four had no desire to vote; eleven were utterly indifferent; one solitary lady thought she would like to vote, if permitted, but added, "probably, when the time came, I should not bother about it." The president omitted the recommendation from his message.

But these were just plain home and society women. So our editor set about investigating the clubs. With club women it might
be different. His experience was singularly like that of the president. He thought he must be unfortunate in his choice of clubs. So, armed with introductions, he betook himself to the meeting of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, at Boston, last summer (1908). Like the astute purveyor of news that he is, he “took particular pains to ask the leading officers and workers of the movement, how they believed the Federation, as a whole, stood on the question of woman suffrage.” We quote the editor literally.

“Said one of the principal officers: ‘So overwhelmingly against it that I would not like to see the Federation place itself on record on the subject.’”

“You are in favor of woman’s voting, then?” I asked.

‘I am, decidedly!’ she answered. ‘But I know only too well how the Federation as a body would express itself!’ I said to another officer standing by: ‘What do you think?’ ‘Just as Mrs. —— does.’ I have tried it on three clubs in different parts of the country and I have desisted from any further effort. ‘Would you mind telling me the ratio?’ ‘Oh! it was terrible—eighty per cent against! It was anything but encouraging.’

“I asked another leading worker in the movement—one who has perhaps traveled as extensively over the country as any officer of the Federation, and spoken before nearly every principal woman’s club in America, “What would be the vote of the Federation on this question? Would you, from your experience, hazard an opinion?” “It isn’t hazardous an opinion. I know only too well it would be a Waterloo for me and mine,” she laughingly answered. “You are a Suffragist, then?” I asked. “Well, yes,” she replied, “I suppose I am. I have said so often enough in public. But somehow or other I am free to say that wherever I have spoken on the subject, I have not been surprised that my arguments have failed to convince. They do not seem convincing to myself!”

The article concludes by saying: “The field of politics as a new excitement for a few restless American women is barred to them by their own sex.” If Mr. Bok had believed that the great body of American women desired the suffrage, can it be believed that he would have given more than a column of his valuable space to the elucidation of such a sentiment as this?

Why Women Vote in Colorado

We are told that women vote in Colorado as generally as men, but we have excellent testimony from private sources, that it is under compulsion, to save the state from the calamity of being governed
by the undesirable classes, who bring out their women voters to the last unit, and so necessitate the voting of the better classes to preserve the balance. Proof that the women of the slums and of the red light districts have not only generally voted in some elections, but have been forced to repeat their votes by the unprincipled politicians who were officially brought in contact with them, is recorded in the courts where such offenders have been tried and convicted. We know that the same thing would occur in Illinois, and especially in Chicago, if municipal suffrage were given to women. Who can imagine that the unscrupulous politicians who infest our down-town districts would see such a mass of votable citizens, lying under their hands, and not find means to use them for their own purposes? Then other women who have their hands full and more than full of home and social and philanthropic duties, would be called upon to take upon themselves, in addition, the burden of politics to counteract their votes. We sincerely and earnestly request to be spared this most unjust and humiliating service.

We will gladly do our duty in the state whereunto, as women, God has called us. We will study to improve our intelligence and enlarge our opportunities in this direction, but we believe that the supreme position of woman as the mother of the race, the guiding genius of the home, and the arbiter of social morals, however it may need to be re-emphasized and expanded in this generation, and under the light of modern science, is too grand and glorious a birthright to be disparaged and bargained away for such political rights as suffrage would bestow upon us.

CHICAGO, February, 1909.
ILLINOIS ASSOCIATION

OPPOSED TO THE EXTENSION OF SUFFRAGE

TO WOMEN

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