

ASPECTS OF THE ENGLISH SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT

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SOME future historian will describe the twentieth century as the Age of the Discovery of Woman. The feminist movement is indeed the most significant phenomenon of our time and, strangely enough, it is the English woman—that favorite child of Mrs. Grundy—who is the chief protagonist of the emancipation of her sex: and England, of all lands the most insular, has become the battlefield whereon the destiny of half the human race will be decided. Even the Socialist propaganda, so powerful elsewhere, is eclipsed in that country by Woman Suffrage, which has drawn to itself the reforming energies of the rising generation. For this, there are several explanations. In the first place, universal manhood suffrage is not now and never has been either the accepted theory or the prevalent practice in Great Britain. There, property not man has the right to vote; and the expansion of the franchise has been brought about solely through the contraction of the property qualification. Even now, although there exists what is virtually manhood suffrage, a British subject must have an independent domicile of a rental value of at least £10 a year in order to be entitled to vote. The Englishman doesn't have to acknowledge woman as an equal, but he must admit that she is a property owner; and for one to have property and not the ballot is to the average British mind a thing inconceivable. He hasn't even the American's answer that voting is a man's job and so seeks refuge from Woman Suffrage arguments in stubborn silence. His very respect for the rights of property has been the Briton's undoing, for the suffragists have turned this conservative sentiment to radical uses by demanding the equal treatment of property. Of course this is mere logic, of which Englishmen are proverbially contemptuous. But not so the Englishwomen. They are keenly aware of the fact that if political privileges are not granted to property, taxation becomes virtually confiscation; and the heroic virtues that can be generated by the property instinct are familiar to all students of his-

tory. The average Englishman, naturally disposed to be fair, desires in his way to do what is right; but his way of doing right is to do it by instalments. It is now fairly well understood that if the Conservative party is triumphant in the next general election, the property-owning women will be given the ballot. And so the Liberals will be "dished" again.

In recent years, women have been crowding the English colleges and universities. Unlike her American sister, the Englishwoman is not encouraged to exercise her abilities in any useful way. The "gentle" tradition of doing nothing is still binding in England, particularly in regard to women, who are the tradition bearers of the race. They are barred from entering the higher professions, and even school teaching is largely a man's affair. Marriage as a career becomes impossible for many because, owing to constant emigration, there are now over a million more women than men in Great Britain. A new type has therefore appeared, a highly educated woman, economically independent, with nothing to do. And what is more natural than that she should turn to the feminist movement as an expression of discontent with a world that first grudgingly grants her opportunities for self-improvement, and then coolly denies her the rewards of talent and ambition? Let it be understood that the Woman Suffrage movement is largely a middle-class affair, and for that reason very likely to succeed. Economic independence backed by intelligence forms a combination too dangerous to oppose even if found in the physically weaker sex.

For generations Englishwomen have been in politics. They have often exerted a powerful influence in electoral battles by their political activity as organizers and speakers. The men accepted these labors as a matter of course, for wasn't woman's greatest virtue self-sacrifice! It slowly began to dawn on the minds of many Englishwomen that the game of politics could be played to the advantage of themselves as a sex. This seemed perfectly natural to them, but quite unnatural to the men who now began to see in the political activity of women something "unwomanly." What had once been considered a virtue had now become a vice.

Any race, class or sex, driven into a corner by society, will

develop peculiar virtues and vices, generally the latter. Underlying the feminist movement there is discernible a passionate yearning to exchange old virtues for new. The women deeply resent the monopoly of those virtues by *mankind* that properly belong to *humankind*. Tenderness and affection are no more peculiarly feminine than loyalty and strength of character are masculine. If there is any one thing that the militant suffragettes have shown, it is that they possess the so-called masculine virtues in superabundance. Young girls, barely out of their teens, have faced rough London crowds with a coolness and daring that would have won them the Victoria Cross, had they been British soldiers on the field of battle. What is distinctly characteristic of the militants is not their hysteria, but their calmness, foresight and planfulness. Every act is coldly considered, its effects nicely calculated, and then deliberately carried out. Nevertheless, common opinion holds them hysterical for the reason that the average person cannot imagine how it is possible for a woman to become intensely interested in anything save in a man or a child. Hence, fighting for an idea, praised as a sublime enthusiasm in men, is denounced as a form of "hysteria" in women.

The feminist movement has been instrumental in effecting a psychologic revolution among large numbers of women who, until now, had accepted uncomplainingly their lot as a part of the divine and natural order of things. For once they, as a sex, have become socially subjective. They want to know about themselves, how they lived in days gone by,—their place in social evolution,—their present status in the different countries,—the real attitude of men toward them,—why they are given certain privileges and denied certain rights. History, which for so long had been mere gossip chronicling the doings of kings and courts, was singularly silent about the doings of the common people, until the working classes made their presence felt. And now it is being rewritten from the economic point of view. The women, too, are beginning to wonder why history is so reticent about them. Can it be that they, like the working class, have been outside of humanity? Have women been mere mind-

less bodies, roaming aimlessly throughout the ages, a disinherited sex that had gotten only the crumbs of civilization!

For the first time women are experiencing the emotion of comradeship because for the first time in history they now have a common cause. Fighting and suffering for a common ideal has given them a sense of sex solidarity never before known. The petty vices of vanity and jealousy so frequently observed in women are scarcely found among the suffragists, who are distinguished by loyalty to each other and faith in their leaders. In one of the London riots, a policeman was about to strike a woman with his stick when another was seen to rush forward and receive the blow. Mrs. Pankhurst and other leaders are always gallantly defended by bodyguards of women whose courage and devotion are the admiration of the police themselves. Anyone who has attended the famous Monday afternoon meetings at the Pavilion Theatre in London must have marvelled at the way women ceased to be a bevy and became a crowd. The applause, the cheering, the telling interruptions, the vibration of many individuals to a common idea, in other words, the spirit of the crowd was as manifest in them as in an assembly of men. In battling for emancipation there has also been aroused in women the totally new feeling of sex-pride. They glory in being feminine and distinctly repudiate mannishness of any kind. To be a new woman means to them that one is filled with the new desire to lift the curse that has lain on womanhood ever since Adam delved and Eve span.

Any class struggling for emancipation will appeal to the sentiments of humanity. They will declare that it isn't for themselves that they are fighting, but for humanity as a whole. In this way did the middle classes in the Nineteenth Century and now the working-men appeal to the sympathy of the world. But all too frequently has humanity been overlooked when victory was finally won. The middle classes who triumphed in 1832 deliberately betrayed the working-men without whose assistance the Reform Bill could not have been wrested from the intrenched aristocracy. The aristocrats of labor, the Trade Unionists, now politically powerful, look with calm indifference on the fate of the vast mass of submerged humanity whose po-

litical wills are broken by economic helplessness. Genuine all-embracing democracy has been singularly absent in the democratic advance of the Nineteenth Century. It is present now in the Woman Suffrage movement. In spite of the fact that the women engaged in it are almost exclusively from the comfortable middle classes; in spite of the fact that many of them are conservative by temperament, the logic of the situation, in which an entire sex, rich or poor, is discriminated against, has forced them to realize that women are indeed all sisters even if men are not all brothers. In their speeches, books and pamphlets the Suffragists are continually sounding the note of Social Reform. We want the ballot, they say, in order to better the condition of women in industry, abolish child labor, cure prostitution, in short to reform a system of society in which the weak and helpless are the especial game of the profiteering exploiter. "We have always pitied the hooligans who have assaulted us," recently declared Mrs. Pankhurst, "because we have known why they existed. We have known that they existed because of evil conditions, because of bad laws. When we have looked into the faces of the undersized abortions who have insulted us, seeing their young faces distorted with vice and disease, it has given us courage to fight in this movement, to bear what we have borne, and to go on with our weary struggle."

Should the property-owning women get the vote, they will immediately continue to fight for their sisters in the working-class with whom they are now in active sympathy. Women of title, imprisoned with factory girls for acts of militancy, have insisted on equal treatment in spite of the well-known tenderness of the English authorities to prisoners of social position. A storm of indignation once swept a suffrage meeting when it was announced that Lady Sybil Smith, daughter of an earl, who had been given a jail sentence, was set free, presumably on account of her rank. This act was bitterly denounced as typical of a "snob Government" which was now discriminating between classes, just as it had for so long discriminated between sexes. If ever there was a bourgeois movement that was possessed by the soul of complete democracy it is that of Woman Suffrage.

To the average Englishman, all this is dreadfully upsetting and confusing. He cannot understand what it is that has turned this patient Griselda into a defiant fury bent on flying into the face of everything that is traditionally womanly and "English." To be content with that station in life in which it has pleased God to call one, as that most English of books, the Book of Common Prayer, phrases it, might even more fitly apply to women than to the lower classes. Under the present social order a woman is really a station in life from which there is seemingly no escape, for nature as well as God has apparently put her there. And the Englishman, thoughtful of God and mindful of nature, simply and prayerfully acquiesces in this arrangement. But the modern woman will not have it so and has openly dared to flout Britain's supreme vice masquerading as her supreme virtue,—respectability,—by speaking on all subjects that concern her own welfare, by becoming an outlaw rather than recognize a Government that persists in treating her as a minor. If this be hysteria, let her enemies make the most of it.

If the enfranchisement of the working classes was a "leap in the dark," the enfranchisement of women would be a dash for the unknown. In one way or another, be it through Parliamentary weakness as in Germany, the caste system as in England, military idealism as in France or Supreme Court decisions as in America, the fangs of universal suffrage have been drawn.

It is really doubtful at times whether the capitalists are as seriously concerned over the advance of Socialism as they pretend to be. The man who has, has taken the measure of the man who hasn't, and feels sure of his ability to prevent any harm that the latter might be meditating against the present social order. But woman is an unknown quantity. Who knows what she will do once she becomes captain of her own soul? From the vasty deep of his ignorance of her, man has conjured up the spirit of fear, doubt and mistrust. Some oppose equal suffrage because they fear women will be too radical; others, curiously enough, for exactly the opposite reason. The truth of the matter is that men are afraid that women, once they share in the direction of the State, will modify Society to suit their inter-

est as a sex, and this may be disadvantageous to the hitherto dominant male.

In the past, civilization has only too often meant civilization for the few and barbarism for the many. During the Golden Age of Pericles, when the Greek intellect had reached its most fruitful development, the mass of people in Athens,—the workers and the women,—were sunk in ignorance and superstition. This was likewise true of Rome in the Age of Augustus, of Italy during the Renaissance and of France in the Age of Louis XIV. It is a warped civilization streaked all over with the barbarism of the disinherited that we are now trying to perfect. Man has paid for excluding women from the full benefits of progress by himself remaining semi-barbaric. The feminist movement in its deepest sense means that women shall be permitted to grow to their full stature, spiritually, intellectually and socially; perhaps she will then prove an aid instead of a hindrance in the work of the world. To reverse the epigram of George Meredith, Man will be the first thing civilized by Woman.

MAKING GOVERNMENT EFFICIENT

VERNICE EARLE DANNER

FOR several generations the legislative system of our States has been the acme of inefficiency. It has been the promoter of graft, the harbinger of corruption, the creator of legal blunders, the mother of high taxes, and a barrier to every effort toward progress. Whole libraries have been written about the weakness of the system, but only a few remedies have ever been suggested, and usually these have been inadequate. Reformers have pleaded for the election of better legislators, forgetting that we already get the best that the system calls for. They have clamored for the amendment of rules, ignoring the fact that experience has already taught us that in legislative matters one rule is hardly ever any better than another. The crux of the whole matter is that our legislative system is an old worn-out machine, as it were, and must be consigned to the scrap-heap before any effectual relief can be obtained.

Our legislative system is the relic of conditions a century or more old, when the people were divided into Lords and Commons and it was thought each must have a legislative body to keep the other from oppressing it. But there are no longer any Lords and Commons. Now it is the sovereign people who rule, and as far as governmental matters are concerned, in theory at least, one man is as good as another. Even that old antiquated idea that the people were not competent to elect their United States Senators has finally been broken down, and the last excuse for a dual legislative system based upon a division of sovereignty has passed away.

Political scientists have defended the dual legislative system for ages on the ground that a unicameral legislature is likely to act too hastily in legislative matters, and that therefore there must be two bodies, one to hold the other in check. But what appears to be a very pretty theory here has not worked out in practice. One of the worst troubles with our present dual system is the hasty action it encourages. The time that should be spent in careful and deliberate consideration of business is often