

Morning The Daily Astorian

VOL. XX, NO. 126.

ASTORIA, OREGON, SATURDAY, MARCH 1, 1884.

PRICE, FIVE CENTS.

WOMAN SUFFRAGE.

One of the Leading Questions.

"Shall women vote in Oregon?" is a question to be decided by the voters of this state next June, the matter going before the popular suffrage for the first time. THE ASTORIAN has advocated and now advocates the right of woman to vote—if she wants to. Now that the question is to come before our readers for their votes, it is only fair to present the other side of the case. The following argument against woman suffrage:

The following argument was addressed to the committee of the Massachusetts legislature, on the subject of woman suffrage, by Mrs. Clara T. Leonard, of Springfield. Mrs. Leonard, the wife of a leading lawyer in Springfield, has been for some years a prominent member of the state board of health, lunacy and charity. When Butler came into office he endeavored to get a majority of his friends in that board, and appointed Mrs. Leonard superintendent of the woman's prison at Sherburne, which she declined. When the governor afterward made his assault on the management of the Tewksbury almshouse, Mrs. Leonard published a strong defence of its management, which laid the weakness of the governor's case bare. He then removed her from the board of health, lunacy and charity on the ground that she was not a "person" within the meaning of the law. But the supreme court decided she was, and she still remains a member of the board. Mrs. Leonard said:

The principal reasons assigned for giving suffrage to women are these:—

"That the right to vote is a natural and inherent right of which women are deprived by the tyranny of men."

"That the fact that the majority of women do not wish for the right of privilege to vote is not a reason for depriving the minority of the inborn right."

"That women are taxed but not represented, contrary to the principles of free government."

"That society would gain by the participation of women in government, because women are purer and more conscientious than men, and especially that the cause of temperance would be promoted by women's votes."

Those women who are averse to female suffrage hold differing opinions on all these points and are entitled to be heard fairly and without unjust reproach and contempt on the part of "suffragists," so called.

First. The right to vote is not an inherent right, but like the right to hold land, is conferred upon individuals by general consent, with limitations and for the general good of all.

It is as true to say that the earth was made for all its inhabitants, and that no man has a right to appropriate a portion of its surface, as to say that all persons have a right to participate in government. Many reasons can be found to hold both these opinions. Experience has proved that the general good is promoted by ownership of the soil, with the resultant inducement to its improvement. Voting is simply a mathematical test of strength. Uncivilized nations strive for mastery by physical combat, thus wasting life and resources. Enlightened societies agree to determine the relative strength of opposing parties by actual combat. God has made women weaker than men, incapable of taking part in battles, indisposed to make riot and political disturbance. The vote which in the hand of man, is a "possible buy-out," would not, when thrown by a woman, represent any physical power to enforce her will. If all the women in the state voted in one way, and all the men in the opposite one, the women, even if in a majority, would not carry the estimate of material strength and the power to enforce the will of the majority. When one considers the strong passions and conflicts excited in elections, it is vain to suppose that the really strongest would yield to the weaker party.

It is no more unjust to deprive women of the ballot than to deprive minors, who outnumber those above the age of majority, and who might well claim, many of them, to be as well able to decide political questions as their elders. If the majority of women are either not desirous to vote or are strongly opposed to voting, the minority should yield in this as they are obliged to in all other public matters. In fact, they will be obliged to yield as long as the present state of opinion exists among women in general, for legislators will naturally consult the wishes of the women of their own families and neighborhood, and be governed by them. There can be no doubt that in this state, where women are highly respected and have great influence, that the ballot would be readily granted to them by men if they desired it, or generally approved of woman suffrage.

Women are taxed, it is true, so are minors, without the ballot. It is true to say that either class is not represented. 'Tis the thousand ties of relationship and friendship cause the identity of interest between the sexes. What is good in a community for men, is good also for their wives and sisters, daughters and friends. The laws of Massachusetts discriminate much in favor of women, as thus: By exempting unmarried women of small estates from taxation; by allowing women, and not men, to acquire a set-aside without paying tax; by compelling husbands to support their wives, by exempting wives, even when rich, from supporting an indigent husband; by making men liable for debts of wives, and not vice versa.

In the days of the American revolution the first cause of complaint was that a whole people were taxed, but not represented. To-day there is not a single interest of women which is not shared and defended by men, not a subject in which she takes an intelligent interest in which she cannot exert an influence in the community. This because the men who govern live, not in a remote country with separate interests, but in the closest relations of family and neighbor-

hood, and bound by the tenderest ties to the other sex, who are fully and well represented by relations, friends and neighbors in every locality. That women are purer and more conscientious than men as a sex, is exceedingly doubtful, but applied to politics. The faults of the sexes are different according to their constitution and habits of life. Men are more violent and open in their misdeeds, but any person who knows human nature well, and has examined it in its various phases, knows that each sex is open to its peculiar temptation and sin; that the human heart is weak and prone to evil without distinction of sex. It seems certain that were women admitted to vote and to hold political office, all the intrigue, corruption and selfishness displayed by men in political life would also be found among women. In the temperance cause we should gain little or nothing by admitting women to vote, for two reasons: First—That experience has proven that the strictest laws cannot be enforced if a great number of people determine to drink liquor. Secondly—Because among women voters we should find thousands in our cities of foreign birth who habitually drink beer and spirits daily without intoxication, and who regard license or prohibitory laws as an infringement on their liberty.

It has been said that municipal suffrage for women in England has proved a political success. Even if this is true it offers no parallel to the condition of things in our cities. First, because there is in England a property qualification required to vote, which excludes the more ignorant and irresponsible classes, and makes woman voters few and generally intelligent; secondly, because England is an old, conservative country, with much emigration and but little immigration. Here is a constant influx of foreigners, illiterate, without love of our country, or interest in our knowledge of the history of our liberties, to whom, after a short residence, we give a full share in our government. The result begins to be alarming. Enormous taxation, purchasable votes, easy prey to demagogues—all these alarm the more thoughtful, and we are not yet at the end. It is a wise thought that the possible bayonet or ruder weapon in the hand of our new citizens would be even worse than the ballot, and our safer course, is to give the immigrants a stake and interest in the government. But when we learn that on an average 1000 immigrants per week land at the port of Boston in the last calendar year, is it not well to consider carefully how we double, and more than double, the popular vote, with all its dangers and its ingredients of ignorance and irresponsibility?

Last of all must be considered that the lives of men and women are essentially different. One sex lives in public, in constant conflict with the world; the other sex must live chiefly in private and domestic life, or the race will be without homes, and gradually die out. If nearly one-half of the male voters of our state forego their duty, or privilege, as is the fact, what proportion of women would exercise the suffrage? Probably a very small one. The best test vote would be in the cities, as now, and the ignorant and unfit women would be the prey of the unscrupulous demagogue.

Women do not hold an inferior position to men. In this land they have the softer side of life—the best of everything. There are, of course, exceptions—individuals, whose struggle in life is hard, whose husbands and fathers are tyrants instead of protectors—so there are bad wives, and men ruined and disheartened by selfish, idle women. The best work a woman can do for the purifying of politics is by her influence over men, by the wise training of her children, by her intelligent, unselfish counsel to husband or brother or friend, by a thorough knowledge and discussion of the needs of her community. Many laws on the statute books of our own and other states have been the work of women. More might be added.

As is the opinion of many of us that woman's power is greater without the ballot or possibility of office-holding for gain when standing outside of politics. She discusses great questions upon their merits. Much has been achieved by women in the anti-slavery cause, the temperance cause, the improvement of public and private charities, the reformation of criminals, all by intelligent discussion and influence upon men. Our legislators have been ready to listen to women, and carry out their plans, the wise training of their children, by their intelligent, unselfish counsel to husband or brother or friend, by a thorough knowledge and discussion of the needs of her community. Many laws on the statute books of our own and other states have been the work of women. More might be added.

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