

on the author

LETTERS TO A FRIEND
ON VOTES FOR WOMEN

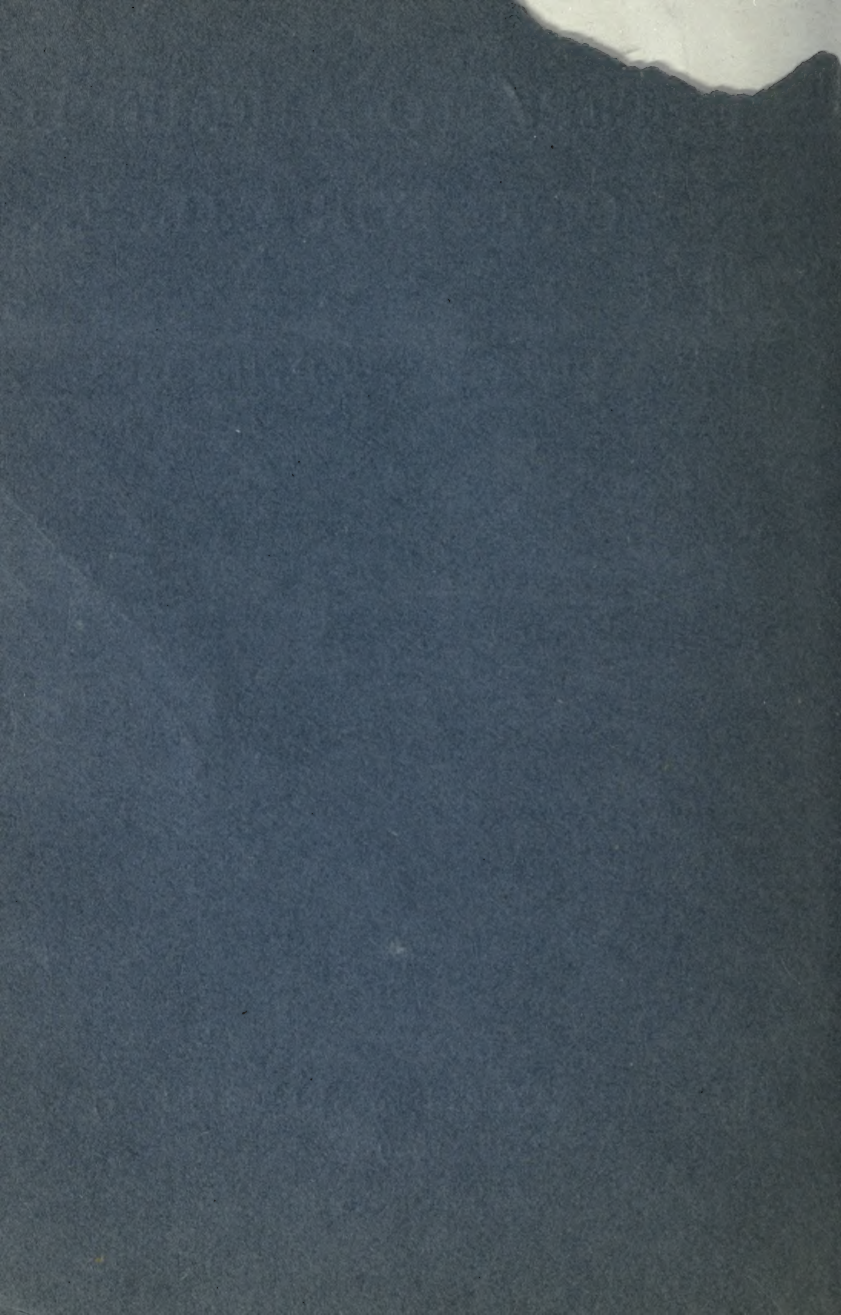
BY A. V. DICEY, K.C., LL.D., HON. D.C.L.

LONDON

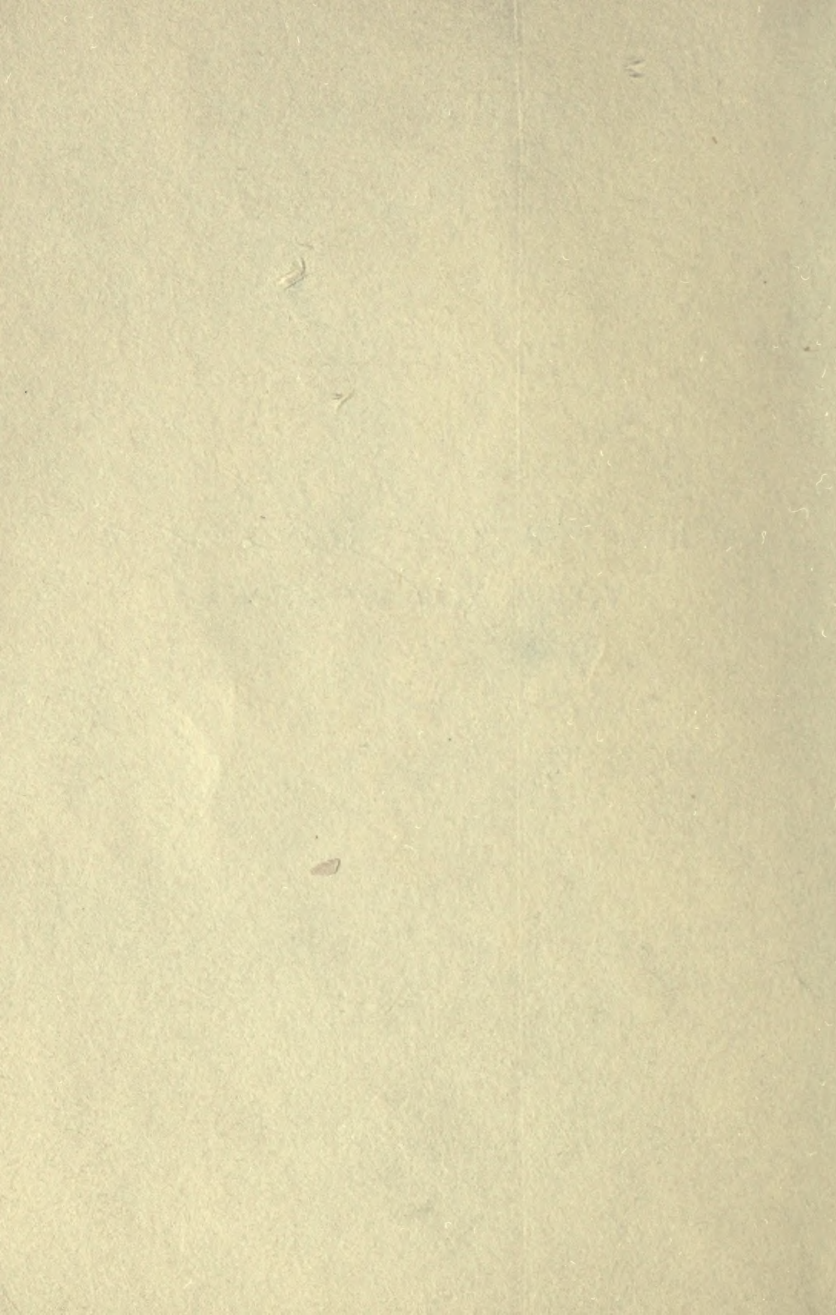
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

1909

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LETTERS TO A FRIEND ON
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BY ALBERT V. DICEY

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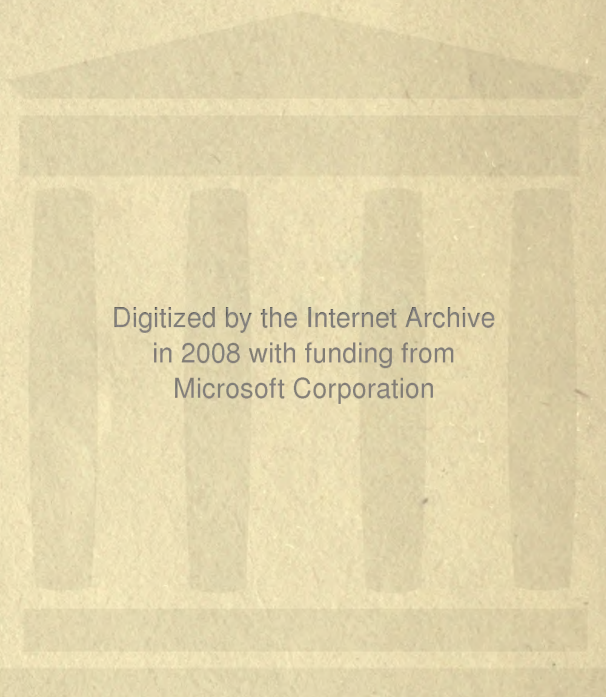
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JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

1909

to
C. E. S.



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LETTERS TO A FRIEND ON VOTES FOR WOMEN

LETTER I

INTRODUCTION

MY DEAR C.,

OXFORD.

You ask how it has happened that, though I was for many years an advocate, I have now become a convinced opponent of the introduction of woman suffrage into England? The question is a natural one. It is the better worth an answer because my own change of opinion has been shared by many of my contemporaries who began to take an interest in politics some fifty or sixty years ago. We all of us were Liberals; we most of us came under the influence of J. S. Mill, and we could not then have found a wiser, a nobler, and, above all, a more public-spirited teacher of the rights and duties of citizens. Under his guidance we favoured every attempt to extend not only the liberty

but also the political rights of women. In my own case, my faith in the benefit to be derived from woman suffrage was enhanced by the circumstance, over which I shall always rejoice, that it was my good fortune to take in early manhood a decided though insignificant part in promoting the education of women. In the success of Bedford College, of Newnham College, and of Somerville College, I felt, and I trust shall always feel, the keenest interest. For many years I identified the extension of women's political power with the effort to procure for them every possible opportunity for the development and employment of their natural gifts.

It is never easy to trace the influences which have brought about an honest change in any of one's own beliefs, whether political or religious. These influences are a quite different thing from the reasons by which a change may rightly be justified. They are not so much arguments as the conditions under which reasons which at one time seemed decisive lose their force, whilst reasoning, which at one time seemed to carry little weight, gains for one's own mind a new power and significance.

The considerations which, independently of specific arguments, have in respect of woman suffrage told upon my own judgment may be summed up under a few heads :

First, the movement for the maintenance of the union between England and Ireland brought me for the first time into something like active political life. For nearly a quarter of a century I have joined in resistance to every demand for Home Rule. This circumstance told in several respects upon the way in which I gradually came to look upon the movement in favour of woman suffrage.

My Unionism impressed upon me, as did also my keen sympathy with the Northern States of America in their opposition to secession, the thought that Conservatism may in some instances be an effort to enforce the supremacy of common justice, and to maintain the unity of a great nation. It made me feel that the mere desire of a class, however large, for political power or for national independence affords no conclusive reason why the wish should be granted. It raised in my mind the doubt whether the Liberalism of the day, which I had fully accepted, had not

exaggerated the wisdom and the justice of yielding, where possible, to every wish entertained by a large number of our fellow-citizens. Since 1885 I have never doubted that a majority of the inhabitants of Ireland are opposed to the Union with Great Britain. I have also never seen the least reason to doubt that the people of the United Kingdom ought to insist upon the maintenance of the Union. Political action, further, under leaders such as the Duke of Devonshire, John Bright, Chamberlain, and Lord James of Hereford, none of whom showed the least sympathy with the movement for woman suffrage, made me begin to question the strength of the arguments, especially the moral arguments, used in its support. At the same time, Gladstone's appeals to the great heart of the people, to the masses against the classes, and generally to sentiment, showed me how easily emotional politics might produce the palliation of gross injustice. Nor could I fail to perceive with new clearness the danger which lurked under the concession of sovereign power to women, who as a body are more readily influenced than men by the emotions of the moment. I

neither assert nor hold that political Unionism is logically inconsistent with the belief that English women ought to receive Parliamentary votes. I merely insist upon the simple fact that the grounds on which most Unionists rest their moral right to maintain the Union against the wishes of the majority of the people of Ireland are opposed to some of the reasons and much of the sentiment which tell in favour of the movement for woman suffrage.

d/ Secondly, thought and also experience convince me that the current maxims of Liberalism (as also of Conservatism), though they may contain a large element of important truth, are never absolutely true principles, from which a wise man can safely draw far-reaching logical deductions. As I hope to show you in a future letter, they may be useful watchwords, but they are nothing more. Hence, as years went by, I came to see that democratic maxims, even when endorsed by Mill, possessed nothing like the authority which, in common with most of my contemporaries at Oxford, I used to ascribe to them. I could no longer accept with something like implicit faith every dogma

contained in his treatise 'On Liberty.' Later reflection has, indeed, shown me that, whilst his 'Subjection of Women' contains, side by side with much noble sentiment, some singularly fallacious reasoning, the treatise 'On Liberty,' so far from supporting the claim of women to political authority, really supplies an argument against the moral claim either of woman or of any other class of the community to share in political power if such participation is opposed to the welfare of the State. It was a great relief, at any rate to myself, to discover that I could reconcile my enthusiasm for everything which promotes the personal freedom and the education of women with the strenuous denial to them of any share in sovereign power.

By degrees, too, the admiration for Mill's extraordinary gift of logical exposition, as well as gratitude for much of his teaching, became in my mind compatible with the admission that with him the reality, though not the form, of logic is often sacrificed to the influence of moral emotion, and that this subordination of his reason to the force of generous passion is nowhere more noticeable

than in his 'Subjection of Women.' Mill theoretically grounds all knowledge on experience, but throughout this treatise he minimizes the importance of natural and undisputed facts; he in effect inculcates the neglect of the lessons to be derived from historical experience embodied in the general, if not universal, customs of mankind; he bids his disciples prefer to such teaching conclusions drawn logically enough from some general dogmas which are far from possessing absolute truth. Thus, in favour of some *a priori* assumption as to the essential equality or similarity of human beings, we are counselled to overlook what has curiously been called the 'accident of sex.'

Thirdly, I at last, though slowly, reached the firm conviction that the right to a Parliamentary vote ought not to be considered the private right of the individual who possesses it. It is in reality not a right at all; it is rather a power or function given to a citizen for the benefit not primarily of himself, but of the public. This is assuredly the doctrine of English law, no less than of common sense. It affords the sole, but also the ample, justifica-

tion for the punishment of both the giving and the receiving of bribes at a Parliamentary election. It justifies the deprivation of whole classes—such, for example, as the Irish forty-shilling freeholders—of their votes, and this, too, without giving them any pecuniary or other compensation. My conviction as to the true nature of a Parliamentary vote led inevitably to the conclusion that the expediency, or what in such a matter is the same thing, the justice, of giving Parliamentary votes to English women depends on the answer to the inquiry, not whether a large number of English women, or English women generally, wish for votes, but whether the establishment of woman suffrage will be a benefit to England?

To this question I am unable to return an affirmative answer. I have become, therefore, of necessity an opponent of woman suffrage.

LETTER II

ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR OF WOMAN'S SUFFRAGE

MY DEAR C.,

Will the grant of Parliamentary votes to English women promote the welfare of England?

This, my dear friend, is the inquiry to which you wish to have a candid and reasoned answer. It is assuredly a question which every elector throughout the United Kingdom will, as he values the prosperity of his country, be called upon, it may be within a few months, and certainly within two or three years, to answer. It is a problem to which not one man in a thousand has given careful attention. In the attempt to solve it an elector will receive little aid from his leaders. The hesitation of the Government and the ambiguous silence of the Opposition are of bad omen ; they suggest transactions and intrigues ; they foretell that a fundamental change in the constitution of England, to which the world pre-

sents no real parallel, may be carried through in obedience, not to the clearly expressed will of the nation, but to those calculations of election agents and wirepullers which guide the action even of honest statesmen who have too fully imbibed the spirit of Parliamentary partisanship.

My purpose in this correspondence is to make woman suffrage the subject of calm argument. I propose to examine the main reasons in favour of, and the objections which lie against, the establishment of woman suffrage, and then to insist upon the conclusion which such an investigation forces upon me, that a revolution of such boundless significance cannot be attempted without the greatest peril to England. My whole line of reasoning, let me point out, involves two assumptions. The one is that the concession of Parliamentary votes to women must be in the United Kingdom, either for good or bad, a revolution. The second is that woman suffrage must with us finally lead to its logical result—that is, the complete political equality of men and women. Neither assumption can be disputed by any clear-headed suffragist.

No such person can deny that the idea which underlies the claim of votes for women is fairly summed up in the dogma laid down by Mill: 'That the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes—the legal subordination of one sex to the other—is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other.'*

Nor can any sound thinker deceive himself or be allowed to deceive others by the argumentative sleight-of-hand which first conciliates opponents by treating the introduction of woman suffrage as a commonplace reform, comparable to the extension of the Parliamentary franchise to lodgers, and then excites the enthusiasm of supporters by putting the same measure forward as a revolution which will work the political, social, and moral renovation of England.

I shall in this and in the next letter go through and weigh the importance of the arguments in favour of woman suffrage; and

* Mill: 'Subjection of Women,' p. 1.

let me admit at once that there is an obvious *prima facie* case in favour of giving Parliamentary votes to women. Its strength (which I have not the least wish to underrate) lies in five arguments or lines of thought.

FIRST ARGUMENT.—All the ordinary democratic principles or maxims, it is argued, on which English reformers have been accustomed to rely, support in appearance the claim of women to vote for members of Parliament. ‘Every citizen,’ it is often said, and still more often assumed, ‘has a right to a vote.’ It is surely hard to prove that a woman does not share this natural right. Secondly, ‘representation,’ we are told, ‘ought to accompany taxation.’ Why, then, deny representation to a woman who pays every tax payable by a man? Thirdly, ‘the Court of Parliament,’ to use an ancient formula, ‘is the great inquest of the nation; its special function is to remove the grievances of the people.’ But no one can deny that women, no less than men, have grievances, and grievances which often have not obtained the attention they deserve. Fourthly, ‘every class,’ it is said, ‘ought to be represented

in Parliament' ; and it is difficult to maintain that, in one sense of the word 'class,' English women do not make up a very large class—the majority, indeed, of the nation—and a division of human beings assuredly distinct from the whole body of men. We need not illustrate the point further. The reasoner who relies on any of these current maxims of popular government may readily be driven to admit that the principles or formulas dear to all English Liberals sanction, in words at least, the demand of votes for women.

Yet reasoning based on such democratic principles, effective though it be, admits of an easy reply. These so-called 'principles' are not anything like absolute truths. They are at best maxims, watchwords, catchwords, or shibboleths, which at particular crises of human progress have done good service by summing up ideas sound enough for the practical purposes of the moment. They have never, even as maxims, been rules which any statesman of common sense, even though he may have been the staunchest of democrats, unreservedly applied to the government of mankind.

Examine a few of them, and their true nature at once becomes apparent. The assertion that every person has a 'right' to a vote is, in any discussion with regard to woman suffrage, a mere assumption of the very point at issue. It belongs, further, to an obsolete school of thought. It is a remnant of that belief in 'innate rights' which was expelled from England by the passionate and irresistible reasoning of Burke, and by the cool and deadly analysis of Bentham. In France, indeed, at the time of the Revolution, the demand for natural rights was an excellent war-cry round which to rally men engaged in the assault upon obsolete, artificial, and noxious privileges. But the Republican statesmanship of modern France has forsaken the belief in natural rights, which in 1789 was the accepted faith no less of Constitutionals than of Jacobins. The effect and the extent of this change of view may be measured by the contrast between the successful opportunism of Gambetta, which promised to the Third Republic a permanent existence, and the terrorism of Robespierre, which prepared the way for Napoleonic despotism.

Few, indeed, have been in England the reformers of any kind who could seriously believe in the absolute right of every person to a vote. Faith in this dogma would at this moment dictate the duty of providing at once for British India a Parliament elected by adult suffrage. The whole of the creed which leads to this *reductio ad absurdum* has, indeed, been formally repudiated by the ablest thinker who has advocated the rights of women to an equal share with men in the government of Great Britain.

‘I forego,’ writes Mill, ‘any advantage which could be derived to my argument from the idea of abstract right as a thing independent of utility. I regard utility as the ultimate appeal on all ethical questions; but it must be utility in the largest sense, grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being.’*

These words form part of Mill’s noble apology for individual freedom. They apply with the utmost force to the far more dubious claim of every man or woman to an equal share in sovereign power.

* ‘On Liberty,’ pp. 23, 24, ed. 1859.

Let me here incidentally call your attention to the way in which the very objects for which representative or Parliamentary government exists are, when properly understood, inconsistent with the idea or the delusion that every citizen has a moral right to a vote. Representative government, just because it is a form of popular 'government,' is intended to secure for the people of a given country what I may call the 'legislative effectiveness' of Parliament—that is, that Parliament shall consist of some of the best and most judicious members of the community, and shall enact good and wise laws. Representative government, further, just because it is 'representative,' is intended to secure what may be called 'legislative representativeness' of Parliament, or, in other words, that the laws of a country shall be in accordance with the wishes, the habits, and even the prejudices, of its people. These objects are each of great value. It is certainly desirable that the laws under which a country is governed should be wise laws. It is also desirable that these laws should be in harmony with the wishes of the people who have to obey them. Now, it is

sometimes possible that a law may increase both the effectiveness and representativeness of the Legislature. The Reform Act of 1832 certainly made the House of Commons a better representative of the English people than it had been before 1832, and probably created a legislative body which passed laws better in themselves than would have been enacted by the unreformed Parliament. But then it may well happen that, on the one hand, a change which increases the effectiveness of a legislative body may diminish its representativeness, or, on the other hand, that a change which increases its representativeness diminishes its legislative effectiveness. The disfranchisement, for example, of Irish forty-shilling freeholders raised the character and increased the legislative effectiveness of the Imperial Parliament. But it assuredly made that Parliament represent less perfectly than before the wishes of a large body of Irishmen. It is probable that the legislative character of Congress would be raised if no American citizen were allowed a vote until he had given *bona fide* proof that he could read and write ;

but it is also certain that the imposition upon the electors, either in the United States or in England, of an educational test would in each country detract from the representative character of the National Legislature, which would clearly cease to represent the most ignorant part of the present electorate. On the other hand, increased representativeness may sometimes mean a decrease in legislative effectiveness. It is at least arguable that the establishment of household suffrage has lowered the legislative capacity of the House of Commons. Bold, indeed, would be the paradox-monger who maintained that in no State belonging to the American Commonwealth has the introduction of universal suffrage lowered the moral or intellectual character of the Legislature. We must always, therefore, in legislation which affects the constitution of Parliament, weigh against one another the different qualities of representativeness and effectiveness. Practical wisdom often requires some sacrifice of the one of these qualities to the other. From this necessity the result follows that the mere fact that persons of a particular class

are not represented in Parliament is no proof of their right to enfranchisement. To shout 'Votes for women!' does not prove that English women ought to have votes.

Let us next examine the specially English dogma* that 'taxation involves representation.' During the War of Independence it was the war-cry of American patriots, and was re-echoed by English Whigs, and notably by Chatham. It was a really serviceable formula at a crisis when it was of vital importance to remind ordinary Englishmen that the moral right, as well as the power, of the British Parliament to legislate for the inhabitants of Massachusetts or New York was materially affected by the fact that neither Massachusetts nor New York sent a single representative to the Parliament at Westminster. But neither the leaders in the War of Independence nor the Whigs of England

* 'The principle of "no taxation without representation" is the foundation of English liberty, and we feel that it is one on which we ought not to appeal to a Liberal Government in vain' ('Statement of Association of Registered Medical Women,' *Times*, December 14, 1908, p. 6).

believed that the maxim on which they relied was absolutely true. Americans originally conceded that their favourite formula did not apply to duties on imports. Not a single English Whig, from Chatham downwards, meant to assert that every man in England who paid a tax ought to have a vote. They knew well enough that reckless extension of the suffrage, which might in the days of the Stewarts have been the destruction of Parliamentary government, might quite conceivably, during the reign of George III., give unlimited extension to that royal influence which every Whig professedly abhorred. It is allowable here to press a plain question upon suffragists. Would any Italian patriot, even though he were a Republican irreconcilable to the Monarchy, admit to the Parliamentary franchise the women of Italy at the risk of handing over the government of the country to priests and reactionists? Everyone can supply the true answer to this question. The reply, of course, decides nothing as to the advisability of introducing woman suffrage into England, but it does dispose of the authority attributed by many zealous

suffragists to more than one sacred democratic watchword.

SECOND ARGUMENT.—English women, it is argued, have an irresistible claim to votes, based on the ground that they have suffered, and may again suffer, injustice which cannot be removed until they possess the Parliamentary franchise. My wish is to do the fullest justice to by far the strongest practical reason producible in favour of woman suffrage. It indubitably contains an amount of truth which ought never to be overlooked. Under a representative government any considerable body of persons who are not represented in Parliament is exposed, at best, to neglect. In a country such as England, the views of the unrepresented are overlooked far less through the selfishness than through the stupidity or preoccupation of the voters and their representatives. In 1861 Mill pointed out with truth, though with characteristic exaggeration, that the ideas of the wage-earners, and especially the policy of trade-unionists, did not receive proper attention, and would not command it until artisans were fairly represented in Parliament. The changed

tone of the House of Commons in regard to trade-unionism, since the introduction of household suffrage, has justified Mill's complaint and his prediction.

Mill also insisted, and with substantial truth, that the law with regard to women, and notably in regard to married women's property, was one-sided and unjust; and he argued that this state of things gave strong ground for the claim of women to political equality with men. Nor can any impartial critic maintain that, even at the present day, the desires of women, about matters in which they are vitally concerned, obtain from Parliament all the attention they deserve. A recent proposal to exclude thousands of barmaids from a lawful means of earning an honest livelihood may well cause women of every class to feel that legislation passed by a Parliament representing only men may at any moment deal recklessly with the interests of women. Despotism is none the less trying because it may be dictated by philanthropy, and the benevolence of workmen which protects women from overwork is not quite above suspicion when it coincides with the desire of

artisans to protect themselves from female competition.*

It has further been urged, and not without reason, that the present tendency to extend the area of social legislation, which practically restricts the sphere of individual liberty, increases the risk of legislative invasions on the freedom of women. Add to this that on any question which concerns the relation of the sexes—*e.g.*, the law of divorce—a man will constantly assume, in and out of Parliament, that all women agree with him. Who has not heard it stated in debate that every woman condemned, or, with equal confidence, that every woman desired, the repeal of the law prohibiting marriage with a deceased wife's

* This motive is generally charged against the Factory Acts by those who desire for themselves or for working women complete freedom of contract. It may be true in certain instances or in certain quarters, but it is untrue of the majority of those who passed or who wish to maintain these Acts. Are we to believe that women desire to be freed from the provision prohibiting mothers from employment in a factory within four weeks of giving birth to a child? If so, they require still, in the interests of the community, to be protected against themselves. And, even if women are to be free to sell their labour under prejudicial conditions, what about the children?

sister ? In all probability feminine opinion was as much divided as the opinion of men. Still, it is certainly an evil, as to the magnitude of which judgments may differ, that women possess no constitutional means of expressing officially, so to speak, their opinion on subjects with which they are specially concerned.

This whole line of reasoning is open to at least two criticisms. In the first place, the cases in which the interest of women, as a class, even appears to come into conflict with the interest of men, as a class, are rare. Difference of sex, just because it is a natural division, not depending upon external circumstances, such as the difference between rich and poor, landlords and tenants, traders and agriculturists, does not—at any rate in a civilized country like England—often give rise to an opposition of interests. This is the important truth contained in the paradox attributed to John Bright—that ‘women are not a class.’ Where will you find a body of Englishmen who have legislated of set purpose against the interest of their daughters and in favour of their sons ? Primogeniture itself, as a rule governing descent of land,

does not in reality afford such an instance. It may to many of us seem a harmful survival of a bygone time. It found its justification in the circumstances of the age when it arose, as an institution which prevented the division of property, and in any case it told nearly as much against younger sons as against daughters. In no part of public life is the predominance of a class in general more apparent than in the sphere of taxation. But no woman in modern England is taxed where a man is not taxed. In plain truth, the civil or strictly private rights of an unmarried woman, when not in some way connected with a public function, are, broadly speaking, the same as those of a man. The few exceptions to this rule—*e.g.*, the refusal of degrees to women at Oxford and Cambridge—might be got rid of to-morrow by half the exertion used for obtaining votes for women.

In the second place, the most effective part of the argument under consideration, and that on which Mill placed the greatest reliance, lay in the actual injustice of the law which in his time deprived the married women of England of their own property. It was the

knowledge of this and of other grievous wrongs calling for redress, that, even more than the commanding influence of Mill, enlisted the most generous and the most public-spirited of the youth of England in his crusade in favour of women's rights. Reformers in the middle of the nineteenth century believed, not unreasonably, as assuredly did Mill, that the wrongs done to women could never be removed without giving them a share in sovereign power. The change in the law produced by the Married Women's Property Acts, 1870-1892, and for most practical purposes completed by 1882, has removed almost every grievance of which a married woman in respect of her property had reason to complain. The position of an English wife may in many respects be envied by the women of France, who a few years ago protested against the law of the land by publicly burning the Code Napoléon. The one question which an English reformer need now ask himself is, Whether the zeal to relieve a married woman from unjust disabilities may not, as against her creditors, have bestowed upon her unfair privileges?

But the Married Women's Property Acts, combined with other enactments, such as the Guardianship of Infants Act, 1886, do much more than merely remove acknowledged grievances. They place one fact past a doubt—they demonstrate that a Parliament whereof every member is a man, and every elected member is chosen by men, is ready, at the instance of men advocating the rights of women, to remove every proved defect or unfairness in the laws relating to women. In 1909 we know, what even down to 1882 might have been open to question, that from a Parliament of men elected by men women can obtain, because in fact they have obtained, relief from every proved wrong. Women, in short, in modern England, exert, through free discussion and the certainty with which it tells on public opinion, a legislative influence which indefinitely diminishes, if it does not absolutely annihilate, the force of the argument that the women of England need Parliamentary representation as a guarantee against probable oppression.

THIRD ARGUMENT.—Again, it is urged that the concession of Parliamentary suffrage to

women is merely the final step in that extension of their liberties and rights which in England, above all other countries, has been the glory of the nineteenth century, and remains by far the most certain sign of human progress. This emancipation of women, as it is called, has been full of blessing to the world. There has been no pause, as regards women, in this movement towards freedom. Mill, if now alive, would rejoice with justifiable pride at the change which has come over the spirit of the English world. Few now are the employments unconnected with political power or the rights of the State which are forbidden to a woman.

There exist in the United Kingdom sixteen Universities ; most, if not all of them, contain colleges or residential halls for women. In fourteen of these Universities degrees are given to women. Two alone—namely, Oxford and Cambridge—deny to a woman the technical right to a degree ; but in Oxford and Cambridge colleges for women flourish, and Oxford and Cambridge, in fact, give to a woman the actual honour of the degree of which they still deny her the title. Everyone knows

the name of the lady who, to the utmost satisfaction of the English world, became in fact, though not in name, Senior Wrangler, as well as that of the lady who in reality, though not in form, obtained the highest classical degree given by the University of Cambridge. Everyone is well assured that, unless the lawless follies of fighting suffragists excite some untoward reaction, degrees at Oxford and Cambridge will soon be as open to women as the degrees of Edinburgh, St. Andrews, or the University of Dublin. Women already enjoy the municipal franchise; they are Town Councillors; one woman is a Mayor. Nor does public opinion enforce restraints which are not imposed by law. A woman may express her religious or her political convictions with freedom. It would be ridiculous to describe George Eliot, Mrs. Humphry Ward, or Mrs. Fawcett as having been, or being, tonguetied. Why not, it is urged, take one step more? Why not concede to women Parliamentary votes, and thus pursue to the end that path of progress which has hitherto led to nothing but freedom and happiness?

It is well to admit that this line of reasoning

or of sentiment affords one of the most effective, though not the strongest, among the arguments at the disposal of suffragists. It contains, with some exaggeration, a great deal of truth. The exaggeration is all typified by the use of the misplaced and ambiguous terms 'emancipation' or 'enfranchisement.' From the beginning of the nineteenth century the course of events and of opinion has brought a large increase of freedom both to men and to women ; but the women of England cannot now be 'emancipated,' for they have never been slaves. It is simply absurd to speak of Maria Edgeworth, Elizabeth Fry, Jane Austen, or Harriet Martineau as held in bondage. They gave expression to the ideas, and in many ways led the opinion, of their time. Even theological movements, such as the Evangelical revival, which did not make directly for free - thought, have stimulated indirectly individual energy and the sense of individual responsibility, and have thus opened new spheres of action for women. Let us dismiss at once the cant concealed in the application of such terms as 'enfranchisement' or 'emancipation' to English women.

These expressions, because they mean sometimes delivery from bondage and sometimes the acquisition of political rights, suggest the notion that to give English women votes is to give them freedom. They cannot be emancipated, because they are born free, are free, and will remain free, whether they obtain Parliamentary votes or not.

This point is the more important because the language used conceals from view the fact that personal freedom has little or nothing to do with participation in sovereign authority. I do not, however, for a moment doubt that the gradual removal, which has been going on for more than a century, of fetters placed on the free action and thoughts of women, as also of men, has been an unspeakable blessing to our country. Nor do I wonder at the argument drawn from this fact in favour of admitting women to a share in sovereignty. My contention is that this line of reasoning is open to a clear reply.

The answer is that the progress which gives satisfaction to every man who notes the increase of human freedom and of human welfare has assuredly not arisen from the

attainment by women of political rights. The very complaint of suffragists is that these rights are still denied to English women. The source of the progress which most of us recognize lies in the extension of civil or private rights. It has been caused by the increase of personal freedom. It is due to the practical acceptance in Great Britain of Mill's own law of liberty—namely, that 'the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number is self-protection ; that the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community against his will is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant.'*

This fundamental canon of individualism—that, in the words of Mill, 'over himself, his

* 'Liberty,' pp. 21, 22, ed. 1859. Compare this with the principle which underlies Mill's whole argument in his 'Subjection of Women.' The treatise 'On Liberty' is a demand for personal freedom ; the 'Subjection of Women' is a demand for political equality. Each claim may or may not be valid, but there does not exist between them any necessary logical connection.

own body and mind, the individual is sovereign'—is, as an absolute principle of morals or politics, open to just criticism ; but, as a good working rule of political practice, when tempered by the common sense of prudent statesmanship, it has conferred upon English women immense benefits. But this fact tells, if we think the matter out, rather against than in favour of the claim of votes for women—that is, the claim to a share in sovereignty ; for Mill's dogma rests at bottom upon the distinction which he insists upon, and even exaggerates, between matters which mainly concern the individual, and only indirectly, if at all, concern the public, and matters which immediately concern the public or the State, and only indirectly, if at all, concern the individual. Now, a man's rights as to his own concerns are his private or civil rights, and should be limited only, according to Mill, by respect for the equal rights of his neighbours. But the rights of an individual with reference to matters which primarily concern the State are public or political rights, or, in other words, duties or functions to be exercised by the possessor, not in accordance

with his own wish or interest, but primarily, at least, with a view to the interest of the State, and therefore may, even according to Mill's doctrine, be limited or extended in any way which conduces to the welfare of the community.

This difference between civil and political rights is, for the present argument, essential. Civil rights ought, according to Mill, to be governed by his law of liberty. To political rights this law has hardly any application. No art of logic, even when aided by rhetoric, can convert a precept intended to determine the limits of an individual's freedom, in matters which primarily concern himself, into the dogma that a given individual, or a given class, has necessarily a right to the determination of matters which primarily concern the public or the State. A person's claim, in short, to govern himself is a totally different thing from his claim to govern others. Prove that an English woman has, speaking generally, a rightful claim to the exercise of her natural talents and powers, or even to the education which makes that exercise possible, yet you have not advanced a step towards showing

that an English woman has a right to take part by her vote in the government of the 300,000,000 of men and women who are natives of British India.

The more the difference between civil and political rights is considered, the more instructive it becomes. The deprivation of civil rights may amount to slavery. The non-possession of political rights may, to an individual man, be of the most trifling consequence. There are countries, and free countries (such, I believe, is Belgium), where the State is forced to impose penalties upon electors who do not give their votes. In no civilized country is it necessary to compel men to make use of and enjoy their private rights. Men of the very highest public spirit have felt again and again that, while civil rights—that is, personal freedom in its widest sense—are to every man of vital importance, the possession of political rights may be, if civil freedom is secured, of comparatively little value. One of the most eminent of English democratic leaders wrote in 1838: ‘I very much suspect that at present, for the great mass of the people, Prussia possesses

the best Government in Europe. I would gladly give up my taste for talking politics to secure such a state of things in England.’*

He held that the mild absolutism of Prussia was better for the people than ‘that great juggle of the “English Constitution.”’

These are the ideas of Richard Cobden. They do not command my assent, but they mark, with his customary clearness, the essential difference between the civil rights which constitute individual freedom and the political power which is in reality the imposition of public duties.

* Morley : ‘Cobden,’ vol. i., p. 130.

LETTER III

ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR OF WOMAN SUFFRAGE

MY DEAR C.,

I am afraid that my legal mind (as E. calls it) has perhaps made me rather wearisome to you. When I was examining the most solid of the arguments in favour of the revolution demanded by suffragists, I insisted on distinctions really important in themselves, but which are likely to tell more with lawyers than with laymen or with women. Please, however, listen to two remaining arguments which, though in my judgment little better than fallacies, are intelligible to all persons. The one—namely, the Fourth Argument—will be received with special favour by hardworked and often underpaid women of the labouring classes; the other—namely, the Fifth Argument—is certain to impress benevolent ladies engaged in good works, and inclined to advocate every measure which, on the face of it, tends towards the

moral and religious amelioration of mankind.

FOURTH ARGUMENT.—The possession of votes, it is asserted, will increase the earnings of women. This prophecy is of itself enough to enlist every underpaid and underfed seamstress or maid-of-all-work in the ranks of the fighting suffragists. The plain answer to it is that the prediction, if it means (as every working woman does understand it to mean) that a vote will in itself raise the market value of a woman's work, is false. The ordinary current price of labour depends on economical causes. They are some of them obscure. The lowness of a woman's wages is due in part to her weakness compared with the strength of men, in part to her necessary exclusion from all careers, such as employment in the army and navy, labour in the docks, and the like, for which she is physically unfitted, and in part it may be in England to the excess in the number of women over men, or to the fact that many women do not depend upon their wages for a livelihood. I have always admitted that woman suffrage will increase the chance of Parliament turning its attention

towards the special wants of women, and thus opening to them some few careers from which they are excluded simply by law. Whether, indeed, this, desirable as it may be, will greatly increase the resources of working women is open to doubt. Some economists will suggest that the free admission of women to every function which they can possibly fulfil might do more to depress the whole standard of wages earned by the working classes than to raise the earnings of women. One thing is certain : the current price of labour is not immediately and directly affected by a man's or a woman's possession of the Parliamentary franchise. No master raises his footman's wages because the manservant happens to be a voter ; he will assuredly not raise the wages of his housemaid simply because he finds that under some Woman's Enfranchisement Act she has got her name placed on the Parliamentary register. Why in the name of common sense should a vote confer upon a woman a benefit which it has not conferred upon a man ? In any case it argues recklessness, not to say unscrupulosity, to tell working women, ignorant both of

politics and economics, that Parliamentary votes will raise their wages. The relation, indeed, between votes and earnings has for the last few months been actively discussed in the newspapers. I observe, however, that as the controversy progresses suffragists grow less and less confident about the closeness of the connection between the possession of a vote and the rise in the rate of a woman's earnings.

There is another sense in which a vote or political power may, I admit, have its pecuniary value. It may be used by women, and still more by a body of women, to wring money, or money's worth, from the State. A Ministry in want of support may bid high for the votes of women. But such traffic in votes is nothing better than sheer bribery, and, in the eyes of honest men and of honest women, bribery is none the more respectable because it is the corruption, not of an individual, but of a class, or because the bribe comes neither out of the pocket of a member of Parliament, nor out of the funds of a party, but out of the public revenue. The possibility that newly enfranchised women may be specially open to such corruption affords, if

true, a cogent argument against woman suffrage.

FIFTH ARGUMENT.—The acquisition of votes by women will, it is constantly asserted, work the moral and social regeneration of England. This belief on the part of suffragists is natural. There are virtues, such as modesty, ready sympathy with, and compassion for poverty and suffering, which, though possessed in some degree by most human beings, are deemed, whether rightly or not, to be specially feminine. There are other virtues, such as warlike courage, love of justice, or a passion for truth, which, though happily not the monopoly of either sex, are, whether rightly or not, deemed to be specially masculine. What can be more apparently reasonable than the expectation that when women are given a new share in the government of the nation the private virtues belonging more peculiarly to women may become blended with the public virtues which specially distinguish men, and thus produce in the public life of England such a combination of justice and compassion, of mercy and of truthfulness, as the world has never before wit-

nessed ? It is this dream of a millennium of public righteousness, this passion for a crusade against private vice and in favour of universal peace, which induces some among the best and the most highly educated of English women, as also some women who are not quite the wisest of human beings, to raise, in season and out of season, the cry of ' Votes for women !'

This hope of national regeneration, I confidently assert, is doomed to disappointment, and this for the following reasons :

1. The moral improvement of men or of nations is effected far less by the force of law than by the power of opinion. Law, when unsupported by public opinion, may fail to punish notorious crimes. A duellist who has caused the death of his opponent has for centuries, according to the law of England, been deemed a murderer. But a duellist who fought fairly might, till quite recent days, kill his man without the least fear of punishment. The high morality of Sir Walter Scott, the strictly religious education of Macaulay, left each of them ready to accept a challenge. The philosophic intellect of Sir William Molesworth did not prevent his fighting a

duel. A duellist might be put on trial for murder, but the jury would not convict him, and the Judge's charge would suggest reasons or fallacies in acquittal. By about the middle of the century opinion had begun to change. Lord Cardigan was all but convicted of murder for killing Captain Tuckett in a duel. His lordship, unfortunately for the nation, escaped conviction through a purely technical error in the indictment. It is public opinion, not law, which has to a great extent put down gambling; it is public opinion, not change in the law, which has led English gentlemen to adopt habits of habitual sobriety. It is to public opinion we must mainly trust for the diminution of that love of drink which is the curse of the English wage-earners. But women can, and do, influence public opinion as much as do men. Does anyone seriously suppose that 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' which directed the indignation of the civilized world against the maintenance of negro slavery in the United States, produced the less effect because it was written by Mrs. Beecher Stowe, and not by her brother? I have no wish to exaggerate. There is no need to deny that the

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possession of votes would in some instances increase the moral authority of women ; what I do deny is that the increase in their moral power would be anything like as great as suffragists expect. If on any point of ethics the vast majority of English women were agreed, their agreement would certainly tell on English opinion ; but in estimating the moral effect likely to be produced by woman suffrage, we must remember that it is a sure sign either of ignorance or of fanaticism to expect from legislation effects produced not by law, but by changes in the beliefs or the convictions of the public.

2. It is constantly assumed that the votes of women would assuredly tell against everything which many—let me say which most—good women hold to be evils, more or less suppressible by law or by national policy.

Of the good effect of women's votes in the suppression of what is popularly called vice I have the gravest doubts. This is a subject of which it is impossible and hardly desirable to write with absolute freedom. Three remarks, however, I may be allowed to make. The first is that the effort to put down by

law breaches of the moral rules which ought to govern the relation between the sexes has been made again and again, and has—at any rate where man and woman alike were consenting parties—ended in failure, and frequently been the parent of evils more disastrous than the wrong-doing which it was meant to cure. No one in modern times would wish to reproduce in any town the legislation of Calvin in Geneva. The inhabitants of New England would to-day refuse to bear, and would rightly refuse to bear, the stern laws of their Puritan forefathers. The second remark is that the belief in the cure of moral evils by the force of law arises from the constant confusion between the spheres, which often overlap, of morality and law. The forgetfulness of this distinction has, as the history of every age bears witness, given birth on the one hand to the Pharisaism which teaches that the fulfilment of the law is the same thing as the performance of every moral and religious duty, and, on the other hand, to the sentimentality which teaches, and never taught with greater audacity and with worse effects than to-day, that a man's acts, how-

ever lawless, may receive pardon or eulogy if only they can by any possibility be attributed to an innocent—*e.g.*, a religious or a political—motive. We condemn the law which hangs a murderer, we applaud the murderer who arrogates the name of an assassin. It is, let me lastly remark, certain that if in the England of to-day respectable women united in condemning severely what is generally termed ‘immorality,’ they could produce an effect greater by far than anything which could result from any sort of Parliament. If, to take one example, the seducer of any girl found that, as a rule, his sin excluded him from marriage with any woman of character, the penalty would be sufficient to work a transformation in general opinion as to the heinousness of his offence. But everybody knows that in this matter, and in others respecting the relation of the sexes, the judgment and the conduct of even the best women is not always uniform. They occasionally, at least, condemn the seducer less severely than his victim. It is common knowledge that respectable women do not err on the side of leniency in judging the errors of their own

sex. Nor for this are they wholly to blame. They dimly perceive that it is not always easy to decide which of two guilty parties is the wrong-doer and which is the victim. They catch in practice a glimpse of the consideration, which is often overlooked in theoretical discussions, that sexual errors, which may be covered by one and the same name, differ almost indefinitely in the degree of moral culpability attaching to those who have violated a social law which it is assuredly necessary to keep in force.

It is usually assumed that the votes of women will always make for peace. Now, some forty years ago I dined at the house of an eminent Liberal whose wife was a clever talker. After dinner I stupidly fell half-asleep. I was roused from slumber by hearing my hostess say : ' Women would always be in favour of peace.' I exclaimed, though then an ardent advocate of woman suffrage : ' What is your reason for saying that ?' My abruptness was inexcusable, but the lady could not find a single reason to give me in support of what to her was a moral axiom. Nor have I ever myself been able to find any

sound reason in its favour. A friend, whose sound and impartial judgment we both respect, fully agrees with me. 'I can't,' he writes, 'feel at all sure that women's influence would make for peace. Where wars excite popular feeling it seems to me that women's influence tends to fan the flame. Surely it was not the women, as such, who wanted peace in the Southern States of America, or in France, or in Germany.' In 1870 a Marylander told me that Maryland would have stood out for peace had it not been for the young women of his State, who clamoured for secession and war. Women are more emotional than men, and liability to emotion is no guarantee against warlike passion.

3. I admit, however, though it is not certain, that woman suffrage may give greater weight in public life to the feminine virtues than they now obtain. It is then a duty on a serious matter to speak plainly. At the risk of being misunderstood, I must confess to a grave doubt whether a general increase of tenderness, charity, and humanity in the conduct of public affairs would not be bought

at too high a price if it diminished the reasonableness, the justice, the courage, the sense of responsibility to the State, or the love of truth which are the greatest of civil virtues. The State has been built up by men; its welfare depends upon the encouragement of manly qualities. There are two ways in which the authority of women might work evil. It might lead statesmen or stateswomen to judge public conduct by the rules properly applicable to domestic life. Is it inconceivable that a condition of feeling might arise under which, had it existed in 1805, Nelson might have been cashiered because of his relations with Lady Hamilton? Yet 'Trafalgar saved England.' It is possible, again, that women, rightly careful of private morality, might, as things now stand, not recognize fully the duty, to which men of irregular lives have sometimes subordinated all selfish objects, of placing the welfare of the State far above the personal interests of family life. This suspicion, I shall be told, has no fair foundation. I appeal, then, to John Mill. He is a judge whom no suffragist can challenge. He draws a splendid picture

of what women will become in some future age and in some undiscovered society which places them on a political equality with men ; but he expresses a most unfavourable opinion of English women as he actually knew them in real life from, say, 1830 to 1873. He believes that ‘ disinterestedness in the general conduct of life, the devotion of the energies to purposes which hold out no promise of private advantage to the family, is very seldom encouraged or supported by women’s influence.’* He credits women with aversion to war and addiction to philanthropy, but to these excellent characteristics the influence of women more often than not, in his opinion, gives a direction which is as often mischievous as useful. In philanthropy, the two provinces chiefly cultivated by women are religious proselytism and charity. But then proselytism at home is a name for the embittering religious animosities, whilst abroad it is usually a blind running at an object without either knowing or heeding the fatal mischiefs, even as regards the propagation of religion itself, which may be produced by the means

* ‘ Subjection of Women,’ pp. 161, 162.

employed. As regards charity, women, he conceives, are in the present state of the world both unable to see and unwilling to admit the ultimate evil tendency of any form of charity or philanthropy which commends itself to their sympathetic feelings. To the contributions and the influence of women is, he conceives, due the continually increasing mass of unenlightened and short-sighted benevolence which, relieving people from the disagreeable consequences of their own acts, saps the foundations of self-respect, self-help, and self-control which are the essential conditions both of individual prosperity and of social virtue. Few, indeed, are the women who can appreciate the value of self-dependence; noxious, therefore, he holds, is often the influence of a wife upon her husband: it tends to prevent him from falling below the common standard of ordinary respectability, it tends as strongly to prevent him from rising above it. 'Whoever has a wife and children has given hostages to Mrs. Grundy.' The approbation of that potentate may be a matter of indifference to him, but it is of great importance to his wife. Her

almost invariable tendency is to place her influence in the same scale with social considerations. 'With such an influence in every house, either exerted actively or operating all the more powerfully for not being asserted, is it any wonder that people in general are kept down in that mediocrity of respectability which is becoming a marked characteristic of modern times?'

You know well that this is not my view of the condition or the influence of women. My words summarize the judgment of Mill. He himself might have drawn a brighter picture had he been able to watch the effect of improved education since 1869. Even at that date the darkness of the sketch was, you will say, overcharged. So be it ; but Mill's unjust disparagement is assuredly not wholly devoid of truth. It suggests two reflections which ought not to be hastily rejected. The one is that the domestic virtues may obtain too much rather than too little influence in the transaction of public affairs. Our politicians

* See Mill's 'Subjection of Women,' pp. 160-169. The passages which I have attempted to summarize should be read as a whole.

have by the Old Age Pensions Act re-established a gigantic system of outdoor relief without waiting to hear the judgment of a Commission appointed to inquire into the working of the Poor Law. They have committed this act of supreme rashness, as we now know for certain, without having taken the trouble to ascertain the cost of a most dubious experiment. This our political guides have done, if we judge them with the very utmost charity possible, out of compassion for the miseries of the poor, without thinking for a moment of the burden they might impose on ratepayers whose efforts just kept them out of pauperism. Such leaders will not become wiser or more prudent when they find that their seats depend on the approval of new constituents whose tender-heartedness forbids them to see the evil of any form of charity which, at whatever cost to the State, gives immediate relief to individual distress which excites their sympathies. The other reflection is that, even if education strengthens, as I believe fully it will, the intellectual powers of women, yet the fruits of education come to ripeness only after long years, and

therefore that to thrust political power or—in theory at least—political supremacy upon a body of women who have not as yet acquired as a class the civic virtues which the experience and the labours of centuries have even now developed but imperfectly among ordinary men is, on the very face of the matter, an act of portentous recklessness. But here I pass to another subject—the direct objections to the bestowal of Parliamentary votes upon women. This I reserve for another letter.

LETTER IV

OBJECTIONS TO WOMAN SUFFRAGE

MY DEAR C.,

One of our friends, to whom you have shown the preceding letters, tells me that I have done nothing except render a service to the suffragists by placing their side of the question at issue in so masterly and conclusive a manner as nearly to convince him that they have the best of the argument. If this is the case, it is certainly time for me to press upon you the objections which lie against any proposal for the admission of English women at the present day to the Parliamentary franchise.

FIRST OBJECTION.—Woman suffrage must ultimately, and probably in no long time, lead to adult suffrage, and will increase all the admitted defects of so-called universal, or in strictness manhood, suffrage.

The close connection between woman suffrage and adult suffrage, though occasionally

denied,* is to my mind as clear as day. Every reason and every sentiment which supports the cry of 'Votes for women!' tells, at any rate with nine people out of ten, in favour of

* All suffragists, it is authoritatively announced, are now agreed on the formula that 'women demand the Parliamentary franchise on the same conditions as those on which it is now, or may be hereafter, granted to men.' Hence we are apparently meant to infer that women will contentedly accept the franchise, combined with the maintenance of so-called household suffrage. (See letter signed by Mrs. Fawcett and others, *The Times*, March 23, 1909, p. 6.) The formula is, however, like other articles of peace, ambiguous. (1) It may mean that women will be content with receiving the suffrage on strictly the same conditions as men, though with the result that, as these conditions are much more often fulfilled by men than by women, whilst male electors amount to some 7,000,000 persons, female electors would amount to at most 2,000,000 persons, and this although women constitute the decided majority of the population. I utterly disbelieve that such an arrangement would be permanently acquiesced in. (2) It may mean that the law should be modified so that under the present system of so-called household suffrage an equal number, broadly speaking, of men and of women should be admitted to the franchise, or, in other words, so that the electorate should consist of at least 14,000,000 electors. This, we may be certain, is the sense in which the formula is accepted by ardent suffragists. But this doubled electorate is open to all the objections, though in a slightly less degree, which lie against adult suffrage.

adult suffrage. Every citizen of the United Kingdom, for example, pays taxes ; how can any man or woman who relies on the dogma that taxation involves representation deny that every citizen of the United Kingdom is entitled to a vote ? No one, again, who notes the development of popular government throughout the world can doubt the probability that manhood suffrage, which already exists in France, in Germany, in Switzerland, in the United States, and in most of our self-governing colonies, will at no distant date be established in the United Kingdom. But even the most moderate and sagacious of the agitators for woman suffrage admit, or rather demand, that manhood suffrage shall involve adult suffrage. It would, lastly, be no easy task to give, even in name, political equality to women under our present electoral system. The mere extension of the present system so as to include women would have some extraordinary results. It would in many cases exclude from what suffragists call ' the elementary rights of citizenship ' a large number of married women ; that is exactly the class of women who, in the judgment of most

persons, are best qualified to exercise the franchise without disadvantage to the nation. Woman suffrage, moreover, combined with household suffrage as it actually exists, would lead to the creation of 'faggot votes,' but 'faggot votes' constitute an anomaly, harmless in itself, which Liberals out of office denounce, and even when in office promise to remove. But if it be difficult to combine household suffrage with woman suffrage, the feat of giving political equality to women could be performed with the greatest ease under a scheme of adult suffrage which should give a vote to every citizen, male or female, who has attained the age of twenty-one years.

Woman suffrage, then, I repeat, assuredly means, if not to-day, yet within a short time, the introduction of adult suffrage, and, independently of the new electors being women, must add to the defects of manhood suffrage. A huge constituency is, just because of its size, a bad electoral body. As the number of electors is increased, the power and the responsibility of each man are diminished. Authority passes into the hands of persons who possess neither the independence due to

the possession of property nor the intelligence due to education. Our electorate now consists of some 7,000,000 men. Adult suffrage would create an electorate of, say roundly, at least 20,000,000 * individuals, of whom considerably over 10,000,000 would be women. This mere increase in numbers is no slight evil. That more than half the new electors should be absolutely devoid of political training and traditions creates of itself a national peril; but common sense forbids any fair reasoner to stop at this point. This uneducated majority of the electorate would be women. The very advocates of woman suffrage make it part of their case that the civic virtues of women have never as yet been fully developed. Assuredly the most ordinary prudence warns us against admitting to a full share of sovereignty persons who have lacked all experience of its exercise.

Grant, for the sake of argument—though the concession is not justified by our knowledge of human nature—that possession of power invariably teaches its possessors to use

* It might amount to 24,000,000, containing again a majority of women.

it with justice. Still, it remains the height of folly to entrust the guidance of the State, at a time when the country is surrounded by perils of all kinds, to unskilled apprentices who have no experience in piloting the commonwealth through pressing dangers. The most sagacious advocates of women's rights do not deny that each sex exhibits virtues which are found only in a less degree, or, it may be, not at all, in the other. We hear, as I have pointed out to you, much of the keenness of women's personal sympathies, of their capacity for passionate and often generous emotion; we are told that either nature or training, or both in combination, may lead women to see more readily than men the minute details on which depends the transaction of business. Yet it would not be unfair to say that, while women often perceive more readily than men the actual facts before them, they have a less firm grasp on principles; that a woman, in short, compared with a man of equal ability, may have a better eye for the circumstances around her, but has less of foresight. She has assuredly also less of tenacity.

From differences, upon some of which, in

whatever form they ought to be expressed, no man has insisted more strongly than Mill, it follows that the participation of women in sovereign power must introduce into English politics a new and incalculable element which will not work wholly for good. An English democracy, in common with all democracies, is too emotional. The strong point of popular government is assuredly neither foresight nor firmness of purpose. Now, every student of British history can see that more than once the statesmanlike foresight, and still more certainly the intense tenacity or obstinacy of purpose, which have marked the British aristocracy and the British middle classes, have been the salvation of the country. These qualities defended the independence of England against the despotism of Louis XIV., and, in a later age, against the attacks, first of revolutionary Jacobinism, and next of Napoleonic Imperialism. No one as yet knows whether our democracy can exhibit the unconquerable firmness which once and again has saved England from subjection to foreign power. Who can contemplate without dread a state of things under which democratic

passion, intensified by feminine emotion, may deprive the country both of the calmness which foresees and the resolution which repels the onslaught of foreign enemies? There is, we venture to say, no man, and no woman either, who at moments of calm reflection can believe that, at a time of threatened invasion, the safety of the country would be increased by the possibility that British policy might be determined by the votes and the influence of the fighting suffragists.

· **SECOND OBJECTION.**—The grant of votes to women settles nothing. If conceded tomorrow, it must be followed by the cry of ‘Seats in Parliament for women!’ ‘Places in the Cabinet for women!’ ‘Judgeships for women!’ For the avowed aim of every suffragist, down from John Stuart Mill to Mrs. Pankhurst, is the complete political equality of men and of women. The opening of the Parliamentary franchise to women is the encouragement, not the close, of a long agitation.

THIRD OBJECTION.—The proposed concession of sovereignty to women is in one im-

portant respect opposed to every precedent to be found in the constitutional history of England. It has hitherto been with Englishmen a primary and essential condition of the admission of any body of persons to a share in sovereign power that the class on whose behalf Parliamentary votes are demanded should be eager and ready to take up Parliamentary responsibilities. In 1832 nobody doubted that the middle classes, or in 1867 that the artisans, desired admission to the full powers of citizenship. But this primary condition of constitutional changes has in the present instance not been fulfilled. Many women, indeed, desire votes; a few women clamour passionately for votes. But a large number of English women* protest against the introduction of woman suffrage; they deprecate the concession to themselves of rights which they regard as intolerable burdens, and the concession to other women of powers which they believe the recipients cannot exercise with advantage to the country.

* Of these more than a quarter of a million have already petitioned Parliament against any Bill conferring the suffrage upon women.

This protest must command attention ; it reveals an exceptional state of opinion which must, so long as it exists, tell strongly against the introduction of woman suffrage into Great Britain. The position of these political protestants is in no way absurd. It is best expressed in the words of a woman : ‘The women whose profound, though often unspoken, reluctance to the proposed addition to their duties and responsibilities I am endeavouring to interpret, do not regard the question as mainly referring to the value, or the best distribution, of a particular bit of political machinery ; but as involving that of the right and fair division of labour between the sexes. We regard the suffrage not as conferring a necessarily advantageous position, but rather as the symbol, and to some extent the instrument, of a public participation in political functions ; not as a prize to be coveted, but as the token of a task which should not be indiscriminately imposed—a task not to be lightly undertaken, or discharged without encountering both toil and opposition. We think that justice and fairness consist, not in ignoring actual differences,

but in so adjusting necessary burdens with due regard to the lines of irremovable difference as to secure the most even distribution of pressure. We believe that the fact that Nature has irrevocably imposed certain burdens on our sex constitutes a claim, as a matter of justice, that we should be relieved from some part of those functions which men are competent to share with us.*

Nor is there the least lack of public spirit in the protest by freeborn English women against subjection to a sovereignty of women which they neither desire nor revere, and which they believe would be disastrous to the country. One point is past dispute. Every reason which supports the claim of women to votes supports also the right of women to be consulted on the question whether they shall be given votes or not. It is impossible to maintain that women have a right to determine every matter which concerns the interest of England or of the British Empire, but have no right to be consulted whether it is well for England and for women themselves that the

* Miss C. E. Stephen, 'Women and Politics,' *The Nineteenth Century*, February, 1907, pp. 228, 229.

country should try the new experiment of woman suffrage. No serious reasoner will try to escape this conclusion by the idle retort that a woman who does not desire a vote need not use it. The very essence of her objection is that a vote imposes upon her a duty which may be an intolerable burden, and subjects her to the rule of a class—namely, women—which she deems incompetent to exercise sovereign power.

FOURTH OBJECTION.—The basis of all government is force, which means in the last resort physical strength. But predominant force lies in the hands of men. Now these facts, whether one likes them or not, tell in more ways than people often realize against giving a share in sovereignty to English women. The matter well deserves consideration.

There is, in the first place, a grave danger that the nominally sovereign body may not be in reality able to enforce the law of the land. In this country the legal or constitutional sovereign is Parliament—*i.e.*, the King, the House of Lords, and the House of Commons acting together ; but the ‘ political

sovereign '* is the electorate, which, being wide enough to share and represent the feelings of the mass of the people, does in general obtain obedience to the laws which it approves. But the reason why laws made with the assent or acquiescence of the electorate are obeyed is that the electors constitute a power to which no single citizen and no class of citizens can offer permanent resistance.

That the employment of physical force is the basis of law and of sovereignty anyone may assure himself by observing the way in which law loses its authority whenever the support of the force whence law derives its power is withdrawn. Why has the law of the land little better than a nominal existence in some parts of Ireland? The answer is that, for reasons of party convenience, the British Government will not in Ireland use the power placed in its hands by Parliament for the enforcement of the law. Let a fighting suffragist in her calmer moments ask herself

* For the distinction between the legal and the political sovereign, see Dicey, 'Law of the Constitution,' seventh edition, pp. 70-72.

why it is that her petulance or her cunning is allowed occasionally to interrupt the sittings of the House of Commons, and lower the dignity of Parliament? The answer assuredly is that habitual consideration for the weakness of women makes Englishmen for the moment unwilling to use the force needed for the suppression of misbehaviour, which it may any day be necessary to punish with the severity due to serious crime. Meanwhile law is enfeebled unless supported by adequate force. Now the sovereignty of Parliament, or, in other words, the power of the electorate, might easily be imperilled if the majority of the electors were a class which, though more numerous, is weaker than a minority of the nation. But this is exactly the state of things which might arise under a system of adult suffrage, embracing not only men but women. Suppose an Act of Parliament passed which was opposed to the wishes of the decided majority of male electors, but carried practically by the votes of women. In such a case the ominous result would ensue that, whilst the political sovereign—that is, the majority of the electors—supported the

law, the body possessed of predominant strength would be strongly opposed to the law. Rarely indeed could it happen that anything like the whole body of female electors would be opposed to anything like the whole body of male electors. It is not necessary for our argument to imagine so portentous a state of affairs. But it is certainly possible under a system of adult suffrage, and in a country where, as in England, women constitute the greater part of the population, that a body composed of a large majority of female electors acting together with a minority of male electors, might force upon the country a law or a policy opposed to the deliberate will and judgment of the majority of Englishmen. Is it certain that in such circumstances Englishmen would obey and enforce a law that punished as a crime conduct which they in general held ought to be treated as an offence, not against law, but against morality? Can we, again, feel assured that Englishmen might not forbid the making of an ignominious peace, even though the majority of the electorate, consisting for the most part of women, held that the horrors of war must be

terminated at all costs by a treaty which, in the eyes of most Englishmen, sacrificed the dignity and imperilled the independence of the country ?

Add to this a consideration to which little attention has been paid. The army, the police, governors of gaols, every person, in short, by whom the coercive power of the State is directly exercised, must, under any constitution whatever, be men. Whenever, therefore, a large majority of male electors is outvoted by a majority constituted mainly of women, the minority will command the sympathy of the officials by whose hands the State exercises its power. Woman suffrage, therefore, in common with every system which separates nominal sovereignty from the possession of irresistible power, involves the risk that the constitutional sovereign of the country may be rendered powerless by a class, in this instance the majority of the male electors, possessed of predominant physical force.

Look at the connection between force and government from another point of view. It is an open secret of sound constitutionalism

that any polity which is to stand the trials to which every great institution devised by man is exposed must give effect, under whatever form, to the will of the class possessed of paramount and enduring power. In this sense, and in this sense only, statesmen who most honour law and justice must desire that might and right, law and strength, should harmonize with and support each other. The many failures and the rare successes of constitution-makers equally attest the importance of this principle. Why was it that the democrats and Puritans who planned institutions so ingenious as the constitution of 1653 could create no permanent form of popular government? A partial answer to a complicated question is surely to be found in the fact that the premature and democratic institutions of Puritanism, and even the Protectorate, with its approach towards the ancient kingship, did not represent the strength of England. The yeomanry, on which the Republicans of the Commonwealth relied, was already a declining power. Why, on the other hand, did the Revolution settlement of 1689, with all its defects, stand sub-

stantially unchanged for some 140 years? The answer is that this work of Whig statesmanship on the whole satisfied the large land-owners, the merchants, and the traders, who constituted the true strength of England.

Consider for a moment the experiment, tried in our own times by the American democracy, of conferring full political rights on the negroes of the South. There was much to be said in its favour. In a democratic Republic, men argued, no class could obtain respect or secure its own civil rights unless it had its share in political sovereignty. This was the conviction of most, though not of all, Abolitionists. It was entertained by some of the best and wisest of American statesmen. In the decision finally adopted, noble enthusiasm and philanthropy played a far greater part than partisanship or the shallow astuteness of party managers. The generous experiment has turned out a dubious success, if not a failure. The negro vote is a sham and a fraud. Some candid observers will assert that the state of feeling between the whites and the blacks is worse than ever, though others happily draw a brighter picture

of the condition of the South. No one, thank Heaven, regrets the abolition of slavery ; but patriotic American citizens, among whom may be numbered some of the most sagacious of the men of colour, hold, it would appear, the opinion that the wiser course would have been to use the power of the reunited Republic at the end of the War of Secession for securing to the negroes every civil right, instead of hurrying on their accession to political rights which have certainly not given them political authority.

I know you will never suppose—hardly, I hope, can even an indignant suffragist imagine—that I am so dull as to suggest, what any man of sense knows to be strictly false, that English women occupy anything like the position of ignorant and scarcely civilized negroes. The suggestion that English women are slaves, patent as is its absurdity, comes, if at all, from the more heated and less wise advocates of woman suffrage. All that is here contended for is that page after page of history exemplifies the futility of giving to any class, whether of men or of women, political rights in excess of genuine political power.

Full participation, further, not in civil rights, but in sovereignty, depends on capacity to perform all the duties of citizenship ; and the defence of his country is at certain periods the main, as at all times it ought to be the essential, duty of a British citizen. But this duty women as a class have not the capacity to perform. No one dreams of the formation of an army of amazons, and, were such a thing a possibility, it would be a step back towards barbarism. Nor is it only in the defence of the country against foreign enemies that women are by nature incapable of taking part. The same is the case with the maintenance of law and order at home. Law is a command ; its sanctions are ineffective without force to apply them ; and women are unable to share in the forcible maintenance of the laws which, if they had the vote, they would share in making. It is no argument, in this connection, to say that many men are incapable, from age or weakness, of defending the State, but enjoy the franchise all the same. The aged have taken, or been able to take, their share in public duties ; the weaklings are exceptions. Of women, the reverse is

true. No one dreams that they ought to be constables, officers of police, governors of gaols, or coastguards. No woman is bound, as is a man, to attend the Justices in suppressing a riot upon pain of fine and imprisonment. All this is no absolute ground for excluding women from a share in sovereign power, but it does afford a ground which is not palpably unjust for their exclusion from political authority.

Distinctions of rights founded upon sex have often given rise to injustice, but they have this in their favour—they rest upon a difference not created by social conventions or by human prejudice and selfishness, or by accidental circumstances (such as riches and poverty), which split society into classes, but upon the nature of things. This difference is as far-reaching as it is natural and immutable. It is one which, just because it is permanent and unchangeable, every honest thinker must take into account. That men are men and women are women is an obvious platitude; but it contains an undeniable truth which, like some other unwelcome facts, rhetoric, even when, as with Mill, it masquerades as strict

reasoning, cannot conceal. This is a matter worth insisting upon, for there is nothing which hinders the calm discussion of a political problem requiring for its solution something like judicial serenity so much as the difficulty, inseparable from all discussions involving reference to sex, of putting plain facts into plain language. The comparative weakness of women inevitably means loss of power. Nor can it be forgotten not only that women are physically, and probably mentally, weaker than men, but that they are inevitably, as a class, burdened with duties of the utmost national importance, and of an absorbing and exhausting nature, from which men are free. In any case, the close connection between government and force tells against the claim made on behalf of women to the possession of as much political authority as is conceded to men.

LETTER V

SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT

MY DEAR C.,

My reasoning throughout the whole of these letters has almost of necessity involved a certain amount of repetition. The pains with which I have elaborated particular points may have obscured the general drift of my argument. Allow me, then, in this last letter, to come back to the question whence we started: Will England derive benefit from the introduction of woman suffrage? When the matter has been calmly examined, without declamation or rhetoric, the answer comes out clearly enough. That this is so will be apparent if I broadly summarize the whole case, as it stands before my mind, against granting Parliamentary votes to English women.

There exist, on the one hand, some plausible or even strong arguments for conceding to women a share in sovereign power. The

force, however, of these reasons lies mainly in their correspondence with much of the prevalent sentiment of the day. When examined, they turn out too weak to prove the necessity or the expediency of exposing an ancient commonwealth to the risks of a dangerous experiment, which can hardly, indeed, be complimented with the name of an experiment, since, when once tried, it cannot be given up.

The claim to Parliamentary votes, as a matter of abstract right, is part of an obsolete political creed which did not command the assent of the teacher whose 'Subjection of Women' supplies the argumentative foundation of the claim to woman suffrage. This demand, again, is treated by suffragists as a deduction from the principles of popular government; but these so-called principles, when rationally examined, turn out to be mere watchwords or shibboleths which, if treated as the premises of serious political argument, must, from their vagueness and inaccuracy, lead to absurd conclusions. The desired innovation or revolution is, we are further told, needed to deliver English women

from, or guard them against, grievous wrongs. But we now know from happy experience that such wrongs may be, as they in fact have been, removed or averted by a Parliament consisting solely of men, and in the election whereof no woman had a part.

To give votes to women is, we are assured, nothing but the final step in that path of democratic progress which, during the last eighty years, has led the men and women of England towards freedom and happiness. Grant—though the concession is an extravagant one—that the benefits derived from the development of popular government are not only, as they certainly are, great, but have also been unmixed with any evil, it is easy enough to show that they have been obtained, in Great Britain at least, by adherence to the fundamental canon of individualism, ‘that over himself, his own body and mind, the individual is, or ought to be, sovereign’—that is, by the extension of the civil rights of individuals, whether men or women. But the dogma that an individual, whether man or woman, has a right to determine matters which mainly concern such individual, goes

hardly a step towards showing that, from a woman's right to govern herself, you may legitimately infer that she has a right to govern others. The claim to civil rights or private rights never has been, and never can be, placed on the same footing as the claim to political rights, or, in other words, duties.*

Women's votes, we are told, will raise women's wages; but, in the sense in which every overworked woman will understand this assertion, it is false. The current rate of wages cannot be fixed by law. In the only sense in which the assertion may be true, it supplies, as I have pointed out, the strongest of arguments against the extension of electoral rights to a body of persons

* It is worth noting that no man was less inclined than Mill to entrust the government of India to the British democracy. He deplored the transference of the administration of Indian affairs from the East India Company to Parliament. The good government of India depended, in his opinion, upon a much more profound study of the conditions of Indian government than British politicians had shown any willingness to undertake. There is no reason to suppose that even Mill expected such profound study to be promoted by giving to English women a share in sovereign power.

tempted to use their votes as the means of wringing higher wages from the State.

It is, lastly, with confidence asserted that woman suffrage will make for the suppression of private vice at home and the maintenance of public peace abroad. This idea has for many noble and public-spirited women an immense fascination, but it is grounded in the main on error. Enthusiasm for a legislative crusade against immorality rests on that eternal confusion between the sphere of law and the sphere of ethics, which, as all experience shows, is invariably productive of immense evil. For the belief that women will always be in favour of peace there exists no solid foundation whatever. Capacity for passionate emotion is unfavourable to the calmness of judgment which anticipates the risks and forbids the cruelty and the wastefulness of war.

The reasons, on the other hand, against trying a hazardous constitutional experiment on an ancient commonwealth are of immense weight.

Woman suffrage means adult suffrage ; and adult suffrage means the transfer of the right

to govern the United Kingdom from some 7,000,000 of men to some 20,000,000 or, it may be, 24,000,000 of men and women, whereof women will be the majority.

That the women to be admitted to the Parliamentary franchise will often be excellent persons, highly endowed with the virtues of fortitude, personal unselfishness, and self-sacrifice, we are convinced ; but the conviction that English women will exhibit in the highest degree the virtues of women is not the contradiction, but the complement of the belief, entertained by nearly every man, that women of pre-eminent goodness are often lacking in the virtues, such as active courage, firmness of judgment, self-control, steadiness of conduct, and, above all, a certain sense of justice maintained even in the heat of party conflict, which are often to be found in Englishmen, even of an ordinary type. Whoever asks for the vindication of this belief should study the deeds and the words of the fighting suffragists. He should note at the same time that the female leaders in the battle for women's rights have for the most part never unreservedly condemned the lawless follies and

the hysterical insolence of their followers. These leaders have thus condoned courses of action which, if pursued by every body of persons who deemed that they suffered real grievances, would reduce the United Kingdom to an anarchy deeper than that which destroyed Poland.

Of the features which discredit the agitation whose war-cry is 'Votes for women!' I have of set purpose said little. The antics of the fighting suffragists hardly deserve serious notice. The misapprehension both of history and of law which suggests the delusion that English women have been robbed of a suffrage which they never possessed, has, we trust, been finally disposed of by the impressive judgment delivered by the Lord Chancellor in the House of Lords. The silly and mendacious insinuation* that over 140 women

* 'Is it possible that in free England over 140 women have been sent to prison for only asking for votes for women?' ('Case for Women's Suffrage,' p. 140). The answer, of course, is that it is not possible, and never has happened. Every woman imprisoned was convicted of some distinct breach of the law, such, for example, as resisting and obstructing the police in the execution of their duty, or conduct likely to provoke a breach of the peace.

have been sent to prison only for asking for votes is, in itself, hardly more deserving of confutation than would be the statement that a convicted burglar had got five years' penal servitude 'only because he called on a householder late at night, and entered by the back rather than by the front door of the house.'

The pregnant principle or fact that government itself depends at bottom upon force, tells all but fatally against the establishment of woman suffrage in a country, at any rate, such as England, where it would ultimately give predominant power to women. Nothing, I may add, is more noteworthy or characteristic than the incapacity of suffragists to recognize this unwelcome truth. Their political blindness is shown by the failure to perceive that for women to rely on physical force for the attainment of political authority calls into play the instrument, and creates the condition of opinion, which, should women obtain votes, might deprive them of any real share in sovereignty. The folly displayed by a class which, knowing itself to be deficient in paramount physical strength, relies upon lawless violence for the attainment of its ends,

excites derision. But it reminds a thoughtful observer of the anarchy or tyranny which would be possible under any constitution that dissevered legal right from physical power, and left open the chance that a Government supported by a majority of the electorate, consisting mainly of women, should come into conflict with the vast majority of the male electors who commanded the sympathy of, or (as in Switzerland) had come to coincide with, the national army.

Nor must it for a moment be forgotten that the vast majority of the 10,000,000 or more women who under a system of adult suffrage would be admitted to the electorate have never sanctioned the demand for participation in sovereign power; whilst the protest by a large and increasing body of women against the so-called concession to English women of rights which thousands of them regard as the unjust imposition of an unbearable burden becomes every day more and more audible, and must be heard with the most profound respect.

This, then, is the case against woman suffrage. To fair-minded men who have

throughout life been zealous to extend the civil rights of English women, it may well seem decisive. They will refuse to sanction a policy which, if it offers some dubious benefits to women, threatens irreparable damage, and great and immediate peril to England.

[Will the kind of argument, you ask, which I have laid before you in these letters, pressed as it has been, and is, in every shape and from all sides upon public attention, arrest a dangerous revolution ?

No one knows. It will certainly not commend itself to enthusiasts who believe that they are resisting laws unjust to women, when in reality they are attacking, not human law, but the very nature of things. One circumstance fills me with hope. It is the calm but vigorous action of women who protest against a policy which they hold to be injurious to the nation as a whole, and especially to women themselves. They have already achieved much. They have aroused the attention of the country. They have made it absolutely impossible that a measure far more revolutionary than the introduction of manhood

suffrage should pass through Parliament, whilst exciting less attention than a Bill allowing the consolidation or union of two or three great railway companies. They have, I trust, averted the risk, against which we must still be on our guard, that the admission of women to the Parliamentary franchise should be the result of party intrigue. Their duty, and I am certain their wish, is to continue with vigour the good work they have begun. A petition signed by more than 250,000 women has already told for much. Let the numbers be doubled, and it takes no prophet to predict that the pledges and opinions of candidates for seats in Parliament will undergo a miraculous change. Women can do more than any men to check an agitation which may delay for years the removal, at the instance of moderate reformers, of really injurious restraints upon the free action of women. Moderate reform has everything in its favour. It has produced all the definite improvements—and they are many—in the condition of English women which have been effected during the last fifty years. The petulance of lawlessness can boast of no beneficial achievement whatever. It

has for the first time given to political agitation, as conducted by some of the women of England, the character of disloyalty and, to speak plainly, of absurdity.

Our final appeal is, and must be, to the electors. Let every elector remember for once the main duty which, independent of party connection, lies upon him. He is bound, on the subject of woman suffrage, to vote with a sole eye to the permanent interest of the United Kingdom and of the British Empire. England is surrounded by perils. Our neighbours are military States, each of which maintains armies larger than we can retain within the bounds of the United Kingdom. These States are armed nations ; some of them are governed on military principles. One and all, however, whether they have done much or little for the promotion of popular freedom, the Continental States recognize, with one insignificant exception, the principle that none can have a share in sovereignty who cannot defend the land for which he may be required at any moment to die.

Contrast the position of Great Britain. No soldier, and very few civilians, can assert with

confidence that our present army is sufficient for our defence. It is uncertain, as we all now know, whether our navy can of itself guarantee the United Kingdom against invasion. On the Englishmen who, civilians though they remain, must, as high authorities tell us, receive military training, will depend the maintenance of England's independence, and the existence of the British Empire. In Ireland we have resistance to the law which Ministers refuse to put down, and which may any day be transformed into organized sedition. The spirit of nationality is moving in Egypt. From India we hear of widespread conspiracy which might some day make armed revolt a possibility. Meanwhile grave questions are pending in Eastern Europe, whence an armed conflict may arise from which our honour and our interests may make it impossible for us to hold aloof. The very vastness of our Empire, and the envy with which it is regarded by other nations, provoke and expose us to attack. The necessary intricacy and entanglement of our foreign and colonial policy make it more than ever needful that the country should be guided by the cool head,

the clear aim, and the tenacious purpose, which are to be found only in the strongest and most sagacious of men.

We inherit institutions built up by generations of statesmen, and well worth defence. Our constitution, resting as it does on the unquestionable supremacy of the civil power and the universal rule of equal law, is, with all its defects, the strongest, the freest, the most pacific, we may venture to say the most humane, form of government which has ever existed in any great State or Empire. It maintains an unvaried peace in every country subject to the British flag ; it has secured for the self-governing colonies of Great Britain independence as regards their local affairs, combined with exemption from the necessity of defending themselves against foreign aggression either by the sacrifices of war or by the intolerable burden of an armed peace. At this moment Englishmen are engaged in the earnest endeavour to prove that popular government in Great Britain is compatible with the maintenance of Imperial power and Imperial peace. What may be the issue of this effort to combine honest democracy with

sane Imperialism no prophet is daring enough to foretell. Yet upon its success may well depend the fate of popular government throughout the civilized world.

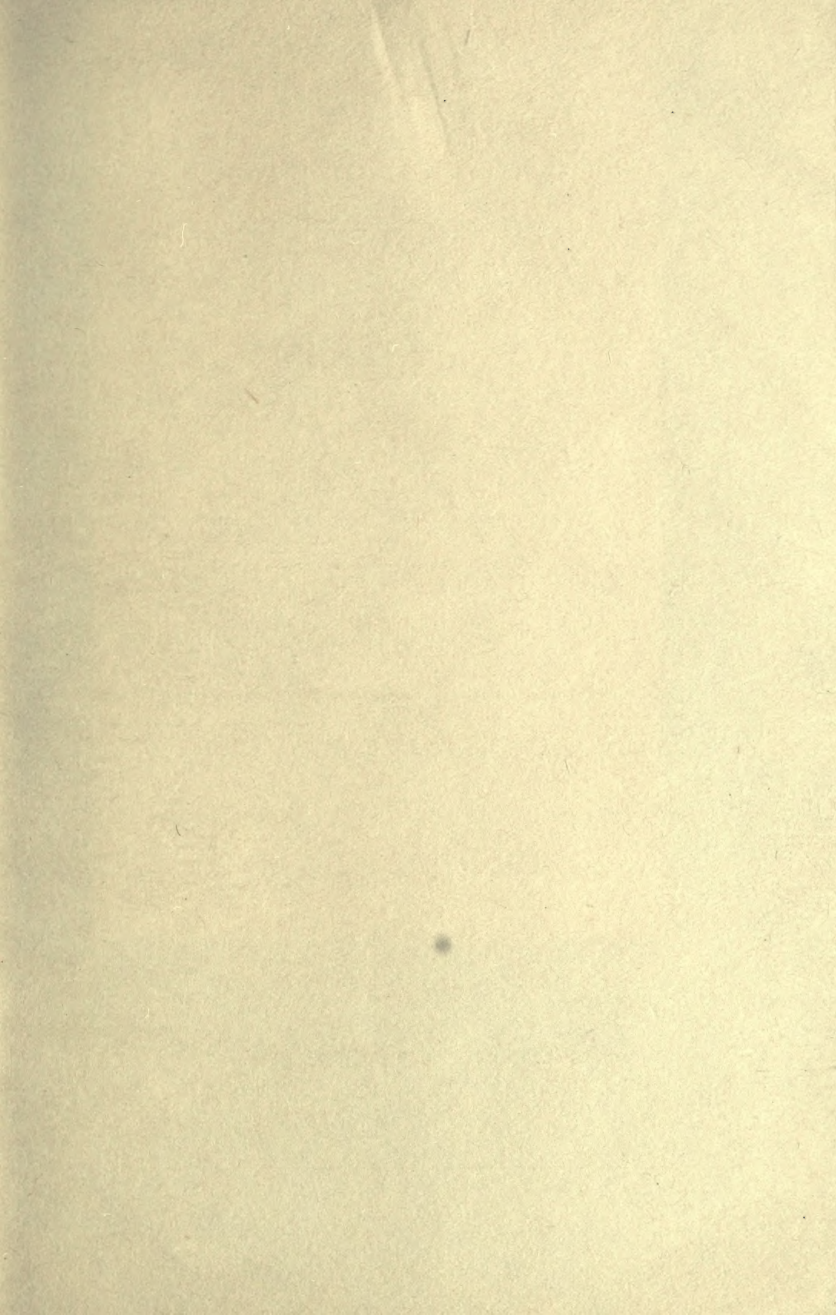
At this crisis we are asked to add to our existing dangers and to our heavy political labours a new and doubtful experiment in constitutional government. We are asked to weaken English democracy by far more than doubling the number of English electors ; we are asked to place the government of England, nominally at least, in the hands of women. Of these the best are ignorant of statesmanship ; the least trustworthy are fanatics who, in their passionate desire to obtain a share in the sovereignty which determines the policy of the British Empire (including the fate of millions of inhabitants of dependent countries), have conclusively shown that they have not yet mastered the most elementary principles of self-government or of loyal obedience to the laws of their native land. To these demands English electors will, I trust, be deaf. An appeal is made to their common sense and common prudence ; they must for once trust themselves rather than their

leaders. The most honourable of Parliamentary statesmen, when once engrossed in the game of party warfare, are apt to forget the very elements of statesmanship. They count votes gained or lost in or out of Parliament, and they lose the capacity for understanding the voice of the nation. May that voice be clear and unmistakable. It was well said a little while ago by a great soldier : ‘ We are not here only, nor even chiefly, for the purposes of the moment. We are the trustees for the future of the Empire. Upon what is done or neglected in Parliament beforehand must depend sooner or later the fate of England and of the British dominions throughout the world. We are bound in this House to look beyond the bawling and the brawling of the day, and to uphold Imperial policy above the clamour of selfish or short-sighted interests. Is not this, indeed, my lords, the greater part of our duty ? Unless we occupy ourselves most earnestly and under a sense of personal trusteeship with the means by which the safety and greatness of our country, continued from age to age, may be maintained in time to come, we cannot justify our exist-

ence even against the subversive force challenging this House to-day, and we shall not escape the heavy judgment of history. We are links in a living chain, pledged to transmit intact to posterity the glorious heritage we have received from those who have gone before us.*

These are the words of Lord Roberts. They were addressed to the House of Lords. They refer immediately to the imperative need of providing at all costs for the defence of the country. But their wisdom and their patriotism give them a wide application. They admirably describe the grave responsibility which falls upon every elector when urged to revolutionize the constitution of the United Kingdom. Whoever takes them to heart will refuse his sanction to an experiment which might well bring destruction on his country.

* See speech in the House of Lords, reported in the *Times*, November 24, 1908, p. 6.



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Dices

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