# The Enfranchisement of Women

HARRIET TAYLOR MILL

# The Enfranchisement of Women

The 1851 text

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*The Enfranchisement of Women* · Harriet Taylor Mill

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# CONTENTS

**Introduction** ..... vii

**Enfranchisement of Women** ..... 1

A question of justice ..... 4
The prejudice of custom ..... 7
The "proper sphere" ..... 9
The maternity argument ..... 12
Competition for work ..... 13
The hardening effect ..... 15
Why men want it so ..... 17
Companions but not equals ..... 18
The moderate reformers ..... 22
Marriage between unequals ..... 23
"Women do not want it" ..... 28
The movement ahead ..... 30

# INTRODUCTION

In October 1850 about a thousand people met at Worcester, Massachusetts, for the first National Woman's Rights Convention. Harriet Taylor (1807–1858), a London writer who married the philosopher John Stuart Mill the following year, read the report in the *New York Tribune* and answered it with this essay, published anonymously in the *Westminster Review* in July 1851. Mill later said that it was hers, with his help only as an editor.

Taylor Mill goes further than the convention itself. Women should have the vote, a place on juries and in parliament, and access to every profession, because no one can know what any person is fit for until all are free to try. She takes apart the standard objections one by one—that politics is incompatible with motherhood, that women would add to the competition for jobs, that public life would harden them—and argues that the subordination of wives corrupts husbands too: a man who lives with an inferior stops growing. The essay ends by turning on the women writers of her day who disclaim any wish for equality.

Slurs in the original are replaced by bracketed neutral words. The right-hand column is Taylor Mill in modern English; the left is the text of the *Westminster Review*.

# Enfranchisement of Women

*Reviewing the 1850 Worcester Women's Rights Convention, Taylor Mill argues for women's full political, civil and economic equality and answers the objections to it.*

| | 1851 | MODERN |
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| 0 | *The New York Tribune for Europe.* October 29th, 1850. | *The New York Tribune for Europe.* October 29, 1850.[1] |
| 1 | Most of our readers will probably learn from these pages for the first time, that there has arisen in the United States, and in the most civilized and enlightened portion of them, an organised agitation on a new question—new, not to thinkers, nor to any one by whom the principles of free and popular government are felt as well as acknowledged, but new, and even unheard of, as a subject for public meetings and practical political action. This question is, the enfranchisement of women; their admission, in law and in fact, to equality in all rights, political, civil, and social, with the male citizens of the community. | Most of our readers will probably learn from these pages, for the first time, that an organized agitation has arisen in the United States, in the most civilized and enlightened part of the country, on a new question. It is not new to thinkers, nor to anyone who feels the principles of free and popular government as well as acknowledges them. But it is new, even unheard of, as a subject for public meetings and practical political action. The question is the enfranchisement of women: their admission, in law and in fact, to equality with the male citizens of the community in all rights, political, civil, and social. |
| 2 | It will add to the surprise with which many will receive this intelligence, that the agitation which has commenced is not a pleading by male writers and orators *for* women, those who are professedly to be benefitted remaining either indifferent or ostensibly hostile: it is a political movement, practical in its objects, carried on in a form which denotes an intention to persevere. And it is a movement not merely *for* women, but *by* them. Its first public manifestation appears to have been a Convention of Women, held in the State of Ohio, in the spring of 1850. Of this meeting we have seen no report. | Many will be all the more surprised by this news because the agitation now begun is not a case of male writers and orators pleading *for* women, while the women who are supposed to benefit stay indifferent or openly hostile. It is a political movement with practical aims, carried on in a form that shows an intention to persevere. And it is a movement not merely *for* women, but *by* them. Its first public appearance seems to have been a Convention of Women held in the State of Ohio in the spring of 1850. We have seen no report of this meeting.[2] |
| | On the 23rd and 24th of October last, a succession of public meetings was held at Worcester, in Massachusetts, under the name of a "Women's Rights Convention," of which the president' was a woman, and nearly all the chief speakers women; numerously reinforced, however, by men, among whom were some of the most distinguished leaders in the kindred cause of *[Black]* | On the 23rd and 24th of October last, a series of public meetings was held at Worcester, Massachusetts, under the name of a "Women's Rights Convention." Its president was a woman, and nearly all the chief speakers were women. They were, however, joined by many men, among them some of the most distinguished leaders in the kindred cause of Black emancipation. A general committee |

1 The newspaper report under review. The essay itself appeared anonymously in the *Westminster Review* in July 1851.
2 The Ohio Women's Convention met at Salem, Ohio, in April 1850.

| | 1851 | MODERN |
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| | emancipation. A general and four special committees were nominated, for the purpose of carrying on the undertaking until the next annual meeting. | and four special committees were appointed to carry on the work until the next annual meeting.[3] |
| 3 | According to the report in the New York Tribune, above a thousand persons were present throughout, and "if a larger place could have been had, many thousands more would have attended." The place was described as "crowded from the beginning with attentive and interested listeners." In regard to the quality of the speaking, the proceedings bear an advantageous comparison with those of any popular movement with which we are acquainted, either in this country or in America. Very rarely in the oratory of public meetings is the part of verbiage and declamation so small, that of calm good sense and reason so considerable. | According to the report in the New York Tribune, more than a thousand people were present throughout, and "if a larger place could have been had, many thousands more would have attended." The hall was described as "crowded from the beginning with attentive and interested listeners." As for the quality of the speaking, the proceedings compare favorably with those of any popular movement we know of, either in this country or in America. Very rarely in the oratory of public meetings is so little given to verbiage and declamation, and so much to calm good sense and reason. |
| | The result of the Convention was in every respect encouraging to those by whom it was summoned: and it is probably destined to inaugurate one of the most important of the movements towards political and social reform, which are the best characteristic of the present age. | The result of the Convention was in every way encouraging to those who called it. It is probably destined to inaugurate one of the most important of the movements toward political and social reform that are the best feature of the present age. |
| 4 | That the promoters of this new agitation take their stand on principles, and do not fear to declare these in their widest extent, without time-serving or compromise, will be seen from the resolutions adopted by the Convention, part of which we transcribe:— | The promoters of this new agitation take their stand on principles, and they are not afraid to declare those principles in their widest extent, without opportunism or compromise. This can be seen from the resolutions adopted by the Convention, some of which we copy here: |
| 5 | "*Resolved*—That every human being, of full age, and resident for a proper length of time on the soil of the nation, who is required to obey the law, is entitled to a voice in its enactment; that every such person, whose property or labour is taxed for the support of the government, is entitled to a direct share in such government; therefore, | "*Resolved*—That every human being, of full age, and resident for a proper length of time on the soil of the nation, who is required to obey the law, is entitled to a voice in its enactment; that every such person, whose property or labor is taxed for the support of the government, is entitled to a direct share in such government; therefore, |
| 6 | "*Resolved*—That women are entitled to the right of suffrage, and to be considered eligible to office, . . . and that every party which claims to represent the humanity, the civilization, and the progress of the age, is bound to inscribe on its banners, equality before the law, without distinction of sex or colour. | "*Resolved*—That women are entitled to the right of suffrage, and to be considered eligible to office, . . . and that every party which claims to represent the humanity, the civilization, and the progress of the age, is bound to inscribe on its banners, equality before the law, without distinction of sex or color. |

3 "The Convention" throughout is this first National Woman's Rights Convention, Worcester, October 23–24, 1850, presided over by Paulina Wright Davis. Abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips and Frederick Douglass took part.

| | 1851 | MODERN |
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| 7 | "*Resolved*—That civil and political rights acknowledge no sex, and therefore the word "male" should be struck from every State Constitution. | "*Resolved*—That civil and political rights acknowledge no sex, and therefore the word 'male' should be struck from every State Constitution. |
| 8 | "*Resolved*—That, since the prospect of honourable and useful employment in after life is the best stimulus to the use of educational advantages, and since the best education is that we give ourselves, in the struggles, employments, and discipline of life; therefore it is impossible that women should make full use of the instruction already accorded to them, or that their career should do justice to their faculties, until the avenues to the various civil and professional employments are thrown open to them. | "*Resolved*—That, since the prospect of honorable and useful employment in after life is the best stimulus to the use of educational advantages, and since the best education is that we give ourselves, in the struggles, employments, and discipline of life; therefore it is impossible that women should make full use of the instruction already accorded to them, or that their career should do justice to their faculties, until the avenues to the various civil and professional employments are thrown open to them. |
| 9 | "*Resolved*—That every effort to educate women, without according to them their rights, and arousing their conscience by the weight of their responsibilities, is futile, and a waste of labour. | "*Resolved*—That every effort to educate women, without according to them their rights, and arousing their conscience by the weight of their responsibilities, is futile, and a waste of labor. |
| 10 | "*Resolved*—That the laws of property, as affecting married persons, demand a thorough revisal, so that all rights be equal between them; that the wife have, during life, an equal control over the property gained by their mutual toil and sacrifices, and be heir to her husband precisely to that extent that he is heir to her, and entitled at her death to dispose by will of the same share of the joint property as he is." | "*Resolved*—That the laws of property, as affecting married persons, demand a thorough revisal, so that all rights be equal between them; that the wife have, during life, an equal control over the property gained by their mutual toil and sacrifices, and be heir to her husband precisely to that extent that he is heir to her, and entitled at her death to dispose by will of the same share of the joint property as he is." |
| 11 | The following is a brief summary of the principal demands:— | Here is a brief summary of the principal demands: |
| 12 | "1. *Education* in primary and high schools, universities, medical, legal, and theological institutions. | "1. *Education* in primary and high schools, universities, medical, legal, and theological institutions. |
| 13 | "2. *Partnership* in the labours and gains, risks and remunerations, of productive industry. | "2. *Partnership* in the labors and gains, risks and remunerations, of productive industry. |
| 14 | "3. *A coequal share* in the formation and administration of laws—municipal, state, and national—through legislative assemblies, courts, and executive offices." | "3. *A coequal share* in the formation and administration of laws—municipal, state, and national—through legislative assemblies, courts, and executive offices." |

## A QUESTION OF JUSTICE

*Taylor Mill argues that the Declaration of Independence and English maxims of freedom both condemn excluding women.*

| | 1851 | MODERN |
|---|---|---|
| 15 | It would be difficult to put so much true, just, and reasonable meaning into a style so little calculated to recommend it as that of some of the resolutions. But whatever objection may be made to some of the expressions, none, in our opinion, can be made to the demands themselves. As a question of justice, the case seems to us too clear for dispute. As one of expediency, the more thoroughly it is examined the stronger it will appear. | It would be hard to put so much true, just, and reasonable meaning into a style as poorly suited to recommend it as that of some of the resolutions. But whatever objection may be made to some of the wording, none, in our opinion, can be made to the demands themselves. As a question of justice, the case seems to us too clear for dispute. As a question of expediency, the more thoroughly it is examined, the stronger it will appear. |
| 16 | That women have as good a claim as men have, in point of personal right, to the suffrage, or to a place in the jury-box, it would be difficult for anyone to deny. It cannot certainly be denied by the United States of America, as a people or as a community. Their democratic institutions rest avowedly on the inherent right of everyone to a voice in the government. Their Declaration of Independence, framed by the men who are still their great constitutional authorities—that document which has been from the first, and is now, the acknowledged basis of their polity, commences with this express statement:— | It would be difficult for anyone to deny that women have as good a claim as men, as a matter of personal right, to the suffrage or to a place in the jury-box. Certainly the United States of America cannot deny it, as a people or as a community. Their democratic institutions openly rest on the inherent right of everyone to a voice in the government. Their Declaration of Independence was framed by the men who are still their great constitutional authorities, and it has been from the first, and still is, the acknowledged basis of their political system. It begins with this express statement: |
| 17 | "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." | "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." |
| 18 | We do not imagine that any American democrat will evade the force of these expressions by the dishonest or ignorant subterfuge, that "men," in this memorable document, does not stand for human beings, but for one sex only; that "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" are "inalienable rights" of only one moiety of the human species; and that "the governed," whose consent is affirmed to be the only source of just power, are meant for that half of mankind only, who, in relation to the other, have hitherto assumed the character of *governors*. The contradiction between principle and practice cannot be explained away. | We do not imagine that any American democrat will evade the force of these words by the dishonest or ignorant dodge of claiming that "men," in this memorable document, does not mean human beings but one sex only; that "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" are "inalienable rights" of only half the human species; and that "the governed," whose consent is declared to be the only source of just power, means only that half of humankind which has so far taken on the role of *governors* over the other. The contradiction between principle and practice cannot be explained away. |

1851

A like dereliction of the fundamental maxims of their political creed has been committed by the Americans in the flagrant instance of *[the enslaved Black people]*; of this they are learning to recognise the turpitude. After a struggle which, by many of its incidents, deserves the name of heroic, the abolitionists are now so strong in numbers and in influence that they hold the balance of parties in the United States.

It was fitting that the men whose names will remain associated with the extirpation, from the democratic soil of America, of the aristocracy of colour, should be among the originators, for America and for the rest of the world, of the first collective protest against the aristocracy of sex; a distinction as accidental as that of colour, and fully as irrelevant to all questions of government.

19 Not only to the democracy of America, the claim of women to civil and political equality makes an irresistible appeal, but also to those radicals and chartists in the British islands, and democrats on the Continent, who claim what is called universal suffrage as an inherent right, unjustly and oppressively withheld from them. For with what truth or rationality could the suffrage be termed universal, while half the human species remain excluded from it? To declare that a voice in the government is the right of all, and demand it only for a part—the part, namely, to which the claimant himself belongs—is to renounce even the appearance of principle.

The chartist who denies the suffrage to women, is a chartist only because he is not a lord; he is one of those levellers who would level only down to themselves.

20 Even those who do not look upon a voice in the government as a matter of personal right, nor profess principles which require that it should be extended to all, have usually traditional maxims of political justice with which it is impossible to reconcile the exclusion of all women from the common rights of citizenship. It is an axiom of English freedom that taxation and representation should be co-extensive. Even under the laws which give the wife's property to the husband,

there are many unmarried women who pay taxes. It is one of the fundamental doctrines of the British constitution, that all persons should be

MODERN

The Americans have committed a similar abandonment of the fundamental maxims of their political creed in the flagrant case of the enslaved Black people, and they are now learning to recognize how shameful it is. After a struggle that, in many of its episodes, deserves to be called heroic, the abolitionists are now so strong in numbers and influence that they hold the balance between the parties in the United States.

It was fitting that the men whose names will remain linked with rooting out the aristocracy of color from the democratic soil of America should be among the originators, for America and for the rest of the world, of the first collective protest against the aristocracy of sex: a distinction as accidental as that of color, and fully as irrelevant to every question of government.

The claim of women to civil and political equality makes an irresistible appeal not only to American democracy, but also to the radicals and chartists in the British Isles, and the democrats on the Continent, who claim what is called universal suffrage as an inherent right, unjustly and oppressively withheld from them. For how could suffrage truly or rationally be called universal while half the human species remains excluded from it? To declare that a voice in the government is the right of all, and then demand it only for a part—namely, the part to which the claimant himself belongs—is to give up even the appearance of principle.

The chartist who denies the suffrage to women is a chartist only because he is not a lord. He is one of those levelers who would level only down to themselves.

Even those who do not regard a voice in the government as a matter of personal right, and do not profess principles requiring that it be extended to all, usually hold traditional maxims of political justice that cannot be reconciled with excluding all women from the common rights of citizenship. It is an axiom of English freedom that taxation and representation should go together. Even under the laws that give the wife's property to the husband,

there are many unmarried women who pay taxes. It is one of the fundamental doctrines of the British constitution that everyone should be tried by

1851

tried by their peers: yet women, whenever tried, are tried by male judges and a male jury.

To foreigners the law accords the privilege of claiming that half the jury should be composed of themselves; not so to women. Apart from maxims of detail, which represent local and national rather than universal ideas; it is an acknowledged dictate of justice to make no degrading distinctions without necessity. In all things the presumption ought to be on the side of equality. A reason must be given why anything should be permitted to one person and interdicted to another.

But when that which is interdicted includes nearly everything which those to whom it is permitted most prize, and to be deprived of which they feel to be most insulting; when not only political liberty but personal freedom of action is the prerogative of a caste;

when even in the exercise of industry, almost all employments which task the higher faculties in an important field, which lead to distinction, riches, or even pecuniary independence, are fenced round as the exclusive domain of the predominant section, scarcely any doors being left open to the dependent class, except such as all who can enter elsewhere disdainfully pass by; the miserable expediencies which are advanced as excuses for so grossly partial a dispensation, would not be sufficient, even if they were real, to render it other than a flagrant injustice.

While, far from being expedient, we are firmly convinced that the division of mankind into two castes, one born to rule over the other, is in this case, as in all cases, an unqualified mischief; a source of perversion and demoralization, both to the favoured class and to those at whose expense they are favoured; producing none of the good which it is the custom to ascribe to it, and forming a bar, almost insuperable while it lasts, to any really vital improvement, either in the character or in the social condition of the human race.

MODERN

their peers. Yet women, whenever they are tried, are tried by male judges and a male jury.

The law grants foreigners the privilege of demanding that half the jury be made up of foreigners; it grants women no such thing. Setting aside such detailed maxims, which express local and national rather than universal ideas, it is an acknowledged dictate of justice to make no degrading distinctions without necessity. In everything, the presumption ought to be on the side of equality. A reason must be given why anything should be permitted to one person and forbidden to another.

But consider a case where what is forbidden includes nearly everything that those who are permitted it value most, and whose loss they would feel as the deepest insult; where not only political liberty but personal freedom of action is the privilege of a caste;

where, even in working life, almost all occupations that call on the higher faculties in an important field, and that lead to distinction, wealth, or even financial independence, are fenced off as the exclusive domain of the dominant group, and scarcely any doors are left open to the dependent class except those that everyone who can get in elsewhere scornfully passes by. In such a case, the miserable considerations of expediency put forward as excuses for so grossly one-sided an arrangement would not be enough, even if they were real, to make it anything other than a flagrant injustice.

And far from its being expedient, we are firmly convinced that dividing humankind into two castes, one born to rule over the other, is in this case, as in every case, an unqualified evil. It is a source of perversion and demoralization both to the favored class and to those at whose expense they are favored. It produces none of the good customarily ascribed to it, and while it lasts it forms an almost insurmountable barrier to any truly vital improvement, either in the character or in the social condition of the human race.

## THE PREJUDICE OF CUSTOM

*She answers the appeal to custom: women's subjection began in physical force, like slavery and conquest.*

1851

21 These propositions it is now our purpose to maintain. But before entering on them, we would endeavour to dispel the preliminary objections which, in the minds of persons to whom the subject is new, are apt to prevent a real and conscientious examination of it. The chief of these obstacles is that most formidable one,

custom. Women never have had equal rights with men. The claim in their behalf, of the common rights of mankind, is looked upon as barred by universal practice. This strongest of prejudices, the prejudice against what is new and unknown, has, indeed, in an age of changes like the present, lost much of its force; if it had not, there would be little hope of prevailing against it.

Over three-fourths of the habitable world, even at this day, the answer, "it has always been so," closes all discussion. But it is the boast of modern Europeans, and of their American kindred, that they know and do many things which their forefathers neither knew nor did; and it is perhaps the most unquestionable point of superiority in the present above former ages, that habit is not now the tyrant it formerly was over opinions and modes of action, and that the worship of custom is a declining idolatry.

An uncustomary thought, on a subject which touches the greater interests of life, still startles when first presented; but if it can be kept before the mind until the impression of strangeness wears off, it obtains a hearing, and as rational a consideration as the intellect of the hearer is accustomed to bestow on any other subject.

22 In the present case, the prejudice of custom is doubtless on the unjust side. Great thinkers, indeed, at different times, from Plato to Condorcet, besides some of the most eminent names of the present age, have made emphatic protests in favour of the equality of women. And there have been voluntary societies, religious or secular, of which the Society of Friends is the most known, by whom that principle was recognised. But there has been no political community or nation in which, by law, and usage, women have not been in a state of political and

MODERN

These are the propositions we now mean to defend. But before turning to them, we will try to clear away the preliminary objections that, in the minds of people to whom the subject is new, tend to prevent a real and conscientious examination of it. The chief of these obstacles is the most formidable one of all:

custom. Women have never had equal rights with men. Claiming the common rights of humankind on their behalf is regarded as ruled out by universal practice. It is true that this strongest of prejudices, the prejudice against what is new and unknown, has lost much of its force in an age of change like the present; if it had not, there would be little hope of overcoming it.

Over three-quarters of the inhabited world, even today, the answer "it has always been so" ends all discussion. But modern Europeans, and their American kin, pride themselves on knowing and doing many things their forefathers neither knew nor did. And perhaps the most unquestionable way in which the present surpasses earlier ages is that habit is no longer the tyrant it once was over opinions and ways of acting, and that the worship of custom is a declining idolatry.

An unaccustomed thought on a subject that touches the greater interests of life still startles people when it is first presented. But if it can be kept before the mind until the sense of strangeness wears off, it gets a hearing, and as rational a consideration as the hearer's intellect usually gives to any other subject.

In the present case, the prejudice of custom is no doubt on the unjust side. Great thinkers, it is true, at different times, from Plato to Condorcet, along with some of the most eminent names of the present age, have protested emphatically in favor of the equality of women. And there have been voluntary societies, religious or secular, that recognized that principle, the best known being the Society of Friends. But there has been no political community or nation in which women have not been, by law and custom, in a state of political and

1851

civil inferiority. In the ancient world the same fact was alleged, with equal truth, in behalf of slavery.

It might have been alleged in favour of the mitigated form of slavery, serfdom, all through the middle ages. It was urged against freedom of industry, freedom of conscience, freedom of the press; none of these liberties were thought compatible with a well-ordered state, until they had proved their possibility by actually existing as facts. That an institution or a practice is customary is no presumption of its goodness, when any other sufficient cause can be assigned for its existence. There is no difficulty in understanding why the subjection of women has been a custom. No other explanation is needed than physical force.

23 That those who were physically weaker should have been made legally inferior, is quite conformable to the mode in which the world has been governed. Until very lately, the rule of physical strength was the general law of human affairs. Throughout history, the nations, races, classes, which found themselves the strongest, either in muscles, in riches, or in military discipline, have conquered and held in subjection the rest. If, even in the most improved nations, the law of the sword is at last discountenanced as unworthy, it is only since the calumniated eighteenth century. Wars of conquest have only ceased since democratic revolutions began. The world is very young, and has but just begun to cast off injustice.

It is only now getting rid of *[Black]* slavery. It is only now getting rid of monarchical despotism. It is only now getting rid of hereditary feudal nobility. It is only now getting rid of disabilities on the ground of religion. It is only beginning to treat any *men* as citizens, except the rich and a favoured portion of the middle class. Can we wonder that it has not yet done as much for women?

As society was constituted until the last few generations, inequality was its very basis; association grounded on equal rights scarcely existed; to be equals was to be enemies; two persons could hardly co-operate in anything, or

MODERN

civil inferiority. In the ancient world the same fact was cited, with equal truth, in defense of slavery.[4]

It could have been cited in favor of serfdom, the milder form of slavery, throughout the Middle Ages. It was urged against freedom of industry, freedom of conscience, and freedom of the press. None of these liberties was thought compatible with a well-ordered state until they had proved they were possible by actually existing as facts. That an institution or practice is customary is no presumption that it is good, when some other sufficient cause can be given for its existence. There is no difficulty in understanding why the subjection of women has been a custom. No other explanation is needed than physical force.

That the physically weaker should have been made legally inferior fits perfectly with the way the world has been governed. Until very recently, the rule of physical strength was the general law of human affairs. Throughout history, the nations, races, and classes that found themselves strongest, whether in muscle, in wealth, or in military discipline, have conquered the rest and held them in subjection. If, even in the most advanced nations, the law of the sword is at last frowned on as unworthy, this has been so only since the much-maligned eighteenth century. Wars of conquest have ceased only since democratic revolutions began. The world is very young, and has only just begun to cast off injustice.

It is only now getting rid of the slavery of Black people. It is only now getting rid of monarchical despotism. It is only now getting rid of hereditary feudal nobility. It is only now getting rid of legal disabilities on the grounds of religion. It is only beginning to treat any *men* as citizens except the rich and a favored part of the middle class. Can we be surprised that it has not yet done as much for women?

As society was organized until the last few generations, inequality was its very foundation. Association based on equal rights hardly existed; to be equals was to be enemies. Two people could

4 Plato's Republic (Book V) admits women to the ruling class of guardians. Condorcet argued in 1790 for admitting women to the rights of citizenship. The Society of Friends are the Quakers, who allowed women to preach.

| 1851 | MODERN |
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| meet in any amicable relation, without the law's appointing that one of them should be the superior of the other. Mankind have outgrown this state, and all things now tend to substitute, as the general principle of human relations, a just equality, instead of the dominion of the strongest. | hardly cooperate in anything, or meet on friendly terms, without the law's deciding that one of them should be the other's superior. Humankind has outgrown this state, and everything now tends to replace the dominion of the strongest with a just equality as the general principle of human relations. |
| But of all relations, that between men and women being the nearest and most intimate, and connected with the greatest number of strong emotions, was sure to be the last to throw off the old rule and receive the new: for in proportion to the strength of a feeling, is the tenacity with which it clings to the forms and circumstances with which it has even accidentally become associated. | But of all relations, the one between men and women, being the closest and most intimate, and bound up with the greatest number of strong emotions, was sure to be the last to throw off the old rule and accept the new. For the stronger a feeling is, the more tenaciously it clings to the forms and circumstances it has become associated with, even by accident. |

## THE "PROPER SPHERE"

*She denies anyone's right to fix another's sphere and cites women rulers as evidence of ability.*

| 1851 | MODERN |
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| 24 When a prejudice, which has any hold on the feelings, finds itself reduced to the unpleasant necessity of assigning reasons, it thinks it has done enough when it has re-asserted the very point in dispute, in phrases which appeal to the pre-existing feeling. Thus, many persons think they have sufficiently justified the restrictions on women's field of action, when they have said that the pursuits from which women are excluded are *unfeminine*, and that the *proper sphere* of women is not politics or publicity, but private and domestic life. | When a prejudice that has any hold on the feelings finds itself reduced to the unpleasant necessity of giving reasons, it thinks it has done enough when it has restated the very point in dispute, in phrases that appeal to the feeling already there. Thus many people think they have sufficiently justified the restrictions on women's field of action once they have said that the pursuits from which women are excluded are *unfeminine*, and that the *proper sphere* of women is not politics or public life, but private and domestic life. |
| 25 We deny the right of any portion of the species to decide for another portion, or any individual for another individual, what is and what is not their "proper sphere." The proper sphere for all human beings is the largest and highest which they are able to attain to. What this is, cannot be ascertained, without complete liberty of choice. The speakers at the Convention in America have therefore done wisely and right, in refusing to entertain the question of the peculiar aptitudes either of women or of men, or the limits within which this or that occupation may be supposed to be more adapted to the one or to the other. | We deny the right of any part of the species to decide for another part, or of any individual for another individual, what is and what is not their "proper sphere." The proper sphere for all human beings is the largest and highest they are able to reach. What this is cannot be determined without complete freedom of choice. The speakers at the Convention in America have therefore acted wisely and rightly in refusing to take up the question of the particular aptitudes of either women or men, or of the limits within which this or that occupation may be supposed better suited to the one or to the other. |
| They justly maintain, that these questions can only be satisfactorily answered by perfect freedom. Let every occupation be open to all, | They rightly maintain that these questions can be answered satisfactorily only by perfect freedom. Let every occupation be open to all, without favor |

1851

without favour or discouragement to any, and employments will fall into the hands of those men or women who are found by experience to be most capable of worthily exercising them. There need be no fear that women will take out of the hands of men any occupation which men perform better than they. Each individual will prove his or her capacities, in the only way in which capacities can be proved—by trial; and the world will have the benefit of the best faculties of all its inhabitants.

But to interfere beforehand by an arbitrary limit, and declare that whatever be the genius, talent, energy, or force of mind of an individual of a certain sex or class, those faculties shall not be exerted, or shall be exerted only in some few of the many modes in which others are permitted to use theirs, is not only an injustice to the individual, and a detriment to society, which loses what it can ill spare, but is also the most effectual mode of providing that, in the sex or class so fettered, the qualities which are not permitted to be exercised shall not exist.

26 We shall follow the very proper example of the Convention, in not entering into the question of the alleged differences in physical or mental qualities between the sexes; not because we have nothing to say, but because we have too much; to discuss this one point tolerably would need all the space we have to bestow on the entire subject. [1] But if those who assert that the "proper sphere" for women is the domestic, mean by this that they have not shown themselves qualified for any other, the assertion evinces great ignorance of life and of history. Women have shown fitness for the highest social functions, exactly in proportion as they have been admitted to them.

By a curious anomaly, though ineligible to even the lowest offices of state, they are in some countries admitted to the highest of all, the regal; and if there is any one function for which they have shown a decided vocation, it is that of reigning. Not to go back to ancient history, we look in vain for abler or firmer rulers than Elizabeth; than Isabella of Castile; than Maria Teresa; than Catherine of Russia; than Blanche, mother of Louis IX. of France; than Jeanne d'Albret, mother of Henri Quatre. There are few kings on record who contended with more

MODERN

or discouragement to any, and employments will fall into the hands of those men or women whom experience shows to be most capable of carrying them out well. There need be no fear that women will take from men any occupation that men perform better than they do. Each individual will prove his or her abilities in the only way abilities can be proved—by trial; and the world will have the benefit of the best faculties of all its inhabitants.

But to interfere in advance with an arbitrary limit, and to declare that, whatever the genius, talent, energy, or strength of mind of an individual of a certain sex or class, those faculties shall not be used, or shall be used only in a few of the many ways in which others are allowed to use theirs, is not only an injustice to the individual and a harm to society, which loses what it can ill afford to lose, but also the most effective way of ensuring that, in the sex or class so shackled, the qualities that are not allowed to be exercised will not exist.

We shall follow the very proper example of the Convention in not entering into the question of the alleged differences in physical or mental qualities between the sexes—not because we have nothing to say, but because we have too much; to discuss this one point even passably would take all the space we can give to the entire subject.[1] But if those who assert that the "proper sphere" for women is the domestic one mean that women have not shown themselves qualified for any other, the assertion displays great ignorance of life and of history. Women have shown fitness for the highest social functions exactly in proportion as they have been admitted to them.

By a curious anomaly, although women are ineligible for even the lowest offices of state, in some countries they are admitted to the highest of all, the throne; and if there is any one function for which they have shown a decided vocation, it is that of reigning. Without going back to ancient history, we look in vain for abler or firmer rulers than Elizabeth; than Isabella of Castile; than Maria Theresa; than Catherine of Russia; than Blanche, mother of Louis IX of France; than Jeanne d'Albret, mother of Henry IV. Few kings on record contended with more difficult circumstances, or over-

1851

difficult circumstances, or overcame them more triumphantly, than these.

Even in semi-barbarous Asia, princesses who have never been seen by men, other than those of their own family, or ever spoken with them unless from behind a curtain, have as regents, during the minority of their sons, exhibited many of the most brilliant examples of just and vigorous administration.

In the middle ages, when the distance between the upper and lower ranks was greater than even between women and men, and the women of the privileged class, however subject to tyranny from the men of the same class, were at a less distance below them than any one else was, and often in their absence represented them in their functions and authority—numbers of heroic chatelaines, like Jeanne de Montfort, or the great Countess of Derby as late even as the time of Charles I., distinguished themselves not only by their political but their military capacity.

In the centuries immediately before and after the Reformation, ladies of royal houses, as diplomatists, as governors of provinces, or as the confidential advisers of kings, equalled the first statesmen of their time: and the treaty of Cambray, which gave peace to Europe, was negociated in conferences where no other person was present, by the aunt of the Emperor Charles the Fifth, and the mother of Francis the First.

101112

MODERN

came them more triumphantly, than these women did.[5]

Even in Asia, which Europeans count as only half-civilized, princesses who have never been seen by any men except those of their own family, and have never spoken with them except from behind a curtain, have, as regents during their sons' childhood, given many of the most brilliant examples of just and vigorous government.[6]

In the Middle Ages the distance between the upper and lower ranks was greater even than that between women and men; and the women of the privileged class, however subject to tyranny from the men of that class, stood less far below them than anyone else did, and often represented them in their functions and authority when they were absent. In that age numbers of heroic chatelaines, like Jeanne de Montfort, or—as late as the time of Charles I—the great Countess of Derby, distinguished themselves not only by their political but by their military ability.[7]

In the centuries just before and after the Reformation, ladies of royal houses, as diplomats, as governors of provinces, or as confidential advisers of kings, equaled the foremost statesmen of their time; and the treaty of Cambrai, which gave peace to Europe, was negotiated in conferences at which no one else was present, by the aunt of the Emperor Charles V and the mother of Francis I.[8]

5 Blanche of Castile governed France as regent for her son Louis IX (1226–34, and again 1248–52); Jeanne d'Albret was queen of Navarre and a leader of the French Protestants.
6 She writes "semi-barbarous Asia," reflecting the Victorian habit of ranking peoples on a supposed scale of "civilization" with Europe at the top.
7 Jeanne de Montfort (c. 1295–1374) led her captive husband's cause in the War of the Breton Succession; Charlotte, Countess of Derby, defended Lathom House against Parliament's forces in 1644. A chatelaine is the mistress of a castle.
8 The "Ladies' Peace" of 1529, negotiated by Margaret of Austria and Louise of Savoy.
9 Sydney Smith (1771–1845), clergyman and wit, a founder of the *Edinburgh Review*; the passage comes from his 1810 essay on female education.

## THE MATERNITY ARGUMENT

*She names three objections and answers the first: motherhood excludes only mothers, and needs no law.*

1851

27 Concerning the fitness, then, of women for politics, there can be no question: but the dispute is more likely to turn upon the fitness of politics for women. When the reasons alleged for excluding women from active life in all its higher departments, are stripped of their garb of declamatory phrases, and reduced to the simple expression of a meaning, they seem to be mainly three: the incompatibility of active life with maternity, and with the cares of a household; secondly, its alleged hardening effect on the character; and thirdly, the inexpediency of making an addition to the already excessive pressure of competition in every kind of professional or lucrative employment.

28 The first, the maternity argument, is usually laid most stress upon: although (it needs hardly be said) this reason, if it be one, can apply only to mothers. It is neither necessary nor just to make imperative on women that they shall be either mothers or nothing;

or that if they have been mothers once, they shall be nothing else during the whole remainder of their lives. Neither women nor men need any law to exclude them from an occupation, if they have undertaken another which is incompatible with

MODERN

As to the fitness of women for politics, then, there can be no question; the dispute is more likely to turn on the fitness of politics for women. When the reasons given for excluding women from active life in all its higher departments are stripped of their dress of rhetorical phrases and reduced to the plain expression of a meaning, they seem to be mainly three: first, the incompatibility of active life with motherhood and with the cares of a household; second, its alleged hardening effect on the character; and third, the inexpediency of adding to the already excessive pressure of competition in every kind of professional or paid employment.

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or that, if they have once been mothers, they be nothing else for the whole rest of their lives. Neither women nor men need a law to exclude them from one occupation if they have taken up another that is incompatible with it. No one pro-

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[1] An excellent passage on this part of the subject, from one of Sydney Smith's contributions to the 'Edinburgh Review,' we will not refrain from quoting:— "A great deal has been said of the original difference of capacity between men and women, as if women were more quick and men more judicious—as if women were more remarkable for delicacy of association, and men for stronger powers of attention. All this, we confess, appears to us very fanciful.

[1] We cannot refrain from quoting an excellent passage on this part of the subject from one of Sydney Smith's contributions to the *Edinburgh Review*: "A great deal has been said about the original difference of capacity between men and women, as if women were quicker and men more judicious—as if women were more remarkable for delicacy of association, and men for stronger powers of attention. All this, we confess, seems to us very fanciful.[9]

11

That there is a difference in the understandings of the men and the women we every day meet with, everybody, we suppose, must perceive; but there is none surely which may not be accounted for by the difference of circumstances in which they have been placed, without referring to any conjectural difference of original conformation of mind. As long as boys and girls run about in the dirt, and trundle hoops together, they are both precisely alike.

That there is a difference between the understandings of the men and the women we meet every day, everybody, we suppose, must perceive; but surely there is none that cannot be accounted for by the different circumstances in which they have been placed, without appealing to any conjectured difference in the original makeup of their minds. As long as boys and girls run about in the dirt and roll hoops together, they are exactly alike.

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If you catch up one-half of these creatures, and train them to a particular set of actions and opinions, and the other half to a perfectly opposite set, of course their understandings will differ, as one or the other sort of occupations has called this or that talent into action. There is surely no occasion to go into any deeper or more abstruse reasoning, in order to explain so very simple a phenomenon."— *Sydney Smith's Works,* vol. i. p. 200.

If you catch up one half of these creatures and train them to one particular set of actions and opinions, and the other half to a completely opposite set, of course their understandings will differ, as one or the other kind of occupation has called this or that talent into action. There is surely no need for any deeper or more abstruse reasoning to explain so very simple a phenomenon."— *Sydney Smith's Works,* vol. i, p. 200.

1851

it. No one proposes to exclude the male sex from Parliament because a man may be a soldier or sailor in active service, or a merchant whose business requires all his time and energies.

Nine-tenths of the occupations of men exclude them *de facto* from public life, as effectually as if they were excluded by law; but that is no reason for making laws to exclude even the nine-tenths, much less the remaining tenth. The reason of the case is the same for women as for men. There is no need to make provision by law that a woman shall not carry on the active details of a household, or of the education of children, and at the same time practise a profession or be elected to parliament.

Where incompatibility is real, it will take care of itself: but there is gross injustice in making the incompatibility a pretence for the exclusion of those in whose case it does not exist. And these, if they were free to choose, would be a very large proportion. The maternity argument deserts its supporters in the case of single women, a large and increasing class of the population; a fact which, it is not irrelevant to remark, by tending to diminish the excessive competition of numbers, is calculated to assist greatly the prosperity of all. There is no inherent reason or necessity that all women should voluntarily choose to devote their lives to one animal function and its consequences.

Numbers of women are wives and mothers only because there is no other career open to them, no other occupation for their feelings or their activities. Every improvement in their education, and enlargement of their faculties—everything which renders them more qualified for any other mode of life, increases the number of those to whom it is an injury and an oppression to be denied the choice. To say that women must be excluded from active life because maternity disqualifies them for it, is in fact to say, that every other career should be forbidden them in order that maternity may be their only resource.

MODERN

poses to exclude the male sex from Parliament because a man may be a soldier or sailor on active service, or a merchant whose business requires all his time and energy.

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Where the incompatibility is real, it will take care of itself; but it is gross injustice to make the incompatibility a pretext for excluding those in whose case it does not exist. And these, if they were free to choose, would be a very large proportion. The maternity argument deserts its supporters in the case of single women, a large and growing class of the population—a fact which, it is not irrelevant to remark, is likely to contribute greatly to the prosperity of all, since it tends to reduce the excessive competition of numbers. There is no inherent reason or necessity why all women should voluntarily choose to devote their lives to one animal function and its consequences.

Numbers of women are wives and mothers only because no other career is open to them, no other outlet for their feelings or their energies. Every improvement in their education and every enlargement of their faculties—everything that makes them better qualified for any other way of life—increases the number of those for whom it is an injury and an oppression to be denied the choice. To say that women must be excluded from active life because motherhood disqualifies them for it is in fact to say that every other career should be forbidden them so that motherhood may be their only resource.

## COMPETITION FOR WORK

*She answers the fear that women workers would lower wages: a wife who earns becomes a partner.*

1851

MODERN

29

1851

But secondly, it is urged, that to give the same freedom of occupation to women as to men, would be an injurious addition to the crowd of competitors, by whom the avenues to almost all kinds of employment are choked up, and its remuneration depressed. This argument, it is to be observed, does not reach the political question. It gives no excuse for withholding from women the rights of citizenship. The suffrage, the jury-box, admission to the legislature and to office, it does not touch. It bears only on the industrial branch of the subject.

Allowing it, then, in an economical point of view, its full force; assuming that to lay open to women the employments now monopolized by men, would tend, like the breaking down of other monopolies, to lower the rate of remuneration in those employments; let us consider what is the amount of this evil consequence, and what the compensation for it. The worst ever asserted, much worse than is at all likely to be realized, is that if women competed with men, a man and a woman could not together earn more than is now earned by the man alone.

Let us make this supposition, the most unfavourable supposition possible: the joint income of the two would be the same as before, while the woman would be raised from the position of a servant to that of a partner. Even if every woman, as matters now stand, had a claim on some man for support, how infinitely preferable is it that part of the income should be of the woman's earning, even if the aggregate sum were but little increased by it, rather than that she should be compelled to stand aside in order that men may be the sole earners, and the sole dispensers of what is earned.

MODERN

But secondly, it is urged that to give women the same freedom of occupation as men would be a harmful addition to the crowd of competitors who choke the avenues to almost every kind of employment and drive down its pay. This argument, it should be noted, does not reach the political question. It gives no excuse for withholding from women the rights of citizenship. It does not touch the suffrage, the jury-box, or admission to the legislature and to office. It bears only on the industrial side of the subject.

Let us grant it, then, its full force from an economic point of view; let us assume that opening to women the employments now monopolized by men would tend, like the breaking down of other monopolies, to lower the rate of pay in those employments; and let us consider how great this bad consequence is, and what the compensation for it would be. The worst ever claimed—much worse than is at all likely to happen—is that if women competed with men, a man and a woman together could not earn more than the man alone earns now.

Let us make this supposition, the most unfavorable one possible: the joint income of the two would be the same as before, while the woman would be raised from the position of a servant to that of a partner. Even if every woman, as things now stand, had a claim on some man for support, how infinitely preferable it is that part of the income should be earned by the woman, even if the total were increased only a little by it, rather than that she should be forced to stand aside so that men may be the sole earners and the sole dispensers of what is earned.

| 1851 | MODERN |
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| Even under the present laws respecting the property of women,[2] a woman who contributes materially to the support of the family, cannot be treated in the same contemptuously tyrannical manner as one who, however she may toil as a domestic drudge, is a dependent on the man for subsistence. As for the depression of wages by increase of competition, remedies will be found for it in time. Palliatives might be applied immediately; for instance, a more rigid exclusion of children from industrial employment, during the years in which they ought to be working only to strengthen their bodies and minds for after life. | Even under the present laws concerning the property of women,[2] a woman who contributes substantially to the support of the family cannot be treated with the same contemptuous tyranny as one who, however hard she toils as a household drudge, depends on the man for her living. As for the lowering of wages by increased competition, remedies for it will be found in time. Palliatives could be applied at once: for instance, a stricter exclusion of children from industrial employment during the years in which they ought to be working only to strengthen their bodies and minds for later life.[13] |
| Children are necessarily dependent, and under the power of others; and their labour, being not for themselves but for the gain of their parents, is a proper subject for legislative regulation. With respect to the future, we neither believe that improvident multiplication, and the consequent excessive difficulty of gaining a subsistence, will always continue, nor that the division of mankind into capitalists and hired labourers, and the regulation of the reward of labourers mainly by demand and supply, will be for ever, or even much longer, the rule of the world. But so long as competition is the general law of human life, it is tyranny to shut out one half of the competitors. | Children are necessarily dependent and under the power of others; and their labor, being not for themselves but for their parents' gain, is a proper subject for legislative regulation. As for the future, we do not believe that improvident multiplication, and the resulting excessive difficulty of earning a living, will always continue; nor that the division of mankind into capitalists and hired laborers, and the regulation of laborers' pay mainly by supply and demand, will be the rule of the world forever, or even much longer. But so long as competition is the general law of human life, it is tyranny to shut out half of the competitors. |
| All who have attained the age of self-government, have an equal claim to be permitted to sell whatever kind of useful labour they are capable of, for the price which it will bring. | All who have reached the age of self-government have an equal claim to be allowed to sell whatever kind of useful labor they are capable of, for the price it will bring. |

14

## THE HARDENING EFFECT

*She argues that modern public life does not harden men in ways women are spared.*

| 1851 | MODERN |
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| 30 The third objection to the admission of women to political or professional life, its alleged hardening | The third objection to admitting women to political or professional life, its alleged hardening tend- |

13 Under English law at the time, a married woman's property and earnings belonged to her husband; this changed only with the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882.

14

[2] The truly horrible effects of the present state of the law among the lowest of the working population, is exhibited in those cases of hideous maltreatment of their wives by working men, with which every newspaper, every police report, teems. Wretches unfit to have the smallest authority over any living thing, have a helpless woman for their household slave. These excesses could not exist if women both earned, and had the right to possess, a part of the income of the family.

[2] The truly horrible effects of the present state of the law among the poorest of the working population are displayed in those cases of hideous abuse of their wives by working men with which every newspaper and every police report teems. Wretches unfit to have the slightest authority over any living thing have a helpless woman as their household slave. These excesses could not exist if women both earned, and had the right to own, a part of the family's income.

1851

tendency; belongs to an age now past, and is scarcely to be comprehended by people of the present time. There are still, however, persons who say that the world and its avocations render men selfish and unfeeling;

that the struggles, rivalries and collisions of business and of politics make them harsh and unamiable; that if half the species must unavoidably be given up to these things, it is the more necessary that the other half should be kept free from them; that to preserve women from the bad influences of the world, is the only chance of preventing men from being wholly given up to them.

31 There would have been plausibility in this argument when the world was still in the age of violence; when life was full of physical conflict, and every man had to redress his injuries or those of others, by the sword or by the strength of his arm. Women, like priests, by being exempted from such responsibilities, and from some part of the accompanying dangers, may have been enabled to exercise a beneficial influence. But in the present condition of human life, we do not know where those hardening influences are to be found, to which men are subject and from which women are at present exempt.

Individuals now-a-days are seldom called upon to fight hand to hand, even with peaceful weapons; personal enmities and rivalities count for little in worldly transactions; the general pressure of circumstances, not the adverse will of individuals, is the obstacle men now have to make head against. That pressure, when excessive, breaks the spirit, and cramps and sours the feelings, but not less of women than of men, since they suffer certainly not less from its evils. There are still quarrels and dislikes, but the sources of them are changed.

The feudal chief once found his bitterest enemy in his powerful neighbour, the minister or courtier in his rival for place: but opposition of interest in active life, as a cause of personal animosity, is out of date; the enmities of the present day arise not from great things but small, from what people say of one another, more than from what they do; and if there are hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, they are to be found among women fully as much as among men. In the present state of civilization, the notion of

MODERN

ency, belongs to an age now past and is scarcely intelligible to people of the present time. There are still, however, people who say that the world and its business make men selfish and unfeeling;

that the struggles, rivalries, and clashes of business and politics make them harsh and unamiable; that if half the species must unavoidably be given over to these things, it is all the more necessary that the other half be kept free of them; that to preserve women from the bad influences of the world is the only chance of preventing men from being wholly given over to them.

This argument would have been plausible when the world was still in the age of violence, when life was full of physical conflict and every man had to redress his own injuries, or those of others, by the sword or by the strength of his arm. Women, like priests, being exempt from such responsibilities and from part of the dangers that went with them, may have been able to exercise a beneficial influence. But in the present condition of human life we do not know where to find those hardening influences to which men are subject and from which women are at present exempt.

Individuals nowadays are seldom called on to fight hand to hand, even with peaceful weapons; personal enmities and rivalries count for little in worldly affairs; the general pressure of circumstances, not the hostile will of individuals, is what men now have to struggle against. That pressure, when excessive, breaks the spirit and cramps and sours the feelings—but no less in women than in men, since women certainly suffer no less from its evils. There are still quarrels and dislikes, but their sources have changed.

The feudal chief once found his bitterest enemy in his powerful neighbor, the minister or courtier in his rival for office; but conflict of interest in active life, as a cause of personal hostility, is out of date. The enmities of the present day arise not from great things but from small ones, from what people say about one another more than from what they do; and if there are hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, they are found among women fully as much as among men. In the present

| 1851 | MODERN |
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| guarding women from the hardening influences of the world, could only be realized by secluding them from society altogether. | state of civilization, the idea of guarding women from the hardening influences of the world could be carried out only by secluding them from society altogether. |
| The common duties of common life, as at present constituted, are incompatible with any other softness in women than weakness. Surely weak minds in weak bodies must ere long cease to be even supposed to be either attractive or amiable. | The ordinary duties of ordinary life, as now constituted, are incompatible with any softness in women other than weakness. Surely weak minds in weak bodies must soon cease to be even supposed attractive or lovable. |

### WHY MEN WANT IT SO

*She argues that women's subordination survives because men like it and teach women to call submission a virtue.*

| 1851 | MODERN |
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| 32 But, in truth, none of these arguments and considerations touch the foundations of the subject. The real question is, whether it is right and expedient that one-half of the human race should pass through life in a state of forced subordination to the other half. | But in truth, none of these arguments and considerations touches the foundations of the subject. The real question is whether it is right and expedient that one half of the human race should pass through life in a state of forced subordination to the other half. |
| If the best state of human society is that of being divided into two parts, one consisting of persons with a will and a substantive existence, the other of humble companions to these persons, attached, each of them to one, for the purpose of bringing up *his* children, and making *his* home pleasant to him; | If the best state of human society is to be divided into two parts—one made up of persons with a will and an existence of their own, the other of humble companions to these persons, each attached to one of them for the purpose of bringing up *his* children and making *his* home pleasant to him; |
| if this is the place assigned to women, it is but kindness to educate them for this; to make them believe that the greatest good fortune which can befal them, is to be chosen by some man for this purpose; and that every other career which the world deems happy or honourable, is closed to them by the law, not of social institutions, but of nature and destiny. | if this is the place assigned to women, then it is only kindness to educate them for it: to make them believe that the greatest good fortune that can befall them is to be chosen by some man for this purpose, and that every other career the world thinks happy or honorable is closed to them by the law—not of social institutions, but of nature and destiny. |
| 33 When, however, we ask why the existence of one-half the species should be merely ancillary to that of the other—why each woman should be a mere appendage to a man, allowed to have no interests of her own, that there may be nothing to compete in her mind with his interests and his pleasure; the only reason which can be given is, that men like it. It is agreeable to them that men should live for their own sake, women for the sake of men: and the qualities and conduct in subjects which are agreeable to rulers, they succeed for a long time in making the subjects themselves consider as their appropriate virtues. | When, however, we ask why the existence of one half of the species should merely serve that of the other—why each woman should be a mere appendage to a man, allowed no interests of her own, so that nothing may compete in her mind with his interests and his pleasure—the only reason that can be given is that men like it. It suits them that men should live for their own sake and women for the sake of men. And the qualities and conduct in subjects that suit rulers are what the rulers succeed, for a long time, in making the subjects themselves regard as their proper virtues. |

| 1851 | MODERN |
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| Helvetius has met with much obloquy for asserting, that persons usually mean by virtues the qualities which are useful or convenient to themselves. How truly this is said of mankind in general, and how wonderfully the ideas of virtue set afloat by the powerful, are caught and imbibed by those under their dominion, is exemplified by the manner in which the world were once persuaded that the supreme virtue of subjects was loyalty to kings, and are still persuaded that the paramount virtue of womanhood is loyalty to men. | Helvetius has been much abused for asserting that people usually mean by virtues the qualities that are useful or convenient to themselves. How true this is of mankind in general, and how remarkably the ideas of virtue put into circulation by the powerful are caught up and absorbed by those under their dominion, can be seen in the way the world was once persuaded that the supreme virtue of subjects was loyalty to kings, and is still persuaded that the paramount virtue of womanhood is loyalty to men.[15] |
| Under a nominal recognition of a moral code common to both, in practice self-will and self-assertion form the type of what are designated as manly virtues, while abnegation of self, patience, resignation, and submission to power, unless when resistance is commanded by other interests than their own, have been stamped by general consent as pre-eminently the duties and graces required of women. The meaning being merely, that power makes itself the centre of moral obligation, and that a man likes to have his own will, but does not like that his domestic companion should have a will different from his. | A moral code common to both is recognized in name. In practice, self-will and self-assertion form the model of what are called the manly virtues. Meanwhile self-denial, patience, resignation, and submission to power have been stamped by general consent as preeminently the duties and graces required of women, except when resistance is demanded by interests other than their own. All this means merely that power makes itself the center of moral obligation, and that a man likes to have his own way but does not like his domestic companion to have a will different from his. |

## COMPANIONS BUT NOT EQUALS

*She traces women's dependence through history and argues that unequal companionship now weakens men.*

| 1851 | MODERN |
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| 34 We are far from pretending that in modern and civilized times, no reciprocity of obligation is acknowledged on the part of the stronger. Such an assertion would be very wide of the truth. But even this reciprocity, which has disarmed tyranny, at least in the higher and middle classes, of its most revolting features, yet when combined with the original evil of the dependent condition of women, has introduced in its turn serious evils. | We are far from claiming that in modern, civilized times no reciprocal obligation is acknowledged on the part of the stronger. Such a claim would be very far from the truth. This reciprocity has stripped tyranny of its most revolting features, at least in the upper and middle classes. But when combined with the original evil of women's dependent condition, it has in its turn introduced serious evils. |
| 35 In the beginning, and among tribes which are still in a primitive condition, women were and are the slaves of men for the purposes of toil. All the hard bodily labour devolves on them. The *[Aboriginal Australian man]* is idle, while women painfully dig up the roots on which he lives. An American Indian, when he has killed a deer, leaves it, and | In the beginning, and among tribes that still live as people did in the earliest times, women were and are the slaves of men for the purposes of toil. All the hard physical labor falls on them. The Aboriginal Australian man is idle while women painfully dig up the roots on which he lives. A Native American man who has killed a deer leaves it and |

15 Claude-Adrien Helvétius (1715–1771), French philosopher whose *De l'esprit* (1758) traced moral judgments to self-interest; the book was condemned and publicly burned.

1851

sends a woman to carry it home. In a state somewhat more advanced, as in Asia, women were and are the slaves of men for the purposes of sensuality.

In Europe there early succeeded a third and milder dominion, secured not by blows, nor by locks and bars, but by sedulous inculcation on the mind; feelings also of kindness, and ideas of duty, such as a superior owes to inferiors under his protection, became more and more involved in the relation. But it did not for many ages become a relation of companionship, even between unequals; the lives of the two persons were apart. The wife was part of the furniture of home, of the resting-place to which the man returned from business or pleasure. His occupations were, as they still are, among men; his pleasures and excitements also were, for the most part, among men—among his equals.

He was a patriarch and a despot within four walls, and irresponsible power had its effect, greater or less according to his disposition, in rendering him domineering, exacting, self-worshipping, when not capriciously or brutally tyrannical. But if the moral part of his nature suffered, it was not necessarily so, in the same degree, with the intellectual or the active portion. He might have as much vigour of mind and energy of character as his nature enabled him, and as the circumstances of his times allowed. He might write the 'Paradise Lost,' or win the battle of Marengo. This was the condition of the Greeks and Romans, and of the moderns until a recent date.

Their relations with their domestic subordinates occupied a mere corner, though a cherished one, of their lives. Their education as men, the formation of their character and faculties, depended mainly on a different class of influences.

36 It is otherwise now. The progress of improvement has imposed on all possessors of power, and of domestic power among the rest, an increased and increasing sense of correlative obligation. No man now thinks that his wife has no claim upon his

MODERN

sends a woman to carry it home. In a somewhat more advanced state, as in Asia, women were and are the slaves of men for the purposes of sensuality.[16]

In Europe a third and milder dominion took its place early on. It was secured not by blows, nor by locks and bars, but by being carefully instilled into the mind. Feelings of kindness and ideas of duty, such as a superior owes to inferiors under his protection, also became more and more bound up with the relation. But for many ages it did not become a relation of companionship, even between unequals: the two people's lives were apart. The wife was part of the furniture of home, of the resting place to which the man returned from business or pleasure. His occupations were, as they still are, among men; his pleasures and excitements, too, were for the most part among men —among his equals.

He was a patriarch and a despot within his four walls. Power that answered to no one had its effect on him, greater or smaller according to his disposition: it made him domineering, demanding, and self-worshipping, when it did not make him capriciously or brutally tyrannical. But if the moral part of his nature suffered, the intellectual or active part did not necessarily suffer to the same degree. He might have as much vigor of mind and energy of character as his nature gave him and the circumstances of his times allowed. He might write "Paradise Lost," or win the battle of Marengo. This was the condition of the Greeks and Romans, and of the moderns until recently.[17]

Their relations with their domestic subordinates occupied a mere corner of their lives, though a cherished one. Their education as men—the formation of their character and faculties—depended mainly on influences of a different kind.

It is otherwise now. The progress of improvement has imposed on all who hold power, domestic power among the rest, a sense of corresponding obligation, and that sense is still growing. No man now thinks his wife has no claim on his actions ex-

16 Like most Victorians, the author ranks societies on a single ladder of "civilization"; her examples reflect the ethnography of her day, not modern knowledge.
17 Milton's epic poem (1667); Marengo was Napoleon's victory over the Austrians in 1800.

1851

actions but such as he may accord to her. All men of any conscience believe that their duty to their wives is one of the most binding of their obligations. Nor is it supposed to consist solely in protection, which, in the present state of civilization, women have almost ceased to need: it involves care for their happiness and consideration of their wishes, with a not unfrequent sacrifice of their own to them.

The power of husbands has reached the stage which the power of kings had arrived at, when opinion did not yet question the rightfulness of arbitrary power, but in theory, and to a certain extent in practice, condemned the selfish use of it. This improvement in the moral sentiments of mankind, and increased sense of the consideration due by every man to those who have no one but himself to look to,

has tended to make home more and more the centre of interest, and domestic circumstances and society a larger and larger part of life, and of its pursuits and pleasures. The tendency has been strengthened by the changes of tastes and manners which have so remarkably distinguished the last two or three generations.

In days not far distant, men found their excitement and filled up their time in violent bodily exercises, noisy merriment, and intemperance. They have now, in all but the very poorest classes, lost their inclination for these things, and for the coarser pleasures generally; they have now scarcely any tastes but those which they have in common with women, and, for the first time in the world, men and women are really companions. A most beneficial change, if the companionship were between equals; but being between unequals, it produces, what good observers have noticed, though without perceiving its cause, a progressive deterioration among men in what had hitherto been considered the masculine excellences.

Those who are so careful that women should not become men, do not see that men are becoming, what they have decided that women should be—are falling into the feebleness which they have so long cultivated in their companions. Those who are associated in their lives, tend to become assimilated in character. In the present closeness

MODERN

cept what he chooses to grant her. All men with any conscience believe that their duty to their wives is among the most binding of their obligations. Nor is this duty thought to consist solely in protection, which women have almost ceased to need in the present state of civilization. It involves care for their happiness and consideration for their wishes, and men not infrequently sacrifice their own wishes to their wives'.

The power of husbands has reached the stage that the power of kings had reached when opinion did not yet question the rightfulness of arbitrary power, but condemned its selfish use in theory, and to a certain extent in practice. This improvement in the moral sentiments of mankind, and this heightened sense of the consideration every man owes to those who have no one but him to depend on,

has tended to make home more and more the center of interest, and domestic circumstances and society a larger and larger part of life and of its pursuits and pleasures. The tendency has been strengthened by the changes in tastes and manners that have so remarkably marked the last two or three generations.

Not long ago, men found their excitement and filled their time with violent physical exercise, noisy merriment, and heavy drinking. Now, in all but the very poorest classes, they have lost their taste for these things, and for the coarser pleasures generally. They now have scarcely any tastes except those they share with women, and for the first time in the world men and women are really companions. This would be a most beneficial change if the companionship were between equals. But being between unequals, it produces a progressive deterioration among men in what had until now been considered the masculine excellences. Good observers have noticed this, though without seeing its cause.

Those who take such care that women should not become men do not see that men are becoming what they have decided women should be—are sinking into the feebleness they have so long cultivated in their companions. People who share their lives tend to grow alike in character. Given how closely the sexes now associate, men cannot keep their manliness unless women acquire it.

1851

of association between the sexes, men cannot retain manliness unless women acquire it.

37 There is hardly any situation more unfavourable to the maintenance of elevation of character or force of intellect, than to live in the society, and seek by preference the sympathy, of inferiors in mental endowments. Why is it that we constantly see in life so much of intellectual and moral promise followed by such inadequate performance,

but because the aspirant has compared himself only with those below himself, and has not sought improvement or stimulus from measuring himself with his equals or superiors, In the present state of social life, this is becoming the general condition of men. They care less and less for any sympathies, and are less and less under any personal influences, but those of the domestic roof.

Not to be misunderstood, it is necessary that we should distinctly disclaim the belief, that women are even now inferior in intellect to men. There are women who are the equals in intellect of any men who ever lived: and comparing ordinary women with ordinary men, the varied though petty details which compose the occupation of most women, call forth probably as much of mental ability, as the uniform routine of the pursuits which are the habitual occupation of a large majority of men.

It is from nothing in the faculties themselves, but from the petty subjects and interests on which alone they are exercised, that the companionship of women, such as their present circumstances make them, so often exercises a dissolvent influence on high faculties and aspirations in men. If one of the two has no knowledge and no care about the great ideas and purposes which dignify life, or about any of its practical concerns save personal interests and personal vanities, her conscious, and still more her unconscious influence, will, except in rare cases, reduce to a secondary place in his mind, if not entirely extinguish, those interests which she cannot or does not share.

MODERN

There is hardly any situation more unfavorable to keeping an elevated character or a vigorous intellect than to live in the society, and seek by preference the sympathy, of people inferior in mental endowments. Why is it that in life we constantly see so much intellectual and moral promise followed by such inadequate performance,

if not because the aspiring person has compared himself only with those below him, and has not sought improvement or stimulus by measuring himself against his equals or superiors? In the present state of social life, this is becoming the general condition of men. They care less and less for any sympathies, and are less and less subject to any personal influences, except those of their own home.

So as not to be misunderstood, we must expressly disclaim the belief that women are, even now, inferior to men in intellect. There are women who are the intellectual equals of any men who ever lived. And comparing ordinary women with ordinary men, the varied though petty details that make up most women's occupation probably call for as much mental ability as the uniform routine of the pursuits that habitually occupy a large majority of men.

The companionship of women, as their present circumstances make them, so often has a dissolving effect on high faculties and aspirations in men. This comes not from anything in women's faculties themselves, but from the petty subjects and interests on which alone those faculties are exercised. One of the two may have no knowledge of, and no care for, the great ideas and purposes that give dignity to life. She may care for none of its practical concerns beyond personal interests and personal vanities. If so, her conscious influence, and still more her unconscious influence, will, except in rare cases, push into a secondary place in his mind those interests that she cannot or does not share, if it does not extinguish them altogether.

## THE MODERATE REFORMERS

*She attacks the plan to educate women only as pleasant companions for their husbands.*

1851

38 Our argument here brings us into collision with what may be termed the moderate reformers of the education of women; a sort of persons who cross the path of improvement on all great questions; those who would maintain the old bad principles, mitigating their consequences. These say, that women should be, not slaves, nor servants, but companions; and educated for that office: (they do not say that men should be educated to be the companions of women).

But since uncultivated women are not suitable companions for cultivated men, and a man who feels interest in things above and beyond the family circle wishes that his companion should sympathize with him in that interest; they therefore say, let women improve their understanding and taste, acquire general knowledge, cultivate poetry, art, even coquet with science, and some stretch their liberality so far as to say, inform themselves on politics; not as pursuits, but sufficiently to feel an interest in the subjects, and to be capable of holding a conversation on them with the husband, or at least of understanding and imbibing his wisdom. Very agreeable to him, no doubt, but unfortunately the reverse of improving.

It is from having intellectual communion only with those to whom they can lay down the law, that so few men continue to advance in wisdom beyond the first stages. The most eminent men cease to improve, if they associate only with disciples. When they have overtopped those who immediately surround them, if they wish for further growth, they must seek for others of their own stature to consort with. The mental companionship which is improving, is communion between active minds, not mere contact between an active mind and a passive.

This inestimable advantage is even now enjoyed, when a strong-minded man and a strong-minded woman are, by a rare chance, united: and would be had far oftener, if education took the same pains to form strong-minded women which it takes to prevent them from being formed. The modern, and what are regarded as the improved

MODERN

Our argument here brings us into collision with what might be called the moderate reformers of women's education. They are a kind of person who crosses the path of improvement on every great question: those who would keep the old bad principles while softening their consequences. These people say that women should be not slaves, nor servants, but companions, and should be educated for that role. (They do not say that men should be educated to be the companions of women.)

But uncultured women are not suitable companions for cultured men, and a man who takes an interest in things above and beyond the family circle wants his companion to share that interest. So they say: let women improve their understanding and taste, acquire general knowledge, cultivate poetry and art, even flirt with science. Some stretch their liberality so far as to say: let them inform themselves about politics. This is not meant as a pursuit, but only enough to take an interest in these subjects and to hold a conversation about them with the husband, or at least to understand and absorb his wisdom. Very pleasant for him, no doubt, but unfortunately the opposite of improving.

It is because they have intellectual communion only with people to whom they can lay down the law that so few men go on advancing in wisdom beyond the first stages. The most eminent men stop improving if they associate only with disciples. Once they have outgrown those immediately around them, if they want to keep growing they must seek out others of their own stature to keep company with. The mental companionship that improves is communion between active minds, not mere contact between an active mind and a passive one.

This priceless advantage is enjoyed even now, when by rare chance a strong-minded man and a strong-minded woman are united. It would be had far more often if education took the same pains to form strong-minded women that it takes to prevent them from being formed. The modern methods of educating women, which are regarded as

1851

and enlightened modes of education of women, abjure, as far as words go, an education of mere show, and ~profess to aim at solid instruction, but mean by that expression, superficial information on solid subjects. Except accomplishments, which are now generally regarded as to be taught well if taught at all, nothing is taught to women thoroughly.

Small portions only of what it is attempted to teach thoroughly to boys, are the whole of what it is intended or desired to teach to women. What makes intelligent beings is the power of thought: the stimuli which call forth that power are the interest and dignity of thought itself, and a field for its practical application. Both motives are cut off from those who are told from infancy that thought, and all its greater applications, are other people's business, while theirs is to make themselves agreeable to other people.

High mental powers in women will be but an exceptional accident, until every career is open to them, and until they, as well as men, are educated for themselves and for the world—not one sex for the other.

MODERN

improved and enlightened, renounce an education of mere show, as far as words go. They claim to aim at solid instruction, but by that phrase they mean superficial information on solid subjects. Apart from accomplishments, which are now generally held to be worth teaching well if taught at all, nothing is taught to women thoroughly.[18]

Small portions of what there is an attempt to teach boys thoroughly are the whole of what anyone intends or wishes to teach women. What makes beings intelligent is the power of thought. The stimuli that call that power forth are the interest and dignity of thought itself, and a field for its practical application. Both motives are cut off from those who are told from infancy that thought, and all its greater applications, are other people's business, while theirs is to make themselves agreeable to other people.

High mental powers in women will remain only an exceptional accident until every career is open to them, and until they, like men, are educated for themselves and for the world—not one sex for the other.

## MARRIAGE BETWEEN UNEQUALS

*She argues that a husband's power breeds selfishness in him and artifice in her.*

1851

39 In what we have said on the effect of the inferior position of women, combined with the present constitution of married life, we have thus far had in view only the most favourable cases, those in which there is some real approach to that union and blending of characters and of lives,

which the theory of the relation contemplates as its ideal standard. But if we look to the great majority of cases, the effect of women's legal inferiority on the character both of women and of men must be painted in far darker colours. We do not speak here of the grosser brutalities, nor of the man's power to seize on the woman's earnings, or compel her to live with him against her will.

We do not address ourselves to any one who requires to have it proved that these things

MODERN

In what we have said about the effect of women's inferior position, combined with the present constitution of married life, we have so far had in view only the most favorable cases. These are the cases in which there is some real approach to that union and blending of characters and of lives

which the theory of the relation holds up as its ideal standard. But if we look at the great majority of cases, the effect of women's legal inferiority on the character of both women and men must be painted in far darker colors. We are not speaking here of the grosser brutalities, nor of the man's power to seize the woman's earnings or to compel her to live with him against her will.

We are not addressing anyone who needs proof that these things should be remedied. We assume

18 "Accomplishments" were the ornamental skills of a young lady's education: music, drawing, dancing, modern languages, needlework.

1851

should be remedied. We suppose average cases, in which there is neither complete union nor complete disunion of feelings and of character; and we affirm that in such cases the influence of the dependence on the woman's side, is demoralizing to the character of both.

40 The common opinion is, that whatever may be the case with the intellectual, the moral influence of women over men is almost always salutary. It is, we are often told, the great counteractive of selfishness. However the case may be as to personal influence, the influence of the position tends eminently to promote selfishness. The most insignificant of men, the man who can obtain influence or consideration nowhere. else, finds. one place where he is chief and head. There is one person, often greatly his superior in understanding, who is obliged to consult him, and whom he is not obliged to consult. He is judge, magistrate, ruler, over their joint concerns; arbiter of all differences between them.

The justice or conscience to which her appeal must be made, is his justice and conscience: it is his to hold the balance and adjust the scales between his own claims or wishes and those of another. His is now the only tribunal, in civilized life, in which the same person is judge and party.

A generous mind, in such a situation, makes the balance incline against its own side, and gives the other not less, but more, than a fair equality; and thus the weaker side may be enabled to turn the very fact of dependence into an instrument of power, and in default of justice, take an ungenerous advantage of generosity; rendering the unjust power, to those who make an unselfish use of it, a torment and a burthen. But how is it when average men are invested with this power, without reciprocity and without responsibility?

Give such a man the idea that he is first in law and in opinion—that to will is his part, and hers to submit; it is absurd to suppose that this idea merely glides over his mind, without sinking into it, or having any effect on his feelings and practice. The propensity to make himself the first object of consideration, and others at most the second,

is not so rare as to be wanting where everything seems purposely arranged for permitting its

MODERN

average cases, in which there is neither complete union nor complete disunion of feelings and of character. We affirm that in such cases the influence of the dependence on the woman's side is demoralizing to the character of both.

The common opinion is that, whatever may be true of their intellectual influence, the moral influence of women over men is almost always beneficial. It is, we are often told, the great counterweight to selfishness. Whatever may be true of personal influence, the influence of the position strongly promotes selfishness. The most insignificant of men, the man who can win influence or respect nowhere else, finds one place where he is chief and head. There is one person, often far superior to him in understanding, who is obliged to consult him, and whom he is not obliged to consult. He is judge, magistrate and ruler over their joint affairs, and the arbiter of every dispute between them.

The justice or conscience to which she must appeal is his justice and conscience: it is for him to hold the balance and weigh his own claims or wishes against those of another. His is now the only tribunal in civilized life in which the same person is both judge and party.

A generous mind in such a situation tips the balance against its own side, and gives the other side not less but more than fair equality. In this way the weaker side may manage to turn the very fact of dependence into an instrument of power and, lacking justice, take an ungenerous advantage of generosity. The unjust power then becomes a torment and a burden to those who use it unselfishly. But what happens when average men are given this power, without reciprocity and without accountability?

Give such a man the idea that he comes first in law and in opinion, that his part is to will and hers to submit, and it is absurd to suppose that this idea merely glides over his mind without sinking in, or without any effect on his feelings and conduct. The tendency to make himself the first object of consideration, and others at most the second,

is not so rare that it will be missing where everything seems deliberately arranged to let it be

1851

indulgence. If there is any self-will in the man, he becomes either the conscious or unconscious despot of his household. The wife, indeed, often succeeds in gaining her objects, but it is by some of the many various forms of indirectness and management.

41 Thus the position is corrupting equally to both; in the one it produces the vices of power, in the other those of artifice. Women, in their present physical and moral state, having stronger impulses, would naturally be franker and more direct than men; yet all the old saws and traditions represent them as artful and dissembling. Why? Because their only way to their objects is by indirect paths. In all countries where women have strong wishes and active minds, this consequence is inevitable: and if it is less conspicuous in England than in some other places, it is because Englishwomen, saving occasional exceptions, have ceased to have either strong wishes or active minds.

42 We are not now speaking of cases in which there is anything deserving the name of strong affection on both sides. That, where it exists, is too powerful a principle not to modify greatly the bad influences of the situation; it seldom, however, destroys them entirely. Much oftener the bad influences are too strong for the affection, and destroy it. The highest order of durable and happy attachments would be a hundred times more frequent than they are, if the affection which the two sexes sought from one another were that genuine friendship, which only exists between equals in privileges as in faculties.

But with regard to what is commonly called affection in married life—the habitual and almost mechanical feeling of kindliness, and pleasure in each other's society, which generally grows up between persons who constantly live together, unless there is actual dislike—there is nothing in this to contradict or qualify the mischievous influence of the unequal relation. Such feelings often exist between a sultan and his favourites, between a master and his servants; they are merely examples of the pliability of human nature, which accommodates itself in some degree even to the worst circumstances, and the commonest natures always the most easily.

MODERN

indulged. If there is any self-will in the man, he becomes the despot of his household, whether he knows it or not. The wife, it is true, often succeeds in getting what she wants, but only through one or another of the many forms of indirectness and maneuvering.

So the position corrupts both equally: in the one it produces the vices of power, in the other those of cunning. Women, in their present physical and moral state, have stronger impulses and would naturally be franker and more direct than men; yet all the old sayings and traditions portray them as artful and deceitful. Why? Because the only way to their ends is by indirect paths. In every country where women have strong wishes and active minds, this result is inevitable. If it is less noticeable in England than in some other places, that is because Englishwomen, with occasional exceptions, have ceased to have either strong wishes or active minds.

We are not speaking here of cases in which there is anything that deserves the name of strong affection on both sides. Where that exists, it is too powerful a force not to greatly modify the bad influences of the situation; it seldom, however, destroys them entirely. Far more often the bad influences prove too strong for the affection, and destroy it. The highest kind of lasting and happy attachment would be a hundred times more common than it is if the affection the two sexes sought from each other were that genuine friendship which exists only between equals, equal in privileges as in faculties.

But take what is commonly called affection in married life: the habitual, almost mechanical feeling of kindliness and pleasure in each other's company that generally grows up between people who live together constantly, unless there is actual dislike. There is nothing in this to contradict or soften the harmful influence of the unequal relation. Such feelings often exist between a sultan and his favorites, or between a master and his servants. They are merely examples of the adaptability of human nature, which adjusts itself to some degree even to the worst circumstances, and the commonest natures always do so most easily.

1851

43 With respect to the influence personally exercised by women over men, it, no doubt, renders them less harsh and brutal; in ruder times, it was often the only softening influence to which they were accessible. But the assertion, that the wife's influence renders the man less selfish, contains, as things now are, fully as much error as truth. Selfishness towards the wife herself, and towards those in whom she is interested, the children, though favoured by their dependence, the wife's influence, no doubt, tends to counteract.

But the general effect on him of her character, so long as her interests are concentrated in the family, tends but to substitute for individual selfishness a family selfishness, wearing an amiable guise, and putting on the mask of duty. How rarely is the wife's influence on the side of public virtue: how rarely does it do otherwise than discourage any effort of principle by which the private interests or worldly vanities of the family can be expected to suffer.

Public spirit, sense of duty towards the public good, is of all virtues, as women are now educated and situated, the most rarely to be found among them; they have seldom even, what in men is often a partial substitute for public spirit, a sense of personal honour connected with any public duty. Many a man, whom no money or personal flattery would have bought, has bartered his political opinions against a title or invitations for his wife; and a still greater number are made mere hunters after the puerile vanities of society, because their wives value them.

As for opinions; in Catholic countries, the wife's influence is another name for that of the priest: he gives her, in the hopes and emotions connected with a future life, a consolation for the sufferings and disappointments which are her ordinary lot in this. Elsewhere, her weight is thrown into the scale either of the most commonplace, or of the most outwardly prosperous opinions: either those by which censure will be escaped, or by which worldly advancement is likeliest to be procured.

In England, the wife's influence is usually on the illiberal and anti-popular side: this is generally the gaining side for personal interest and vanity; and what to her is the democracy or liberalism in which she has no part—which leaves her the

MODERN

As for the influence that women personally exercise over men, it no doubt makes men less harsh and brutal; in rougher times it was often the only softening influence that could reach them. But the claim that the wife's influence makes the man less selfish contains, as things now stand, fully as much error as truth. The wife's influence no doubt tends to counteract selfishness toward the wife herself and toward those she cares about, the children, though their dependence encourages it.

But so long as her interests are confined to the family, the general effect of her character on him only tends to replace individual selfishness with a family selfishness, which looks amiable and wears the mask of duty. How rarely is the wife's influence on the side of public virtue; how rarely does it do anything but discourage any act of principle that might be expected to hurt the private interests or worldly vanities of the family.

Public spirit, the sense of duty toward the public good, is of all virtues the one most rarely found among women as they are now educated and situated. They seldom have even what in men often partly substitutes for public spirit: a sense of personal honor tied to some public duty. Many a man whom no money or personal flattery could have bought has traded his political opinions for a title or for invitations for his wife. A still greater number are turned into mere hunters after the childish vanities of society because their wives value them.

As for opinions: in Catholic countries, the wife's influence is another name for the priest's. In the hopes and emotions connected with a future life, he gives her consolation for the sufferings and disappointments that are her usual lot in this one. Elsewhere, her weight goes onto the scale of either the most commonplace opinions or the most outwardly prosperous ones: those by which she will escape censure, or those most likely to bring worldly advancement.

In England, the wife's influence is usually on the illiberal and anti-popular side, because that is generally the winning side for personal interest and vanity. And what is democracy or liberalism to her, when she has no part in it and it leaves her

| 1851 | MODERN |
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| Pariah it found her? The man himself, when he marries, usually declines into Conservatism; | the outcast it found her? The man himself, when he marries, usually declines into Conservatism;[19] |
| begins to sympathize with the holders of power, more than with its victims, and thinks it his part to be on the side of authority. As to mental progress, except those vulgarer attainments by which vanity or ambition are promoted, there is generally an end to it in a man who marries a woman mentally his inferior; unless, indeed, he is unhappy in marriage, or becomes indifferent. | he begins to sympathize with the holders of power more than with its victims, and thinks his place is on the side of authority. As for mental progress, apart from the cruder accomplishments that serve vanity or ambition, it generally comes to an end in a man who marries a woman intellectually inferior to him, unless he is unhappy in his marriage or becomes indifferent to it. |
| From a man of twenty-five or thirty, after he is married, an experienced observer seldom expects any further progress in mind or feelings. It is rare that the progress already made is maintained. Any spark of the *mens divinior* which might otherwise have spread and become a flame, seldom survives for any length of time unextinguished. For a mind which learns to be satisfied with what it already is—which does not incessantly look forward to a degree of improvement not yet reached—becomes relaxed, self-indulgent, and loses the spring and the tension which maintain it even at the point already attained. | Once a man of twenty-five or thirty is married, an experienced observer seldom expects any further progress in his mind or feelings. It is rare for the progress already made even to be kept. Any spark of the *mens divinior* that might otherwise have spread and become a flame seldom survives for long without being put out. For a mind that learns to be satisfied with what it already is, and does not constantly look ahead to a degree of improvement not yet reached, grows slack and self-indulgent. It loses the spring and tension that keep it even at the level already attained.[20] |
| And there is no fact in human nature to which experience bears more invariable testimony than to this—that all social or sympathetic influences which do not raise up, pull down; if they do not tend to stimulate and exalt the mind, they tend to vulgarize it. | And there is no fact of human nature to which experience bears more constant witness than this: all social or sympathetic influences that do not raise us up pull us down. If they do not tend to stimulate and elevate the mind, they tend to vulgarize it. |
| 44 For the interest, therefore, not only of women but of men, and of human improvement in the widest sense, the emancipation of women, which the modern world often boasts of having effected, and for which credit is sometimes given to civilization, and sometimes to Christianity, cannot stop where it is. If it were either necessary or just that one portion of mankind should remain mentally and spiritually only half developed, the development of the other portion ought to have been made, as far as possible, independent of their influence. | For the sake, then, not only of women but of men, and of human improvement in the widest sense, the emancipation of women cannot stop where it is. The modern world often boasts of having achieved it, and gives the credit sometimes to civilization and sometimes to Christianity. If it were either necessary or just that one part of humankind should remain only half developed mentally and spiritually, the development of the other part ought to have been made as independent of their influence as possible. |
| Instead of this, they have become the most intimate, and it may now be said, the only intimate associates of those to whom yet they are sedulously kept inferior; and have been raised | Instead, women have become the most intimate companions, and it may now be said the only intimate companions, of the men to whom they are still carefully kept inferior. They have been raised |

19 The original says "the Pariah," a Victorian borrowing from the Indian caste system for someone excluded from society.
20 *Mens divinior*: Latin, "a more divine mind," Horace's phrase (*Satires* 1.4) for the inspiration of the true poet.

| | 1851 | MODERN |
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| | just high enough to drag the others down to themselves. | just high enough to drag the others down to their own level. |

### "WOMEN DO NOT WANT IT"

*She answers the claim that women do not seek emancipation, blaming custom, dependence and literary women.*

| | 1851 | MODERN |
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| 45 | We have left behind a host of vulgar objections, either as not worthy of an answer, or as answered by the general course of our remarks. A few words, however, must be said on one plea, which in England is made much use of for giving an unselfish air to the upholding of selfish privileges, and which, with unobserving, unreflecting people, passes for much more than it is worth. Women, it is said, do not desire—do not seek, what is called their emancipation. On the contrary, they generally disown such claims when made in their behalf, and fall with *acharnement* upon any one of themselves who identifies herself with their common cause. | We have passed over a host of vulgar objections, either as not worth answering or as already answered by the general course of our remarks. A few words, however, must be said about one plea. In England it is much used to give an unselfish air to the defense of selfish privileges, and with unobservant, unreflecting people it passes for far more than it is worth. Women, it is said, do not desire, do not seek, what is called their emancipation. On the contrary, they generally disown such claims when they are made on their behalf, and fall with *acharnement* upon any one of their number who identifies herself with their common cause.[21] |
| 46 | Supposing the fact to be true in the fullest extent ever asserted, if it proves that European women ought to remain as they are, it proves exactly the same with respect to Asiatic women; for they too, instead of murmuring at their seclusion, and at the restraint imposed upon them, pride themselves on it, and are astonished at the effrontery of women who receive visits from male acquaintances, and are seen in the streets unveiled. Habits of submission make men as well as women servile-minded. | Suppose the fact is true to the fullest extent ever claimed. Then if it proves that European women ought to stay as they are, it proves exactly the same about Asian women. They too, instead of complaining about their seclusion and the restraints placed on them, take pride in them, and are astonished at the impudence of women who receive visits from male acquaintances and are seen in the streets unveiled. Habits of submission make men as well as women servile in mind. |
| | The vast population of Asia do not desire or value, probably would not accept, political liberty, nor *[the peoples of the forest]*, civilization; which does not prove that either of those things is undesirable for them, or that they will not, at some future time, enjoy it. Custom hardens human beings to any kind of degradation, by deadening the part of their nature which would resist it. And the case of women is, in this respect, even a peculiar one, for no other inferior caste that we have heard of, have been taught to regard their degradation as their honour. | The vast population of Asia does not desire or value political liberty, and probably would not accept it; nor do the peoples of the forest desire civilization. This does not prove that either is undesirable for them, or that they will not enjoy it at some future time. Custom hardens human beings to any kind of degradation by deadening the part of their nature that would resist it. And in this respect the case of women is actually unique, for no other inferior caste that we have heard of has been taught to regard its degradation as its honor.[22] |
| | The argument, however, implies a secret consciousness that the alleged preference of | The argument, however, implies a secret awareness that women's alleged preference for their de- |

21 *Acharnement*: French for savage, relentless fury.
22 "Civilization" here reflects the Victorian belief that all peoples were moving along a single scale of progress, with Europe at its head.

1851

women for their dependent state is merely apparent, and arises from their being allowed no choice;

for if the preference be natural, there can be no necessity for enforcing it by law. 'To make laws compelling people to follow their inclination, has not hitherto been thought necessary by any legislator. The plea that women do not desire any change, is the same that has been urged, times out of mind, against the proposal of abolishing any social evil—"there is no complaint;" which is generally not true, and when true, only so because there is not that hope of success, without which complaint seldom makes itself audible to unwilling ears.

How does the objector know that women do not desire equality and freedom? He never knew a woman who did not, or would not, desire it for herself individually. It would be very simple to suppose, that if they do desire it they will say so. Their position is like that of the tenants or labourers who vote against their own political interests to please their landlords or employers; with the unique addition, that submission is inculcated on them from childhood, as the peculiar attraction and grace of their character. They are taught to think, that to repel actively even an admitted injustice done to themselves, is somewhat unfeminine, and had better be left to some male friend or protector.

To be accused of rebelling against anything which admits of being called an ordinance of society, they are taught to regard as an imputation of a serious offence, to say the least, against the proprieties of their sex. It requires unusual moral courage as well as disinterestedness in a woman, to express opinions favourable to women's enfranchisement, until, at least, there is some prospect of obtaining it. The comfort of her individual life, and her social consideration, usually depend on the good will of those who hold the undue power; and to possessors of power any complaint, however bitter, of the misuse of it, is a less flagrant act of insubordination than to protest against the power itself.

The professions of women in this matter remind us of the state offenders of old, who, on the point

MODERN

pendent state is merely apparent, and comes from their being allowed no choice;

for if the preference were natural, there would be no need to enforce it by law. No legislator has yet thought it necessary to make laws compelling people to follow their own inclination. The plea that women do not want any change is the one that has been urged since time out of mind against every proposal to abolish a social evil: "there is no complaint." This is generally untrue. When it is true, it is only because there is no hope of success, and without that hope, complaint seldom makes itself heard by unwilling ears.

How does the objector know that women do not desire equality and freedom? He has never known a woman who did not, or would not, desire it for herself individually. It would be very naive to suppose that if they do desire it they will say so. Their position is like that of the tenants or laborers who vote against their own political interests to please their landlords or employers. But they bear one unique addition: from childhood, submission is drilled into them as the special charm and grace of their character. They are taught to think that actively resisting even an admitted injustice done to themselves is somewhat unfeminine, and had better be left to some male friend or protector.[23]

They are taught that to be accused of rebelling against anything that can be called an ordinance of society is to be charged with a serious offense, to say the least, against the proprieties of their sex. It takes unusual moral courage, as well as unselfishness, for a woman to express opinions in favor of women's enfranchisement, at least until there is some prospect of winning it. The comfort of her personal life and her standing in society usually depend on the goodwill of those who hold the undue power. To those who hold power, any complaint about its misuse, however bitter, is a less flagrant act of insubordination than a protest against the power itself.

What women profess on this matter reminds us of the state prisoners of old who, on the point of exe-

23 Until the Ballot Act of 1872, British votes were cast openly, so landlords and employers could see how their tenants and workers voted.

1851

of execution, used to protest their love and devotion to the sovereign by whose unjust mandate they suffered. Griselda herself might be matched from the speeches put by Shakspeare into the mouths of male victims of kingly caprice and tyranny: the Duke of Buckingham, for example, in 'Henry the Eighth,' and even Wolsey.

The literary class of women, especially in England, are ostentatious in disclaiming the desire for equality or citizenship, and proclaiming their complete satisfaction with the place which society assigns to them; exercising in this, as in many other respects, a most noxious influence over the feelings and opinions of men, who unsuspectingly accept the servilities of toadyism as concessions to the force of truth, not considering that it is the personal interest of these women to profess whatever opinions they expect will be agreeable to men. It is not among men of talent, sprung from the people, and patronized and flattered by the aristocracy, that we look for the leaders of a democratic movement.

Successful literary women are just as unlikely to prefer the cause of women to their own social consideration. They depend on men's opinion for their literary as well as for their feminine successes; and such is their bad opinion of men, that they believe there is not more than one in ten thousand who does not dislike and fear strength, sincerity, or high spirit in a woman.

They are therefore anxious to earn pardon and toleration for whatever of these qualities their writings may exhibit on other subjects, by a studied display of submission on this: that they may give no occasion for vulgar men to say (what nothing will prevent vulgar men from saying), that learning makes women unfeminine, and that literary ladies are likely to be bad wives.

MODERN

cution, used to declare their love and devotion to the sovereign by whose unjust order they suffered. Griselda herself could be matched by the speeches Shakespeare puts into the mouths of male victims of royal caprice and tyranny: the Duke of Buckingham, for example, in *Henry VIII*, and even Wolsey.[24]

The literary class of women, especially in England, make a show of disclaiming any desire for equality or citizenship and proclaiming their complete satisfaction with the place society assigns them. In this, as in many other respects, they have a most harmful influence on the feelings and opinions of men. Men unsuspectingly take the servility of toadyism for a concession to the force of truth, not considering that it is in these women's personal interest to profess whatever opinions they expect men will find agreeable. We do not look for the leaders of a democratic movement among men of talent who have risen from the people and are patronized and flattered by the aristocracy.

Successful literary women are just as unlikely to put the cause of women ahead of their own social standing. They depend on men's opinion for their literary successes as well as their feminine ones. And their opinion of men is so low that they believe hardly one man in ten thousand does not dislike and fear strength, sincerity or high spirit in a woman.

They are therefore anxious to earn pardon and tolerance for whatever of these qualities their writings on other subjects may show, by a studied display of submission on this one. They want to give vulgar men no occasion to say (what nothing will stop vulgar men from saying) that learning makes women unfeminine, and that literary ladies are likely to make bad wives.

## THE MOVEMENT AHEAD

*She warns the American movement against sentimental demands and notes the first English petition from Sheffield.*

1851

47 But enough of this; especially as the fact which affords the occasion for this notice, makes it

MODERN

But enough of this, especially since the fact that prompted this article makes it impossible to claim

24 Griselda is the patient wife of Boccaccio and Chaucer who submits without complaint to her husband's cruel trials. In *Henry VIII*, Buckingham on his way to execution and the fallen Cardinal Wolsey both speak of the king with loyal devotion.

| 1851 | MODERN |
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| impossible any longer to assert the universal acquiescence of women (saving individual exceptions) in their dependent condition. In the United States at least, there are women, seemingly numerous, and now organised for action on the public mind, who demand equality in the fullest acceptation of the word, and demand it by a straight-forward appeal to men's sense of justice, not plead for it with a timid deprecation of their displeasure. | any longer that women (apart from individual exceptions) universally accept their dependent condition. In the United States at least, there are women, apparently many of them and now organized to act on public opinion, who demand equality in the fullest sense of the word. They demand it by a straightforward appeal to men's sense of justice, and do not plead for it while timidly begging men not to be displeased. |
| 48 Like other popular movements, however, this may be seriously retarded by the blunders of its adherents. Tried by the ordinary standard of public meetings, the speeches at the Convention are remarkable for the preponderance of the rational over the declamatory element; but there are some exceptions; and things to which it is impossible to attach any rational meaning, have found their way into the resolutions. | Like other popular movements, however, this one may be seriously held back by the blunders of its supporters. Judged by the ordinary standard of public meetings, the speeches at the Convention are remarkable for how much the rational outweighs the rhetorical. But there are some exceptions, and things to which no rational meaning can be attached have found their way into the resolutions. |
| Thus, the resolution which sets forth the claims made in behalf of women, after claiming equality in education, in industrial pursuits, and in political rights, enumerates as a fourth head of demand something under the name of "social and spiritual union," and "a medium of expressing the highest moral and spiritual views of justice," with other similar verbiage, serving only to mar the simplicity and rationality of the other demands: resembling those who would weakly attempt to combine nominal equality between men and women, with enforced distinctions in their privileges and functions. What is wanted for women is equal rights, equal admission to all social privileges; not a position apart, a sort of sentimental priesthood. | Thus the resolution that sets out the claims made on behalf of women first claims equality in education, in employment and in political rights. It then lists as a fourth demand something called "social and spiritual union," and "a medium of expressing the highest moral and spiritual views of justice," with other similar verbiage. This serves only to spoil the simplicity and rationality of the other demands, and it resembles the feeble attempt some people make to combine nominal equality between men and women with enforced distinctions in their privileges and functions. What women need is equal rights, equal admission to all social privileges; not a position apart, a sort of sentimental priesthood. |
| To this, the only just and rational principle, both the resolutions and the speeches, for the most part, adhere. They contain so little which is akin to the nonsensical paragraph in question, that we suspect it not to be the work of the same hands as most of the other resolutions. The strength of the cause lies in the support of those who are influenced by reason and principle; and to attempt to recommend it by sentimentalities, absurd in reason, and inconsistent with the principle on which the movement is founded, is to place a good cause on a level with a bad one. | This is the only just and rational principle, and both the resolutions and the speeches for the most part hold to it. They contain so little like the nonsensical paragraph in question that we suspect it was not written by the same hands as most of the other resolutions. The strength of the cause lies in the support of those who are moved by reason and principle. To try to recommend it by sentimentalities that are absurd in reason, and inconsistent with the principle on which the movement is founded, is to put a good cause on the same level as a bad one. |
| 49 There are indications that the example of America will be followed on this side of the | There are signs that America's example will be followed on this side of the Atlantic. The first step |

1851

Atlantic; and the first step has been taken in that part of England where every serious movement in the direction of political progress has its commencement—the manufacturing districts of the North. On the 13th of February 1851, a petition of women, agreed to by a public meeting at Sheffield, and claiming the elective franchise, was presented to the House of Lords by the Earl of Carlisle.

MODERN

has been taken in the part of England where every serious movement toward political progress begins: the manufacturing districts of the North. On February 13, 1851, the Earl of Carlisle presented to the House of Lords a petition of women claiming the suffrage, which had been adopted at a public meeting in Sheffield.[25]

25 George Howard, 7th Earl of Carlisle, was a Whig politician. The Sheffield petition was among the earliest petitions for women's suffrage presented to Parliament.