

A LECTURE
ON
WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE,

DELIVERED IN BRISTOL ATHENÆUM,
FEBRUARY 24th, 1869,

BY
EMER. PROF. F. W. NEWMAN,

FOR THE
CLIFTON & BRISTOL SOCIETY FOR WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE.

Published by the London Society for Women's Suffrage.
Printed by SPOTTISWOODE, 1869.

Transcribed and Republished by
The Francis William Newman Society, 2009.

A LECTURE
ON
WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE,

DELIVERED IN BRISTOL ATHENÆUM,
FEBRUARY 24th, 1869,

BY
EMER. PROF. F. W. NEWMAN,

FOR THE
CLIFTON & BRISTOL SOCIETY FOR WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

The placards and advertisements have told you that this Lecture is to be delivered under the auspices of the Society which has been formed in Clifton to support the cause of Women's Suffrage. Yet I must warn you that the Society cannot be responsible for all that I say. It desires not to identify itself with either party in politics, and in this sense it is not a political society. But it aims at a political object, and therefore cannot forego political reasonings. A few years back it might have seemed that to urge extension of the parliamentary franchise touched the sorest place in party controversy; but all that is now changed. Lord DERBY and Mr. DISRAELI have called into the exercise of the franchise so many new voters, as to make Ladies on all sides inquire, why they also may not vote. Happily the argument need in the discussion of that question have no longer a party-colour.

F. W. Newman

There are intelligent persons who think all Parliamentary elections a great nuisance. I have heard it seriously urged, as decisive against them, that they produce too much local ill-will, too much excitement, too much rudeness and coarseness; that they do not really select the best men, but either rich men, men of noble birth, or great talkers. Perhaps a well-known philosopher of Chelsea will tell us, that the whole thing is a mistake.—I have read an elaborate discussion, to prove that what is called Political Freedom always makes a nation ill mannered, whether surly or disagreeably smart; that nations under despotism become polite and graceful; that even negroes, while they are slaves, gain smoothness and polish from a constant anxiety to please, but under freedom become self-pleasing and rude. If it be true that the Law and the Executive Government are neither better nor worse, be the legislators and be the ministers who they may; or if good law, and wise, faithful administration, are very small things in comparison with good manners;—I do not expect that men who have made the discovery will be in favour of Women's Suffrage. I expect them rather to say: "Is it not enough, that these notions of constitutional rights have converted nearly all the male sex into snobs and ruffians? and do you want to spoil the women too? Do leave us men to take all the dirty work." But I do not pretend to be so self-sacrificing. Instead of gaily undertaking dirty work, I would rather study how the work may be made clean. I see that women are great lovers of cleanliness; that they are not naturally fond of tumult, of fights, or of dangerous fun. I know also that men will do and say in the presence of men, what they shrink to say or do in the presence of women; that when our grandfathers were used to get drunk after dinner, they did not dare to begin the carousal, until they had sent away the ladies. It is therefore worth inquiring, whether the gentler and purer sex might not improve some of our ways, if we would let them in politics and in morals, as well as at dinner.

Have men really been so successful in the government of the world, that our great maxim of prudence ought to be, to LET WELL ALONE and beware of change? What is the testimony of History in this matter? History is regarded as a very improving study, especially for politicians: but I confess, that when ladies ask my advice about studying History, I hardly know how to refrain from replying,—“Well! if you want to make your heart ache, study History.” It is a book like the little book of the Apocalypse; it may for a moment be sweet in the mouth, but it is bitter in

A Lecture on Women's Suffrage

the stomach. And why is this? Simply because the male sex has so frightfully mis-managed their rule, that the burden of the past is lamentation and woe. Of the *past*,—do I say? But the present is still more alarming: for we see, precisely in the richest, cleverest and most advanced countries of Christendom, under all our knowledge and science, the same evils growing up, as marked the decay of Rome. Is then perseverance in routine all that we want? When, under one physician and one theory of physics, patients one after another run through the same career of wasting disease, does not prudence always suggest to call in a second physician of a different temperament and school?—Each historical failure is attributed to a separate cause; but amid their diversities a general sameness reigns. Briefly I express my belief to be, that,—after full allowance of the inevitable martyrdoms to be endured by the scrupulous who fight against the unscrupulous,—a deeper cause of failure remains: there is *more enthusiasm* on the side of evil than of good, though good men far outnumber the bad. Ever-burning enthusiasm animates the adherents of Injustice; but enthusiasm is seldom or never allowed to lead the side of Right. Politicians even of the best sort dread *too much* Justice, lest it subvert society! dread enthusiasm, lest it carry them off their balance. They say with TALLEYRAND: “Hark you, my friend! no enthusiasm!” Few politicians seem to feel that Justice is not only the glorious path, but the only safe path. Now in my belief Women know this truth by instinct more keenly than Men. Their very weakness perhaps aids them to it. The strong can thrive by violences, the scheming by chicanery; but Justice is the only support of the weaker. This may be in part the reason, why, in a case of clear Right, women do not argue and prate of the Expediency like men. However, be the cause what it may, they seem to me to have more Faith in Right, as they have more of religion, than has the male sex. That is why I believe that men need their joint-action in politics.

Our Society is not proposing to claim the Executive Government for women nor seats in Parliament: all that we ask is, that women may be able to give a vote, which recurs at the average interval of five years, and may be but once in seven years. Nevertheless, considering that the First Personage in the realm is a Queen, and that no sane mind in the three kingdoms would willingly exchange her for any of her male predecessors of the House of Brunswick,—I should not find any thing paradoxical or rash in wishing that the law would let the two sexes, like

F. W. Newman

other things, find their own level, instead of elevating one sex over the other. In the middle of the last century, the Italians had in the Chair of Mathematics in the University of Bologna a lady,—by name MARIA GARTANA AGNESI. Why not, if she excelled in that study? Not many mathematical Professors in England have any ostensible right to claim superiority over MARY SOMERVILLE. If a woman have high gifts from God and have improved them by assiduous culture, what wisdom or what justice is there in shutting our eyes to the fact, or trying to make her gifts as little useful as we can? I cannot adequately set forth the rightfulness of the cause which our Society supports, if I refrain from showing how much more some women have done, and done well, than they are ordinarily allowed to do. Not all the nations of Europe allow a female to be Queen; and not many Queens have reigned; yet among the more celebrated the European sovereigns female names are found. Since PETER THE GREAT Russia has had some considerable and active emperors: we must not judge their characters by any other standard than that of royalty and public success: in this sense none stands higher than the great Empress CATHERINE. In the Austrian line of sovereigns none is higher than the Empress Queen MARIA TERESA. On our English throne Queen ELIZABETH will compete with the best of the EDWARDS or HENRIES. It is not to modern India that we should go to find wise, just, gentle and firm rulers. From the break up of the Mogul dynasty to the present day, anarchy, misgovernment and tyranny have been so common, as more than anything else to have facilitated, and called for, the rise of the British power. Yet if you ask, Of all Indian sovereigns in that calamitous period, *whose* name stands highest in the estimate of British historians? I believe the reply is,—the name of a woman, ALIAH BAE; who, as widow-Queen, governed the Mahrattas for more than twenty years about a century ago. Sir JOHN MALCOLM, writing of her in an official State paper, where we expect what is cold and cautious, seems hardly able to qualify his admiration. You must allow me to quote his words. He says:—

“A female without vanity, a bigot without intolerance, a mind imbued with the deepest superstitions, yet receiving no impressions but what led to the benefit and happiness of those under its influence; a being exercising in the most active and able manner despotic power, not merely with sincere humility, but under the severest moral restraints that a strict conscience could lay upon human action; and this, combined with the greatest indulgence for the weakness and faults

A Lecture on Women's Suffrage

of others. To sum up all;—she was Goodness in its most comprehensive sense Personified.”—
*(*Report upon Malwa.*)

She raised the agricultural classes out of misery, reestablished property, reorganized the finances, introduced courts of arbitration, was herself accessible to appeals and unwearied in administering justice. She constructed roads over difficult hills, built resting places and dug wells for travellers; kept her country in peace and her taxes light, being as forbearing to the rich as she was tender to the poor. While her own chieftains were proud of her, she was wholly proof against flattery, which she checked by extreme coldness to it. This is not written concerning one who lived in distant legendary times, one whose virtues might be held fabulous; but in a very recent period, within the full cognizance of our able and wary statesmen. Who dares to say, or can say at all plausibly, that the sex which produced such a woman in a land of heathenism has any natural incapacity for understanding public affairs?

What is peculiarly instructive in this account is, the fact that ALIAH BAE had no marked superiority of intellect. She was narrowminded, but large-hearted, tender-hearted, and tender of conscience. There is plenty of cleverness in male politicians; too much, one might say. The deficiency lies in the moral, not in the intellectual part; except in so far as narrowness of heart contracts the mind by limiting aspiration and directing it to ignoble ends. It is an old saying, “Where there is a will, there is a way.” Where a ruler, male or female, longs for the public welfare as a mother yearns over her children, very moderate intellect is more fruitful of good than any subtlety of diplomatists.

Allow me to read a few words written in 1841 by a plain spoken statesman of vigorous and original thought:—

“Half the follies, half the brutalities, committed by nations, and for which they have paid the price in long arrears of punishment and suffering, would have been prevented, if they had been presented to the ordeal of the right-minded and clear-headed *Women* of the land. When real necessities occur to nations, Women have never been found deficient in the virtues which such times demand.”—*General T. Perronet Thompson.*

*(NOTE.)—I borrow from the *Westminster Review* (Mahratta Empire) of January, 1869.

F. W. Newman

There are people who say: “Do not seek to give political power to women: be satisfied that they have that influence which their fascination naturally gives them; and beware of lessening that fascination.” I interpret such doctrine to mean, “Refuse to women responsible public power, and yield to their irresponsible secret influence. Let them be as the sultana who sells the offices of State; of as the freemen of a Roman emperor. Let the backstairs flourish.” Nay, but rather, look at France. France has forbidden women to be queens, but cannot help their being queen mothers; and in the history we see what a curse they have been as intriguers or as royal mistresses.

If my limits of time permitted, it might be instructive to review several theories concerning the female sex. But I must pass to the modern English theory. It goes upon presumptions, which unhappily are not always true. It presumes that women of full age are well married, and have not to support themselves; that they need not be taught any other trade or art, than the art of keeping their house clean and tidy, if the husband is poor; or superintending it gracefully, if he is richer. Husbands are never to be sick and infirm, bad, profligate or cruel; they are never to die and leave widows destitute. If any women are unmarried, they are either to receive adequate life-support from wealthy parents, or to become valuable domestic servants in substantial families.

But in contrast to this theory, what are the stern facts of life? In the last census, it appeared that nearly three million and a half of English women and girls work for their own subsistence. They are distinguished as follows:—nearly 839,000 wives, above 487,000 widows, and 2,110,000 spinsters. The laws and customs of England do not count upon this. We pretend to great chivalry towards women, but it certainly does not reach to females of the lower ranks. I do not wholly blame my sex that the actual life of our poor women is so wretched, their toil so degrading, their occupations sometimes filthy, their work terrible hard. We have in general been ignorant how widely spread and how intense the evil. Who could reasonably expect our legislators to know it all? The law did not make any of them the women’s protectors: the law was to blame, and is to blame. But I cannot equally exculpate the male sex for the fact pressed home by the *Dublin National Review*, that men do not care at what the women work, *provided only it be not something lucrative*. If any occupation be pleasant and well paid, it has been reserved for

A Lecture on Women's Suffrage

men, even though it be naturally and obviously a woman's function. Well may the writer deride the sentimental pretence that men keep women out of the franchise from tenderness to the sex, lest it lose refinement by having political protectors.

Now I am coming to the point. What I maintain is this. Women, as a sex, are cruelly wronged both by our laws and by our customs. They never would have been so wronged, if they had been represented in Parliament. To deny such representation to them is now, more than ever, a wrong; because now, more than ever, they are cast on their own resources. Our young men emigrate to the colonies, become sailors, or go into the army, perhaps are sent to India. Our mechanical industry in factories, on railroads, in mines, abound with great dangers; so does all occupation on the sea, in fisheries, coasting trades and general navigation. Male life is cut short by numberless accidents and diseases; women are left widows or unmarried; even those tenderly brought up have to struggle for themselves against the competition of men. Not to give them full equality of law, of education and of trade, is a grievous injustice.

It is very hard to please opponents, and I suppose it is best not to try to please them. On every side come warnings to me from women, that it is unwise to claim Rights for Women, because they find that many men laugh and scoff the moment that Rights are mentioned. Well then: I talk of Woman's Wrongs.—“On no account!” cry ladies to me: “say nothing about our *Wrongs*: for it only makes men angry, and then there is no reasoning with them.” Now let me ask the audience, what is contained in such a statement. Does it not imply, that the women are slaves, and the men have the heart of slaveholders? A slaveholder ridicules the idea of a slave's *rights*. “Coloured men have no rights, which a white man is bound to respect;” was the utterance of Chief Justice TANEY some ten or eleven years ago. But what if the *wrongs* of the slaves were spoken of? The mention of the word set his whole nature on fire. If men do indeed laugh down Woman's Rights, and scold down the mention of her Wrongs, if affords a far completer proof than is desirable that she needs political power for self-protection.

I call on the audience to ponder the fact,—for it is a fact,—that the law of these three kingdoms is more unjust to women than that of the historically despotic countries. The United States inherited our common law: they have much improved it in many States, and especially of late, yet the women there complain greatly of

F. W. Newman

it, and the more so, the better the community is educated. History explains how these results came about. In particular, where royalty has been strong, the Roman law has been made a basis of the new legislation: in England, dread of it as something despotic made the barons cling to our more barbarous common law. Where learned lawyers and judges, with a greater breadth of cultivation, had the main influence in legislation, the despotism of the crown might be noxiously increased, yet the general basis of the law was wiser: equitable consideration might be shown, and sometimes was shown, to the weaker classes of the community, especially women and colonial slaves. But when legislation is shaped by the influence of privileged classes, those classes get, if not all, yet nearly all the benefit. The unrepresented are not heard; their wrongs are either unknown, or unthought of, or are selfishly tolerated. Such is the outline of truth; but when we go into details, nation differs greatly from nation. In England, the law has been signally tyrannical to women, by playing fast and loose with religious theory.

Under cover of the mystical, poetical, or religious idea that husband and wife are one person, the common law has not admitted the wife to equality and to real union, but has absorbed and exploited her, and in the most important senses has made her the husband's slave. To speak first of property:—that great oracle of common law, Lord COKE, laid down: "Marriage is an absolute gift by the wife of all her chattels personal, whether the husband survive the wife or not." Observe the last words. They come to this. If a rich woman marry a poor man, and the man die the day after the marriage, his children by a former wife or his other kinsfolk despoil the woman of the greater part of her own property, and leave to her at the utmost only a widow's fraction, and that, a mere life interest. The law insists on treating the property as though it never had been hers at all!

If, instead of a male English judge, the Mahratta queen, ALIAH BAE, had sat on the bench, I cannot doubt that the decisive word would have been widely different.—Marriage is a voluntary contract. Does a woman in it give away her property? does she, not merely share it with her husband, but alienate it from herself? Why! There is not a word in the contract about her property! On the contrary, the bridegroom says to the bride: "With all my worldly goods I thee endow." The common law, if it arbitrarily reverses a contract, becomes common lawlessness.—So, I am disposed to believe, any female judge would decide. Yet

A Lecture on Women's Suffrage

it is asserted, that the male sex has no interests against the female, and cannot be biased; while the iniquity of male law stares us in the face. The law pretends to found marriage in religion, and gives to the man the out-and-out advantage of that theory; yet the moment that it favours the woman, the law tramples the marriage service under foot.

Now remember that according to a high authority the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the ungodly and sinners; and when it sanctions iniquitous deeds, men will be found to perform such deeds. The opinion of large numbers gravitates down to the level of what the law permits. I am ashamed at the power which English law gives me over my wife; and so I think ought every Englishman. A husband may live in idleness and daintiness on his wife's fortune, while refusing to her every thing but the meanest fare and most necessary support of life. He may gamble away her property, as did Mr. LONG TILNEY WELLESLEY LONG POLE with his wife's vast possessions; or, against her will, he may lose it by foolish investments. And if she have talent and spirit and accomplishments; if, after she has been ruined by him, she earn money by her own exertions, that money is not hers, but his. If she lodge her earnings with a friend, or with a banker, the common law will justify the holder of her money in giving it up to the husband's demand, and, I believe, will compel him. In lower life we know how many a worthless husband clutches his wife's hard-earned wages for his own indulgence,—probably to spend in drink,—and will not let her even feed her children. Now what is law made for, if not to check and put down such enormities? Yet the law itself HAS CAUSED them. No man, however vile, thinks of seizing his *sister's* earnings, and beating her if she will not give them up. Evidently the law which bestows the power alone puts such offences into men's heads.

I mentioned, that even in the United States women are becoming more and more keenly alive to the injustices of the law. An association likely to be very powerful, is there rising for the defence of women, many of whom speak eloquently for their sex. I have copied out part of a speech spoken about six weeks ago by a highly intelligent lady, a Mrs. FRANCES D. GAGE, who, in a retrospect of her own life, states what first impressed her with the wicked injustice of the law towards women. She says:—

F. W. Newman

“At twenty I married. My husband was a lawyer. One day a woman called at our house to see him. Her husband had been drunk, had beaten her, turned her out of the house and kept her children from her. She had married him while he was poor. Her father dying had bequeathed her a farm and house, horses, cattle, sheep, and money. Into this house the husband moved. Into the comforts and use of the money he installed himself as master, and she soon found herself a pauper, dependent on his bounty. He starved her, beat her children, and forced them all to work to excess. She had come to my husband to ask what she should do.

“Leave him,—said he.—‘But he won’t let me have my children.’—No: in law they belong to him.—‘The property is mine.’—In law, not one cent of it; except for your necessary support.—‘Well, if I could have my say about that and my children.’—But you cannot. He can keep the children. You must have an arbitration of men, to say what ought to be enough for your necessary support.—‘Did not my father give it all to me?’—Certainly: but the law gives it to your husband.—‘Can’t I sue him for beating me?’—Not in your own name (!)—‘Suppose you sue him for me: could I then get damages?’—No; any damages would go to other parties. If you choose to leave him, I will do what I can for you. Are you strong enough to leave your children and abide the issue?—‘My God! no. The youngest is a baby.’—Then I cannot help you; unless you sue for assault and battery, and have him bound over to keep the peace.—‘If I should do that, he would kill me.’—I suppose he might maltreat you.

“The poor woman rose slowly from her chair, and in a voice that went to our souls said simply as she went out,—‘I *must* go to my children.’”

You see, a bad husband holds the children in his hand, and by them can control his wife: who not only yearns for them, day by day, but in absence must dread that they will forget her, or will be filled with false prejudices against her. It is notorious to those who have inquired, how much misery mothers will endure from a bad husband, rather than be deprived of their children. Now can any thing be more wonderful than that a law pretending to be just, to be equitable, to be religious, should make out that a mother has no right in her own children? I much rather believe, with a certain ancient people, that the mother has of the two parents the greater right; for on her comes child-rearing as well as child-bearing; and all believe that her affection is deeper than the father’s. The cruelty of our law is to me quite a marvel.—Well: but suppose that there are no children to a marriage; and that a wife,—made miserable by a husband’s ill treatment, tries to run back to the house of her father or brother: what then? Why! then, the law authorizes him *to lock her up!* Not many years back there was such a trial. I read it in the papers, but I cannot refer to it. The judge laid down, that it belonged to the husband’s conjugal rights to retain possession of his wife’s person; and if he

A Lecture on Women's Suffrage

had reason to believe she wished to escape, he had a right to lock her up. What are called the husband's "conjugal rights" are to be retained, at any amount of misery to a woman. I cannot dwell on this; but frightful things are veiled under the words. All this tyrannical theory is evidently constructed by MEN against WOMEN; women have never had a voice in it. The richer classes know the law to be unjust to a wife's property; for when a suitor proposes marriage to a woman who has a thousand pounds or upwards, her kinsmen insist on putting the capital of her fortune into the hands of Trustees. Even so, if a husband is shameless and wicked, there is no common law protection to a wife; she will still have to appeal to a Court which has grown up against the common law and condemns it by evading it. When my wife's trustees pay money to her, I may violently wrench it out of her hands, or break open her desk, and the common law will pronounce that I am not robbing; but am using what is my own. If I seize her whole wardrobe, and barely leave rags for her to wear, and her kinsfolk give her something worth stealing,—say, a velvet cloak, a silk gown, or a fur tippet,—I may strip them off her back, and sell them for my own purposes, and the common law will justify me. Understand then to what all this tends. Such law would never have stood six hundred years with a Parliament in England, if women had been duly represented in that Parliament.

I once more warn you, that our Society is not responsible for my arguments or for my assertions in detail; but I say in my own name, that the law has no more right to give me my wife's property than my sister's property. I call it, wanton spoliation. Women are only too generous to husbands and brothers. Trustees are needful, to save them from their own indiscreet generosity; why should the law plunder them? I do not ask a bit by bit reform: I claim a simple repeal,—a short simple avowal, that marriage makes no difference whatever in a woman's pecuniary status,—that she sacrifices no farthing of pecuniary right or duty by marriage, any more than does a man. Leave the wife on the footing of a sister or grown up daughter, and no difficulty can arise.

There is such a thing as respectable error; there is also such a thing as disgraceful error. If the law, basing itself on religion, tried to enforce domestic morality with a high hand; if it publicly scourged every man who dishonoured a woman; if it acted the spy within our apartments; if it severely punished violence in a husband, and divorced him for any gross neglect of a husband's duties; if it carefully watched

F. W. Newman

over a wife's rights and happiness, and counted her property sacred, as even Mohammedan law does;—we might think that the law had, on the whole, undertaken too much; but at any rate, its error would be respectable. But our law is, all through, lenient to the man and cruel to the woman. If a scoundrel gain a woman's heart, dishonour her, and cast her off, this is no substantive offence by our law. The woman's father can only bring the seducer into court by a ridiculous complaint that he has lost her service during certain months. Her service! The law does not regard *her* as injured; only her *father* is injured; and that, by losing her service! That she is heartbroken, and her whole life-prospects darkened, goes for nothing. The seducer cannot be punished even by a pecuniary fine, except by exposing a too confiding and too generous girl to public shame, laying her open to impudent cross-examination and probably to false imputations. The same law, which is so reckless of men's profligacy, becomes suddenly very religious, as soon as a religious metaphor can be made an excuse for despoiling a wife. This I hold to be, not a respectable superstition, but a mean and scandalous tyranny, enacted by men against women.

Let it be observed, that these rude and coarse iniquities rest entirely on the Common Law, as expounded by judges always irresponsible and often fanciful, not on Parliamentary enactment. In the interest of richer women, our Courts of Equity have done something to soften the evil, which comes down evidently from the barbarous times, and rests on the idea that woman is a sort of slave to man. No English Parliament (I believe) would deliberately have sanctioned such principles; but it has not been their direct duty to disown them, because women have not been their constituents. What is more, we have no reason to suppose that our ancestors in their barbarism imagined or intended such a state of injustice as has grown up out of the interpretation of *unwritten* law by a series of arbitrary judgments. The old Saxons and Germans, among barbarians, stand high as honouring the female sex. Where they saw one household, they insisted on its having one head: hence they attributed all the property to that one who was of course the husband. Heiresses were not allowed to be unmarried; practically no women were rich but widows. But widows possessing property and unmarried women were perhaps not so depressed politically then as in modern England. We know how closely the old English associated the ideas of property with political duty, also with political

A Lecture on Women's Suffrage

right, and especially with the vote by which all rights were supposed to be defended. We know familiarly to this day that women have in some cases local political duties and votes, where they have property on which they are taxed. Now the English Parliament was constructed out of the local institutions of country and borough; so that, until it is disproved, we have a right to infer, and can scarcely help believing, that the women who had municipal or county votes once exercised the Parliamentary vote also; and when the principle was laid down with so much vehemence, that taxation and representation went together, the women who were taxed must almost necessarily have voted. Except, I believe, as to the poll-tax, there was an honest attempt to make voting commensurate with taxation. If then it is to pass as history, that in Old England those widows and spinsters who paid taxes voted only in local matters and not also in Parliamentary Elections, the man who is to convince me must be not only a good Judge in modern law, but also a profound antiquarian; and I shall believe him, not because he is a Judge, but because he is an antiquarian; moreover, he must show no animosity against Women's Suffrage.

In this connexion we may cast a glance on other countries of Europe. In France no woman was allowed to be Queen; yet even before the great revolution of last century, as I am informed, women of property used to vote, on the few occasions on which men were called to vote; nor is the practice extinct in local elections. And when the English conquered Canada from the French, we found Women's Suffrage established there. I hear that it continued into this century; and now that the whole question is opened, we shall probably learn by what influences it was put down. Every where a like phenomenon appears; namely: by the injustice of the strong the weak are made weaker. In former days free men of colour had the suffrage in all the slave-states of the American Union except South Carolina; but the white men, being in the majority, voted them out of the suffrage, first in one, then in another State. Women appear to me to have been ousted thus, little by little, in England; though it is quite clear that at no time had they collectively any adequate legislative defence; for the widows and spinsters possessed of property were but a small fraction of the whole sex. In Hungary, until of late, all women duly qualified by property had the political rights of property; but there again, in reforming the constitution for the interests of liberty, the men were pleased to annihilate the small vestige of power exercised by the women.

F. W. Newman

On the contrary despotic Austria has of late remarkably taken up the cause of women which free Hungary had so unaccountably trampled down; and now free-holding Austrian women who pay a small amount of taxes in country or town have been allowed to vote *by proxy*. No one seems yet to have discovered any evil or inconvenience following it. In the new Electoral law of Italy, as I read, a woman who pays taxes may delegate her vote, which seems equivalent to voting by proxy. In Sweden, widows and spinsters who have some realized income vote in the countries of Europe ahead of England in this matter. Finally, I read that in the Australian colony of Victoria women have for four years voted on equal terms with men, and that every thing goes on satisfactorily under it.

I earnestly trust that Parliament is already becoming aware of the cruel wrongs which our law does to married women. I hope that the worst of them will be soon removed. I rejoice to see so many young lawyers eager in Law Reform. Yet if the legal wrongs of wives were all swept away this week, the history of these wrongs would remain as a cogent proof that injustices will fall on any class which is politically depressed. Wives moreover have ever been the majority of the sex. Yet I must not leave it to be inferred that only married women are sufferers by the selfishness of men: on the contrary, the whole sex is wronged, alike by law, by its administration, and by custom. Where funds have been left for education, without distinction of sex, girls have been excluded by the male Trustees; and when public money is voted, girls have been generally forgotten. To such injustices the Right Hon. Lord LYTTTELTON pointedly referred with great indignation at the last meeting of the Social Science Association. But how long have such things gone on unredressed, because uninvestigated; and uninvestigated, because women have no legislative spokesman! Nor do we easily learn the many forms which injustice takes, and *will* take, while things are thus. We have but lately learnt that widow are often ousted from farms by landlords, because they have no Parliamentary vote. At the bottom of all lies the noxious fixed idea, generated in society by the long injustice of the law, that women have unequal Rights, as an inferior race, who ought not to be paid as much as men for the very same service; and that men have a natural claim to all lucrative appointments. Time does not allow my opening that important subject.

I will not pretend to expect quick and early relief to Women from Women's Suffrage, except in so far as the passing of it will denote a repentant state of the

A Lecture on Women's Suffrage

public mind. Far more important than political equality to the female sex is the full possession of *social* equality,—equality in education, and equality in the market; so that those who must work may work healthfully and happily. This I say, so far as women's interest is concerned. The political franchise cannot be to them an *end*, but only a *means*; and as such it is less valuable than the end. But hitherto we nowhere see social and political degradation separated. The same influences which exclude a class, politically are sure to depress it socially. It is always found impossible to win equity from society, while equality is refused in law. Thus even on that head I find full reason for desiring this stigma of legal inequality to be swept away. But a far greater reason lies behind, in the essential immorality which has hitherto stained the male government of the world. Ambition is very inhuman, very unscrupulous; and to this imperial vice, under every form of government, may be traced the worst enormities of history. Notoriously even in England politicians think much of talent, much of crooked expediency, little of morality. Justice is talked of when convenient, and set aside when convenient.—It has been said that the corruption of what is best becomes worst; and that a bad woman is worse than a bad man. I am disposed to believe it. Yet I believe that the sex collectively has more of the milk of human kindness, and more shrinks from the characteristic cruelties of imperial governments, than does the male sex; and that the impurities which corrupt and disgrace Christian cities would become impossible, if women held equal rule with men. Women who have compassion for their sex, have *no right* to despise the franchise for themselves. It is *selfishness* to say,—“I have a good husband; therefore I do not care that my sex is legally subject to oppression, and thousands of them are trodden under foot.”

Moreover I beg the male part of the audience to remember, that if an attempt were made to disfranchise us men, a bloody civil war would be the inevitable result,—now, as once before. We should sacrifice human lives by the ten thousand, rather than be despoiled of the vote. Now there are women, not a few, who claim this same vote as their equal right; who tell us that we have no right to withhold it. *They* see it to be vital to the interest of their sex. If *we* do not see it:—well, perhaps we do not see that they need luxuries or money, any more than a vote; but, they tell us, we are not arbiters of either matter. To say that women do not *want* it, is like slaveholders who say that slaves do not *want* to be free. The plea is

F. W. Newman

partly false, wholly irrelevant. If we can justly claim the franchise for ourselves, we cannot refuse it to women.

But of what sort are the women who claim it? I am made peculiarly ashamed of my sex, when I hear men in derision call them *strong-minded*. Let me take an example,—rather an extreme example: it shall be HARRIET MARTINEAU. One who judged her severely from a spiritually philosophical point of view, remarked of her, that all her talents were practical and political. Is a woman to have no political voice, because, being strong-minded, she is an excellent woman of business and has high political talent? Another reviewer said of her, that she was a woman towards whom perhaps no man could feel tenderness, but every man must feel respect, and something like fear. Quite different in womanly qualities, but also strong-minded, is the aged MARY SOMERVILLE the astronomer; who is described as a lady of the gentlest and most courtly dignity. Quite different also is Miss BURDETT COUTTS. Where shall I stop in mentioning the names of English women who claim the suffrage? I will add but one, FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE. In the United States, it is a *fact*, against which it is vain to scoff, that the women who are politically most enlightened are also eager for Women's Suffrage. I say, it is a fact; because there we have an easy test of what is political enlightenment. Prejudice against colour has made more than half the white community cruelly unjust to the coloured race. Precisely those women whose justice, truth, and mercy made them take the lead, in spite of odium, and in spite of danger, as abolitionists of slavery, are at the head of the movement for equalizing women with men politically. That all go all lengths, I do not say; but at least they go so far as desiring the vote for women. Such is Mrs. HARRIET BEECHER STOWE: and let me remark, that that other Harriet, HARRIET MARTINEAU, was first to call all England in 1837 to sympathize in the Martyr Age of the United States, when abolitionists risked their lives and ruined their worldly prospects for negro freedom. To say that a woman is eminent in America for zeal on behalf of justice to the coloured race, is almost equivalent to telling us that she is an advocate of Women's Suffrage. I will name only one other American woman, whose position is very remarkable. She is a beautiful young lady under twenty-five, known to the whole Union as ANNA DICKINSON. Such is her eloquence, that she has been a power in the United States for the last three years. Old politicians go to hear her speak, and it is

A Lecture on Women's Suffrage

reported that tears have been seen running down their rugged faces under her rebukes and exhortations. When God has given to women such talents and such hearts, no heartless scoffers can keep them down. ANNA DICKINSON, you may be sure, claims female suffrage as well as negro suffrage and negro equality. So does GARRISON, the veteran retired abolitionist; so does WENDELL PHILLIPS, the eloquent and untiring advocate of justice to all races, of every colour and clime. And in this country, I may say boldly, it is not the more ignorant, the more narrow-minded and narrow-hearted part of either sex which claims the enfranchisement of women, but the same class as energetically seeks improved education. It is quite a peculiarity in this political movement, that it is supported by so many men known in science and literature, but not much known in politics. Besides, I hold in my hand a list of 102 M.P.s who are favourable to it. The list is made up out of the present Parliament: for I observe that Mr. J. STUART MILL's name is not in it, whose very absence reminds us of him. Moreover the names do not belong exclusively to one side of politics. It is sufficient to remark that the late Premier, the Right Hon. BENJAMIN D'ISRAELI was early to avow himself favourable to Women's claim; and that some ladies of title, who are warm in the Conservative cause, are as anxious as any Liberals can be for this justice to women.

[The Lecturer then read Miss F. P. COBBE's summary of nine Reasons "Why women desire the suffrage;" and after a practical call on the audience for aid, closed by saying,—]

Let no one think that he or she is too small or too poor to help. A little zeal goes a great way: so let my last word be,—give us your hearts, and we will make sure of getting your hands.

Published for the BRISTOL AND CLIFTON BRANCH of the
National Society for WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE.

Committee.

Miss LILIAS ASHWORTH, Claverton Lodge, Bath
Mrs. BEDDOE, 2 Lansdown Place
Mrs. ALFRED BRITTAN, 5 Lansdown Place
Rev. J. ESTLIN CARPENTER, 12 Brighton Park
Miss ESTLIN, *Treasurer*, Durdham Down
Miss FLORENCE HILL, Heath House, Stapleton
Emer. Prof. F. W. NEWMAN, *Secretary*, 1 Dover Place
Mr. J. F. NORRIS, 9 Buckingham Vale

Annual Subscribers of 1/- or upwards will be enrolled as Members.
The names of the COUNCIL and Officers are to be had on another paper.
