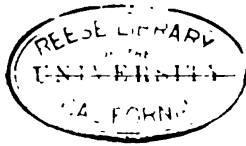


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POLITICAL AND SOCIAL.

BY
F. W. NEWMAN,

EMERITUS PROFESSOR OF UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, LONDON;
HONORARY FELLOW OF WORCESTER COLLEGE, OXFORD;
ONCE FELLOW OF BALLIOL COLLEGE, OXFORD.
AND M.R.A.S.



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WOMEN'S WRONGS.

"Leaflet of Clifton," 1867.

READERS of History and Lawyers are aware that Women's Wrongs are an ancient and terribly persistent fact. American law disfranchised, in one sentence, negroes, criminals, women, idiots, and minors.

Readers of newspapers cannot be ignorant of the miseries endured by wives from brutal husbands.

In ordinary decorous families, *sons* at lavish expense are trained to self-support. The *daughters* in one class have nothing spent on their education; in another, are educated as elegant ornaments of a drawing-room, where they live in luxury for a parent's delight; yet, when he dies, and their youth is spent, they are often turned adrift into comparative poverty, incompetent for self-help.

When complaint is made of this, the ascendant sex graciously tells them, "they ought to marry;" and this in a country where women are counted by the hundred thousand more numerous than men; where also men do not universally accept the state of marriage.

Meanwhile, the law is made as if to dissuade the woman from such a remedy. If she dare to adopt it, it instantly strips her of all her property, great or little; and if she earn anything, authorizes her husband to seize it by force. In the Marriage Service, the husband, as if in mockery, says: "With all my worldly goods I thee endow:" while the law allows him to gamble away her whole fortune the day after the marriage, or to live in riotous indulgence on *her* money and give to her the barest necessaries of life. Nay, not even these, if he so insult and torment her, that she will not live with him. He may maliciously refuse her the sight of her own children, and put them under the care of a paramour, to be trained into hatred of their mother. And if, to gain one sight of them, she return to his house for two days, the law holds her to have "condoned" all his offences, however flagrant.

The richer classes guard in great measure against the unfairness of the law to the wife in money matters, by the expensive, cumbrous, and often inconvenient system of Trustees. The poorer cannot afford it; nor is it at all applicable to a woman's earnings. From day to day we see that a wife may sink all at once into the depths of misery, if her husband be corrupted into drunkenness.

An extract from the proceedings of one of our police courts has been widely circulated in an Eastern newspaper, as illustrating (but not glorifying) English law. A man for beating his ass is sentenced to prison for a month, and the Magistrate expresses regret that he is not allowed to inflict a severer punishment. The culprit grumbles in reply that it is very hard upon him; for he had beaten his wife worse, and had only been sent to prison for eight days.

The law has of late been partially improved, and there is hope that it is about to be further improved, in regard to married women's property. But this cannot wisely set aside the inquiry—Why was such law ever made? what false principle in men's hearts or minds dictated it? does that principle still live and thrive? Unless we tear up the root of bitterness, inveterate injustice never can be subdued. To wish for justice and shudder at novelty of principle, is but to wish for an end and dread the means,—a signal and common type of weakness. Enlightened despots have sometimes appointed official Protectors of aborigines, who cannot be incorporated into the common citizenship of colonists. If the male sex had, in the eight hundred years to which England looks back, appointed Protectors of the female sex, no one can say how many of the worst oppressions might have been mitigated, or removed. It has indeed been said by some, that free colonists have been more oppressive to aborigines than despotic sovereigns. Be this as it may, it is clear that every class is practically selfish, not through evil intent, but from not feeling how the law pinches other classes. When the power and duty of the Crown to protect the weaker classes is removed, it is found that they do not always gain through the constitutional liberty of the classes above them. Hence, when the principle of self-protection for classes is established in part of a nation, events press on and on to the representation of every class, as absolutely necessary for social justice. And this points to the only creditable reply to the question, Why has our law been so unjust to women?—Because woman never had a voice in the

making of it, and men, as a class, have not realized the oppression of women as a class. Men have deep in their hearts the idea that women *ought* to be their legal inferiors; that neither the persons of women nor their property ought to remain their own; that marriage is not a free union on equal terms; and that the law ought to favour the stronger sex against the weaker. It is remarkable that our law is more unjust to women than that of the great historically despotic nations, and in some important respects less favourable than that of the Turks. All these things point out that *equality of the sexes in respect to the Parliamentary Franchise* is essential to justice. The conscience of men is opening to the truth. The horrors attested in the newspapers, and the revelations of the Divorce Courts, forbid longer inaction. Societies for promoting women's power of self-protection by equal right of suffrage are arising. The reader, male or female, is exhorted to aid in this work, as circumstances permit.