

WOMEN'S RIGHTS; AND THE DUTIES OF BOTH MEN AND WOMEN

EDITORIAL BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

THE causes which brought about so much of dreadful failure and wrongdoing to alloy the benefits and advances which followed on the French Revolution were symbolized and foreshadowed in the action of the first revolutionary national legislature. This body passed with wild applause resolutions declaring that the people were to have all imaginable rights, and then voted down a resolution setting forth that the same people had grave and onerous duties. Much, indeed, has America owed to the fact that her two greatest men, Washington and Lincoln, though they did not neglect rights, were even more concerned with duties.

I believe in woman's rights. I believe even more earnestly in the performance of duty by both men and women; for unless the average man and the average woman live lives of duty, not only our democracy but civilization itself will perish. I heartily believe in equality of rights as between man and woman, but also in full and emphatic recognition of the fact that normally there cannot be identity of function. Indeed, there must normally be complete dissimilarity of function between them, and the effort to ignore this patent fact is silly. I believe in woman's suffrage wherever the women want it. Where they do not want it, the suffrage should not be forced upon them. I think that it would be well to let the women themselves, and only the women, vote at some special election as to whether they do or do not wish the vote as a permanent possession. In other words, this is peculiarly a case for the referendum to those most directly affected—that is, the women themselves. I believe such a referendum was held in Massachusetts, in which a majority of the women who voted, voted in favor of the ballot. But they included only about five per cent of the women who were entitled to vote, and where the vote is so light, those not voting should be held to have voted no. This was in 1895. It would be well to try the experiment again in the more doubtful States like Massachusetts or New York. I should be entirely content to abide the decision, either way; for, though I do not think that the damage prophesied from women's voting would come, or has come where it has been tried, I also think that very much less

effect would be produced, one way or the other, than the enthusiasts believe. In other words, I do not regard the movement as anything like as important as either its extreme friends or extreme opponents think. It is so much less important than many other reforms that I have never been able to take a very heated interest in it.

Perhaps one reason why so many men who believe as emphatically as I do in woman's full equality with man take little interest in the suffrage movement is to be found in the very unfortunate actions of certain leaders in that movement, who seem desirous of associating it with disorderly conduct in public and with thoroughly degrading and vicious assaults upon the morality and the duty of women within and without marriage. I cordially agree with Dr. C. W. Saleeby, himself a strong advocate of woman's suffrage, when he says in his book on "Woman and Womanhood:" "Every individual case requires individual consideration, and no less than any individual case ever yet received. But in general those women who counsel the delay of the marriage age are opposing the facts of feminine development and psychology. They are indirectly encouraging male immorality and female prostitution, with the appalling consequences for those directly concerned, for hosts of absolutely innocent women, and for the unborn. Further, those who suppose that the granting of the vote is going to effect radical and fundamental changes in the facts of biology, the development of instinct and its significance in human action, are fools of the very blindest kind. Some of us find that it needs constant self-chastening and bracing up of the judgment to retain our belief in the cause of woman suffrage, of the justice and desirability of which we are convinced, assaulted as we almost daily are by the unnatural, unfeminine, almost inhuman blindness of many of its advocates."

Very few men in America have stood more prominently and emphatically for sound political principles than Ida M. Tarbell. She is one of the few women who influence men along this line, which is ordinarily peculiarly a man's line of influence. Therefore both men and women can afford to listen to her when, in her introduction to the "Book of Woman's Power," she says (I condense):

"Men and women have always crawled or soared together. The lot of woman is hard, but the human lot is hard. The assumption that the improvement of woman's condition depends upon the vote is quite as unsound as the charge of her inferiority. The woman in industry is, after all, but a transient. A training that will lead her to apply her power with appreciation and enthusiasm to domestic and not to political life is what she needs. It is harmful and unsound to believe that woman's position in society would improve in proportion as her activities and interests become the same as those of men. This implies that man's work in society is more important and developing than woman's. But both are essential to society, and who can prove that one essential factor is inferior to another essential factor? Her aptitudes and instincts and functions are different from those of man; and her differences are her strength. She must not prove her equality by doing in his way the things the man does; but by doing the things for which she is fitted, and which the world needs from her. Life is not saved by politics, but by principles."

In his admirable book on "The College Man and the College Woman," President Hyde, of Bowdoin, lays their duty plainly before them both with equal fearlessness and good sense; and one hardly knows whether most to admire his scorn for the licentious man, for the cruel or callous or merely selfish and inconsiderate man, and his insistence upon the same standard of morality for the two sexes, or his insistence to the woman that her life will be worthless unless she bears on her own back her share of the world burden, and feels in her own heart her part of the world sorrow, in normal experience within the home, the shop, the market, doing first of all in her own household her every-day and vital duties, so that thereby, and only thereby, she may become "the comrade of all who labor, the sister of all who serve."

If the woman suffrage movement were to be judged only by those advocates of it who discredit themselves and their sex by disorderly antics in public, and who assail the foundations of private and public morality in their endeavor, not to raise the sense of moral duty in man, but to lower the sense of moral duty in woman, I should certainly oppose the movement. But I do not believe these undesirable apostles are in any way to be accepted as exponents of the cause, and I call attention to the fact that they are prominent, not in the

region where woman suffrage does exist, but in regions where it does not exist.

I pin my faith to woman suffragists of the type of the late Julia Ward Howe. Julia Ward Howe was one of the foremost citizens of this Republic; she rendered service to the people such as few men in any generation render; and yet she did, first of all, her full duty in the intimate home relations that must ever take precedence of all other relations. There was never a better wife or mother; her children rose up to call her blessed, and the commonwealth should call her blessed for the children she bore and reared, for the character she transmitted to them, and the training she gave them in her household. We are fortunate in being able to point to such a woman as exemplifying all that we mean when we insist that the good woman's primary duties must be those of the home and the family, those of wife and mother; but that the full performance of these duties may be helped and not hindered if she also possesses a sense of duty to the public, and the power and desire to perform this duty.

In our Western States where the suffrage has been given to women I am unable to see that any great difference has been caused, as compared with neighboring States of similar social and industrial conditions where women have not the suffrage. There has been no very marked change in general political conditions, nor in the social and industrial position of woman. Yet what slight changes have occurred have been for the better, and not the worse. Moreover, I must say that, being a natural-born democrat, I do like to associate with people who possess every right that I possess. In those Western States it is a real pleasure to meet women, thoroughly womanly women, who do every duty that any woman can do, and who also are not only in fact but in theory on a level of full equality with men. I fail to see that these women are any less efficient in their households, or show any falling off in the sense of duty; I think the contrary is the case; and so far as their influence has affected political life at all it has affected it for good. I do not see much difference between Denver and the big cities of the East in those very matters where we would expect the influence of women's voting to count most; yet, after all, it is the women of Denver who have stood most stoutly behind Judge Lindsey. When I passed through Seattle last spring, it had just finished an election in which a most

needed bit of political house-cleaning had been performed; and the votes of the women had been a potent factor in securing decent government. The same thing was notably true in the Los Angeles election the other day. A very good citizen of Los Angeles, in a position fitting him to pass judgment, writes me as follows of this contest: "By the way, Colonel, I used to be dead against woman's suffrage, and although I voted for it and wrote for it—because it seemed to me right and just and a necessary part of sincere democracy—still I dreaded the consequences. Of course one swallow doesn't make a summer, but up to date in this contest the women have conducted themselves in a way to excite the liveliest admiration. They are setting the men a much-needed example of rapid, thorough work, with no foolish scrapping—dignified, conscientious, and effective."

Therefore I believe in woman suffrage wherever the women wish it. I would not force it upon them where, as a body, they do not wish it. I would leave the matter to be decided by vote of the women themselves. Most of the women whom I know best are against woman suffrage, and strongly criticize me for aiding in, as they term it, "forcing" it on them. But surely both the women who oppose the suffrage and the women who demand it ought to be willing to argue the matter out with the members of their own sex. If a majority of the women of a State vote affirmatively for the suffrage, it is time to give it to them. If only a small minority vote for it, it ought not to be forced upon the hostile and the indifferent majority. If benefit follows the suffrage, the suffragists will be justified. If there is weakening of moral fiber or any other evil as a result, they will be condemned, and will ultimately lose what they have gained. It is, and will ever remain, true of women as of men, that by their fruits shall ye know and judge them. Most of the women whom I know best are against woman suffrage precisely because they approach life from the standpoint of duty. They are not interested in their "rights" so much as in their obligations. They tell me that they feel that already they have as much to do as they can well attend to; that their duties are numerous and absorbing—although they are happy in doing them; and that, for the very reason that they take their duties seriously, and would accept suffrage seriously as a duty, they do not think that such a heavy additional burden should be put on their

shoulders. It is, however, with me a question whether these women, with busy, happy, duty-filled lives, are really typical of those other women who are more or less defenseless. These other women, wage-earning girls for instance, and wives whose husbands are brutal or inconsiderate, would, I believe, be helped by the suffrage, if they used it wisely and honorably. I hope that if women voted we should be able to wage a more rapidly successful war against the "white slave" traffic and kindred iniquities.

But this would come about only if women remembered, what so many men forget, that social evils can be successfully assailed only if the assailants avoid hysteria as carefully as they shun lukewarmness, and are resolved to combine with their fervor cool-headed common sense and the willingness to look unpleasant facts straight in the face.

I most earnestly desire to emphasize my feeling that the question of woman suffrage is unimportant compared to the great fundamental questions that go to the root of right conduct as regards both men and women. There should be equality of rights and duties, but not identity of function; and with the man, as with the woman, the prime duties are those related to the home and the family. Selfishness, frivolity, viciousness, love of ease, shirking toil and risk, avoidance of all that is hard, fear of life—of the only kind of life worth living—all of these are as criminal in the man as in the woman. I am not speaking of exceptions among men and women, but of the average healthy citizen of either sex, of the citizen upon whose character and welfare the success of our great democratic National experiment depends. The first duty of the average citizen is to be a good father or mother, husband or wife. Heaping up money as the end of life or leading a life of vapid ease and avoidance of labor and effort, or any other form of shirking duty, means the rotting of the soul. Cynical fools who advise men against marriage are fond of saying that "to go far one must go alone." But the goal reached alone is not worth reaching! Other fools, advising women to forsake their primary duties and "go into industry," prattle about the "economic dependence" of the wife. Economic dependence, forsooth! Any husband who regards his wife as "economically dependent," or who fails to recognize her as a full partner, needs severe handling by society or the State. The service of the good

mother to society is the most valuable economic asset that the entire commonwealth can show, and is of infinitely more worth to society than any possible service the woman could render by any other, and necessarily inferior, form of industry.

Motherhood must be protected; and the State should make the security of the mothers its first concern. Dr. Saleeby, in his book already quoted, utters the soundest common sense on this subject. Mothers (and children) should not be allowed to work in any way that interferes with the home duties; and widowed mothers with children and deserted mothers with children must be cared for. *But the care must not be given in such way as to encourage the man to shirk his duty.* His prime duty is to provide for his wife and his children; if he fails to do so, the law should instantly seize him and force him to do so. It should be even more severe in thus forcing him to care for his children if he has not married their mother. In such case the man has not merely grievously sinned against another human being, but has grievously sinned against society, against the commonwealth. There must be common parental care for children by both father and mother. Marriage buttresses motherhood by fatherhood. Just as it is the duty of the mother to bear and rear the children, so it is the duty of the father to support the mother and children, and if he fails in this duty the State should actively interfere and force him to perform it. We should not, in a spirit of sentimentality or false humanity, permit the State to relieve him of this duty or encourage him to escape the responsibility by having the State assume it; he is the one on whom the responsibility should fall, and he should be rigidly held to the performance of his duty. *"The last way in which to secure the rights of women is to abrogate the duties of men."* In the future it may well be that unmarried men will have to pay, as they ought to pay, a far heavier share of taxation than at present; but under no circumstances should fathers be permitted to shirk their duty of providing for their children, and the so-called reformers who advocate schemes towards this end are working for the corruption and dissolution of the entire social fabric.¹ Our aim must be the

¹In speaking of Dr. Saleeby's book, I wish to commend in the heartiest way the sound sense as well as sound morality he shows in treating of the hideous evils due to male licentiousness, evils the effect of which are felt by the entire body politic. I do not at all points agree with Dr. Saleeby; but he has rendered a great service.

healthy economic interdependence of the sexes, based on equality of rights and of obligations, including the obligation of sexual and domestic morality; any attempt to bring about the kind of "economic independence" which means a false identity of economic function spells mere ruin. The home, based on the love of one man for one woman and the performance in common of their duty to their children, is the finest product of Christianity and civilization. Our consistent effort must be to strengthen it, and any movement to destroy it marks the nadir of folly and wickedness.

Much can be done by law, and whatever can thus be done should be done. But much more can be done by a vigorous, enlightened, and effectively aroused public opinion. Not only easy divorce, but the shameful shirking of duty by men and women which leads to such divorce and to all kinds of domestic unhappiness, and all unhealthy love of ease and vapid excitement, and inability to prize the really highest things in life, should be unsparingly condemned, not only in theory but in practice. It should be a subject of just indignation wherever a duty is shirked; and we should hold in unmeasured scorn the empty laughter of the fool who sees in such shirking of duty only matter for mirth. In one of the magazines a month or two ago, in what purported to be the "funny" column, was a story of a man proposing marriage to a woman who hesitated to accept him, and he was represented as holding out inducements, saying: "I am willing that we should have no children, so that you will be able to go to Europe whenever you want to, entertain your friends, and not be tied down," to which she answers, "Good!" Foolish and brutal jesting about infamy, about the profanation of what should be holiest in life, is the mark of revolting depravity; for public opinion to tolerate such jests and stories is as if we should tolerate an ape capering over an altar. Woe to us as a Nation if our men and women, our young men and maidens, fail to face life with the brave and solemn purpose to lead it on the plane of high endeavor, and to find their supreme satisfaction in the full performance, and not the avoidance, of duty. "Mother," by Kathleen Norris, is a charmingly told story; and therefore it is a most effective tract which should teach this profound and lofty truth to many, many people who cannot be reached by the preacher or essayist.

To sum up: The point which I wish to

emphasize is that the supreme importance and high position of the woman of the type of Julia Ward Howe cannot be materially increased by the possession of the ballot. I am glad that the good, wise, and brave mother should have the ballot. I am especially glad if its possession will add to the high dignity of her position in the eyes of men. But I cannot conceive of any man's now failing to hold such a mother as more worthy of respect than any man, or than any other woman. The advocates of woman suffrage, unless they utterly and mischievously lose their perspective, will necessarily remember that the highest type of the woman of the future must be essentially identical with the highest type of the woman of the present and of the past—the wife and mother who performs the most important of all social duties with wisdom, courage, and efficiency. She is the woman who is, and always has been, and always will be the most useful and important of all the citizens of the State. No other work, done by any other woman, or by any man, is, or ever will be, as vital as hers to the well-being of society. No other work is, or ever will be, as difficult or as important. There are of course individual cases where the unmarried man or unmarried woman renders great service, just as in every efficient army there are certain men who do not carry arms and who yet render indispensable service. But exactly as in the last analysis the efficiency of the army depends primarily upon the efficiency of the average man who bears arms, so in society as a whole in the last analysis the welfare of the commonwealth rests fundamentally upon the high character of the average family—that is, upon the way in which the average father and the average mother do their duty to one another and to their children. The highest type of such family is already, in the present, of just the kind that it should be in the future. It is a partnership in which the partners are on a full equality of right, and have in common the strongest sense of duty, but in which the duties and the functions are on many points necessarily different. There should be the same level of love, of consideration, of respect and forbearance, to which each partner is bound to attain in his or her treatment of the other. Each should ever think of the rights of the other, and each should ever think of what is even more important than the rights—that is, of his or her own duties.

I believe in the movement for woman

suffrage, and believe that it will ultimately succeed and will justify itself. But I regard it as of far less consequence than many another movement for the betterment of present-day conditions as affecting both men and women. I feel that, instead of having to develop in the future, as something hitherto unknown, the highest and most useful type of woman, we already have that type with us now. The all-important thing is to endeavor in every way to raise as many other individuals as possible to the serene level of this type. In the same way, the important thing to work for in marriage is to raise the average marriage relations to the level of those that already obtain in the finest type of existing marriage. No woman will ever be developed who will stand above the highest and finest of the wives and mothers of today and of the yesterdays. The exercise of the suffrage can never be the most important of women's rights or women's duties. The vital need for women, as for men, is to war against vice, and frivolity, and cold selfishness, and timid shrinking from necessary risk and effort.

Men and women alike must withstand the wicked folly which places the gratification of mean tastes and ambitions and of a thirst for vapid excitement above the high happiness which can come only from the life of worthy effort spent with the full and glad performance of duty as its first object. The vice and folly of men and women, which lead to the divorce court or take shape in the curse of voluntary sterility, are fundamental evils, of prime, of capital importance. The ruin of motherhood and childhood by the merciless exploitation of the labor of women and children is a crime of capital importance. Any tendency to permit the man to shirk his duty as breadwinner, as keeper of the household, who owes his best effort to his wife and children, is an evil of capital importance. Any force or tendency which lowers the efficiency or the standard of living of either the average man or the average woman, whether on the farm or in the workshop or the store or the counting-room or the professions, is a tremendous evil, an evil of capital importance. In the long run and taken as a whole, men and women will go up or go down together, and all reforms of first-class importance must look towards raising both men and women to a higher level, alike as regards the things of the body and as regards the things of the soul.