



Woman Suffrage

and

Its Basic Argument

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TAXATION WITHOUT REPRESENTATION IS TYRANNY.

This was the war cry of the Revolution. It defined the grievance of an oppressed colony against a mother country. When the war was over, however, and the new Republic was organized, the leaders recognized a broader application of the maxim. Not only is it tyranny, they said, for one country to tax another without representation, but it is an oppression equally despotic for any country to tax a single citizen without granting a vote in return as a means of defence against injustice. In response to this logic the old restrictions upon the suffrage which had existed in the colonies were removed, and the payment of a tax was the only qualification required of a voter. Jew and Gentile, Catholic and Protestant, church members and non-church members, foreign and native born became voters on equal terms for the first time in the history of the world. Negroes, Indians, criminals, insane, idiots, non-taxpayers and women were the only persons who remained disfranchised. We may ask why our forefathers were not logical enough to recognize women taxpayers upon the same terms as men and to extend the ballot to them as well. The answer is easy to discover; the class of women taxpayers was exceedingly small. No married woman was permitted by law to control

her own property, or use its income as she chose, nor could she legally collect her own wages. She was thus prevented from accumulating property, and practically barred from all the rights of ownership of that which might come to her by inheritance. In a new country where there were many more men than women, unmarried women with property were rare, and women with property speedily became wives again. Indeed, so few were the independent women of property that the oversight becomes excusable. In our time, women, married or single, may collect their own wages, engage in business and control property. A careful estimate was made by the State Suffrage Association of New York, in 1896, county by county, of the amount of property owned by women and, allowing generously for inaccuracies, it was demonstrated that the valuation of the property possessed by the women of this state was quite equal to the estimated valuation of all the property of the American Colonists at the time they were defending the principle "Taxation without representation is tyranny." In 1899 the men and women taxpayers of New Orleans voted upon a new sewerage and drainage system, and it was discovered that of 25,000 taxpayers, 15,000, or three-fifths, were women. In Boston in 1900, an examination of the assessor's books was made by the Massachusetts Suffrage

Association and revealed the fact that \$150,000,000 worth of property was owned by women. These examples only illustrate the fact known to all, that the women of to-day own and control vast amounts of property. If it was tyranny, as Americans believe, for the Government of King George at the close of the eighteenth century, to follow the precedents of all history, and to tax the Colonists without their consent, it is a tyranny infinitely more outrageous at the beginning of the twentieth century for the United States Government to tax its women citizens without giving them representation.

GOVERNMENTS DERIVE THEIR JUST POWERS FROM
THE CONSENT OF THE GOVERNED.

Later a great reform movement with a platform favorable to the abolishment of the property qualifications swept the country. Its leaders declared that there was a broader and more just basis of government than taxation, viz., "that those who obey the law should have a ballot's share in the making of the law." For the first time in the world, the political rights of the individual were recognized. It was argued that the non-taxpaying clergyman might cast a worthier vote than the commercial-minded money lender; the school teacher, or the college graduate, might

contribute wiser judgment to an election than the ignorant property holder. Under the influence of the logic of these claims, combined with the enlarging conceptions of the "rights of man," the property qualifications were abolished, state by state. Now no taxpaying qualification for the general vote exists in any state.

Again, we may ask, why was not the individuality of the woman recognized upon equal terms with that of man? Because the whole world believed she possessed no individuality worthy of respect. All law and custom of church and state had combined to subordinate her personality to that of her father, husband and son. In the economic world she was scarcely known. Her labor received small compensation and few occupations were open to her. In educational fields she had not appeared, for high schools and colleges were everywhere closed to her and her intellectual development had been universally discouraged. Popular opinion held the subordination of women to be the result of "Divine intention" and women very largely accepted the popular judgment pronounced upon them as final. But times have changed. Now the word "obey" is rarely heard in a marriage ceremony, and when it is pronounced, it is rather in preservation of the ancient form than of its meaning; for it is all but universally conceded that homes are happier,

more dignified and of a higher order where men and women occupy a position of equality in them, than under the former custom of headship of the husband and subordination of the wife. Women are to-day individual entities with a place in the world which they have won by the merit of growing intelligence and increasingly worthy service. The more intelligent classes of people now declare that a wife does not "owe obedience" to her husband as was once the common belief, but that their relation should be one of interdependence and co-operation. It certainly follows logically that if the wife no longer "owes obedience" to her husband, all women collectively cannot "owe obedience" to all men collectively. If the wife is the equal of her husband in the home, it follows consistently that the relation of the sexes in the state must be that of equality of rights and mutual helpfulness; and the laws of the country must represent equally the feminine and masculine point of view. Any government which bases its suffrage upon the theory that "governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed," and yet persistently withholds "consent" from half "the governed" is guilty of high-handed tyranny.

Since the Republic was established, one by one the classes of disfranchised citizens have been enfranchised. Non-taxpayers, negroes and In-

dians have been qualified to vote. To three of the five remaining classes still disfranchised, the opportunity for promotion into voting citizenship is open. Let the criminal repent and promise to become law abiding, and the ballot is at once thrust into his hand. Let the insane regain his senses, and the vote is his. Let the pauper become self-supporting and his disqualification is at once removed. Idiots and women are, therefore, the only truly disfranchised classes in the United States. They stand upon precisely the same plane—it is impossible for either to qualify for the suffrage. A woman may take degrees and honors from universities of the highest rank; she may pay taxes upon millions of dollars' worth of property; she may labor side by side with men in our great factories and shops; she may teach our youth American Citizenship in our schools; she may lead great movements of reform and even of politics; she may devote her life to the welfare of her government, yet she is permitted no more voice upon election day than is her compeer, the idiot! She may possess a genius which lifts her as far above her fellow-men as the snowclad peak rises above the plain below; she may possess a spirituality sufficient to redeem the world, yet her government places her upon the political level of the most pitiful of defectives!

These two so-called American principles, viz., "Taxation without representation is tyranny," and "Governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed," compose the sole argument which has enfranchised men. In every civilized land there is either universal suffrage or a strong movement working toward that end; yet no other claim for its establishment has been put forward than that contained in these two political axioms. Upon these grounds American women ask for the ballot. They are taxed; they are governed. Their plea is simple, logical, unanswerable. That they remain unenfranchised in a land like ours which boasts that it has led the world's movement for self-government, is the most curious of anomalies. No explanation, no excuse, can justify such disfranchisement, or define it as anything short of flagrant injustice and unwarranted tyranny.

Public sentiment alone can right this wrong. The movement needs you. Will you not enlist in our army and help us to do battle with the forces of prejudice, conservatism, and tradition? Do it now.