The Wrong and Peril of Woman Suffrage

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The Wrong and Peril of Woman Suffrage
Dedicated to
Men and Women who
look before they leap
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I

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

The proposal to extend the suffrage to women imposes upon men the duty of deciding whether to retain power where it was lodged by the founders of existing governments, or to make women eligible to vote and hold office upon the same terms as men.

If woman ought to have the suffrage, she has been, with inconsiderable exceptions, grievously oppressed in every period of time, and in every part of the world. Another consideration accentuates the situation: if Woman-Suffrage is essential to the welfare of society, it is of vast importance to all classes that it be conferred; for society needs all possible advantages, especially all safeguards. Besides, if woman has been wrongfully deprived of the right to vote, as it is man, claiming it as his prerogative, who has monopolized this mighty lever of influence, every husband, father, brother, and son, should as speedily as possible remove his iron heel from the neck of wife, mother, sister, and daughter.

If woman is better off without the franchise, and the responsibilities it entails, and if it would diminish
rather than increase her power for good, it is important that she should be fully aware of that fact and equally so for man to see clearly how to vindicate himself from the charge of oppression and tyranny.

This subject drew my attention when in college and interest therein was intensified a few years later when I was in attendance upon the "May Meetings" in Boston, at that time famous throughout the country. There Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Abby Kelly Foster, Wendell Phillips, Lucy Stone, Mrs. Livermore, Julia Ward Howe, and others of note, at white heat with zeal, were at their best in argument, eloquence, satire and wit.

Certain individuals whom I greatly respected avowed themselves favourable to Woman Suffrage. Desirous to promote any true reform, I examined the proposal in all its aspects and relations and have studiously followed its varying phases with the result of a settled conviction that to impose upon woman the burdens of government in the state would be a "Reform—against—Nature" and an irreparable calamity.
II

IF EVER—FOREVER

In considering this proposition, it should be constantly borne in mind that an act investing woman with the duty of voting, with all that it implies, once passed, can never be repealed.

Most constitutional and legislative changes,—if found injurious or useless,—can be revoked; but extensions of suffrage do not belong to that class. England cannot to-day disfranchise the various classes to which during the last century it gave the power of voting. Although at the time of the adoption of the Constitution of the United States, property qualifications for voters were general, and these or others may still be maintained by states if they so decide, no citizen can imagine that a law restricting suffrage to property holders could now be passed.

It is equally true that were suffrage to be extended to woman in the whole country, or in any state, it could never be repealed; for the reason that the persons to be disfranchised would have the power of voting against the proposition to disfranchise them.

This proposal therefore is by far the most important ever made since the founding of a limited monarchy or a republic. It is a scheme not only to double the