

RECENT CRITICS AND CRITICISMS OF THE SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT

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RECENT criticisms, adverse in character, of the equal franchise movement have taken various directions, of which the following are notable signposts:

1. Stanley Bowdle's speech against the Mondell resolution in the United States House of Representatives, January 12, 1915.
2. Agnes Repplier's article on "Women and War," in the May number of *The Atlantic Monthly*.
3. The editorial in *The New York Times*, February 7, 1915.

Concerning Bowdle's speech, the less said the better, and this for our own dignity and self-respect. Pity it is that it cannot be expunged from the national record. It was a disgrace to civilization. Purporting to be an indictment of American womanhood as represented by some of the noblest women our race has produced, it proved to be a far sadder and more serious reflection upon American manhood, especially as that manhood was represented in the late Democratic Congress. The only women upon whom it could possibly reflect would be the women of Bowdle's own household. Historically, we have flattered ourselves that the old Puritan spirit of morality, sobriety and stern integrity fashioned the States of the old Northwest; yet one of them, Ohio, produced Bowdle and sent him back, presumably as her fittest representative, to Washington. We dismiss his speech with the remark that its argument was fallacious, and its whole tone coarsely facetious. Would that the Sixty-third Congress, in making its contribution to the national archives, could do likewise.

Of quite another character is Agnes Repplier's discussion of "Women and War." Here the argument is sound and the arraignment, if such we may call it, is not so much an arraignment of the woman's suffrage movement itself as of certain women prominent in that movement, who are now identifying themselves with the universal peace movement, or finding in the present war a principal argument for electoral extension. Pre-eminent among those who have talked much and most foolishly stands Mrs. Pethick Lawrence, whose record in the history of British militancy does not begin to compare with Mrs. Pankhurst's in personal bravery, but whose unfortunate public utterances are the chief occasion of Miss Repplier's denunciation. The facts of history are not such as to convince us that women are necessarily by temperament and inclination committed to peace or that they will shrink from war any more than will men when national honor is at stake—rather the reverse; and the best proof of that today is to be seen in the martial attitude of European women. The patriotic activity of Mrs. Pankhurst is typical and natural. Peace can be bought, even by women, at too great a price. And, as the latest issue of *The Graphic* so pertinently intimates, Jane Addams and others like her might better have

stayed at home instead of journeying to The Hague in the interests of peace at this particular juncture, for "Who is going to stop the war? Certainly not the people who have not made it. Only the warmakers can be the peacemakers, and to hope for any other ending is mere futility."

The most interesting collection of anti-suffrage arguments recently given appeared in the widely-commented upon *New York Times* editorial. That editorial, be it remembered, was a treasure, because it was archaic. It

was so much so that many of its readers could not bring themselves to take it seriously. Many thought it ironical, an *expose*; in fact, of the *Opposition* in all its absurdity, and some thought it an advertising device. Whatever it was, it calls here for more than a passing notice. Its main contention is that the admission of women to the electorate would cause political muddle and social turmoil, since women are without political experience and are unfitted by nature to obtain any. They have never ruled a State successfully without the aid of men. Men are out in the world working, and gaining by contact with one another the training that is essential for the right exercise of the voting privilege. Here it might be retorted that, in all his remarks, the editorial writer himself shows an ignorance of history, of political science, and of present-day social and economic conditions. Like Rip Van Winkle, he must have just awakened from a long sleep, a sleep that lasted hundreds of years. He evidently is not in the business world himself sufficiently to know that women are there, too, and in immense numbers. They have been gaining experience for a long, long time. Man secured his vote, not by gift of nature, but by slow degrees and as a result of hard struggles. The personal rule of one man is contrary to the American ideal of government.

The best rulers of both sexes and of all times have been those who have conceded that ability may perchance exist in others besides themselves whose advice is not to be despised. Moreover, women have always occupied a more prominent place in the councils of men than meagre historical narratives of a secondary sort give them credit for. In the feudal age, women led armies to battle, and, in their capacity as property holders, had political rights which they exercised at discretion. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries women were the chief diplomats. To them were usually entrusted the more delicate and important missions. It is not fair to deny justice because of possible consequences due to human frailty, for were manhood enfranchisement to be judged by every exhibition of corruption and incompetency that comes to our notice, the roll of charges would be so long that there could be no adequate defense, and democracy would have to be counted an absolute failure.



ANNIE HELOISE ABEL, Ph. D.

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