

Women in Politics.

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In the year book my subject is phrased thus without any limitation whatever, but I assume that the program committee intended to confine it to recent times, to the modern conception of politics and in a great measure to our own country, since otherwise one would be facing a task comparable to that undertaken by Wells in writing the "Outline of History".

Considering the question for a moment in the unrestricted sense, we realize that women have been in politics since the foundation of the world. Many primitive groups developed first as matriarchies. The women were naturally the leaders of the fire which meant so much in tribal life, and the superstitions which clustered about the kindling of the flame served to enhance the importance of their position. This dominance of the female was frequently accompanied by the practice of polyandry, and this plurality of husbands emphasized the necessity of tracing the descent in the female line, a custom which was quite general among primitive peoples as the maternal parent was the only one of whom they could be absolutely certain. All of these factors tended to make the position of women among prehistoric peoples one of great importance, indeed we are probably doing the cave man an injustice when we compare him with our modern slaves. It was only in early historic times and among certain racial groups, that the status of woman was degraded until she was looked upon as a chattel.

We find in every age, however, and among every people, no matter how severe the position of the sex may

be, certain women who have made a lasting ~~impression~~ ^{mark} on the history of their times. Apparently the dominant male was able to make his legal wife realize that "woman's place was in the home", so that, with certain highly laudable exceptions, the less said about the character of these ladies, the better for them and for us. Aspasia moulded Pericles and Greece, Poppaea persuaded Nero to persecute the Christians, Theodora thwarted the plans of the vicious Justinian, Madame de Maintenon influenced Louis XIV to the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. If you require a more respectable list, you may recall that Deborah, the prophetess, was a judge in Israel, and we may assume that it was practical politics when Joel drove the tent pins into the temple of Dives.

History would wear a different and intensely interesting aspect if beside the deeds of the men were written the influence of the women. It has always existed, this feminine influence, imperceptible yet irresistible, and its effect on history is incalculable.

This was the force with which, not many years ago, we were asked to content ourselves, rather than to court the use of any thing as unsexing as the ballot.

It would be a fascinating piece of research to collect the instances where a woman has had the determining influence which destroyed a dynasty or saved a nation from apparent destruction. Joan of Arc saved France from the English yoke and re-animating the spirit of nationality; the pride and obstinacy of Marie Antoinette gave the added pressure needed to force the Bourbons

from the throne of France. Her mother, Maria Theresa, saved Austria from dismemberment, but left a lasting blot upon her memory by assisting in the partition of Poland.

In the more restricted sense, which I believe to have been the intention of the members of the program committee any discussion of women in politics is inseparably bound up with the discussion of woman suffrage. From the position of importance and the freedom she had enjoyed among primitive people woman had come, in the time of the Roman Empire to be looked upon as a chattel, as much a possession of her husband as his slaves or his cattle.

Mrs. Catt in "A World Review of Woman Suffrage" says - "Before the Christian Era began, war, with its accompaniment of enslaved women and polygamy had combined to reduce the women of the nations thus leading the world's civilization to a position of abject servitude. Sold into wifedom among the richer classes, or into prostitution among the poorer ones, robbed of property or means to accumulate it, ignorant, uneducated, repressed, the fate of the average woman depended solely upon the affection or caprice of father, husband or son. The beauty, coquetry, or wit of woman not infrequently won for them a place of honor and importance, but it was well known that the position of even the cleverest might be wrecked at the whips of their male relatives.

Such was the position of woman under the Roman law which became the basis of law throughout Europe. Under the Code Napoleon the laws regarded ^{women}

were very little changed, and through the British⁴⁻ Common Law, this same Roman system of jurisprudence became the basis of American Law. All of these systems emphasized the financial dependence of a woman on her husband or father. She could possess no property, and her own earnings and an estate bequeathed to her alike became his property. In practically every relation in life women found their way impeded by this assumption of inferiority. The professions or trades they might follow, the salaries they might draw, their rights to the guardianship of their own children, these were the bitter acts of injustice which stimulated the early suffrage workers to attempt to better the position of women and to get the ballot both as a weapon and a safeguard rather than as an end in itself. The widow had the rights that did have some legal rights, the wife had none. Mary Gray Peck ironically comments: "If a system had been devised with the purpose of degrading marriage and inflicting women to remain outside it, none could have been more beautiful in its completeness than the common law."

Even in pre-revolutionary times there were not lacking women in the colonies, who rebelled at the subordination which was forced upon them. Mistress Ann Hutchinson, was banished from Massachusetts and lacked little of becoming a martyr because she insisted on the privilege of free speech on religious matters. During the war such women as Betty Ross, Mercy Otis Warren, Abigail Adams, Mrs. Prentiss

and Hannah See Corbin were demanding liberty not only for their country but for their sex.

The first real achievements in the struggle for a freer life for women lay on the side of education. Catherine Beecher, older sister of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mary Lyon of Mt. Holyoke College, Harriet Hunt and Elizabeth Blackwell were among the earliest workers for better educational opportunities for women. The temperance cause and the anti-slavery question were burning ones at the time, and we may perhaps consider the appearance of women as delegates, the contest over their right to serve and to speak from the platform as the first intrusion of American women into politics.

The bitterness growing out of these conflicts and the resentment of the women at the injustices which they were forced to bear, inspired a few brave souls with the conception of complete political equality between men and women. The first Women Rights Convention in the history of the world met in Seneca Falls in 1848 - a year of notable revolutions in many countries. Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were the leaders in the convention, but in the course of a few years other women whose names are equally well known joined the movement.

The history of the suffrage movement from this point is so well known as to require only a brief discussion. It was a struggle against intensely bitter opposition, which hesitated at no form of violence or ridicule at first the leaders had struggled with equal bravory for

property and family rights, educational and professional rights, prohibition of the liquor traffic and abolition of slavery, but the clearer sighted saw gained the conviction that it was impossible to reform the world in one generation, and decided to select their efforts on equal political rights for women in the conviction that the other reforms must follow.

One of the early questions, which at this distance seems wholly humorous was the question of dress reform. Remembering the trailing skirts, spreading hoods and tight waists of the period, one does not wonder at the desire for emancipation. After a thorough trial of the bloomer costume it was eventually given up. Mrs. Stanton said that bloomers were adapted only to forms of classic perfection, and Miss Cuthbert said that wearing them had been a physical comfort but a mental crucifixion. For some years, however, the platform of the women's rights conventions offered the diverting spectacle of Lucy Stone's black silk and velvet bloomer outfit, beside the Quaker simplicity of Lucretia Mott and the more conventional attire of the other leaders.

The first victory of the movement was in the enfranchisement of women in Wyoming in 1869. Many legal disabilities were removed in other states and more and more the trades and professions were opened to women. Oberlin was the first college to establish the precedent of co-education in 1833, but the example was followed by all the western state universities, and by most western schools. In 1919

the century of struggle culminated in the constitutional amendment which gave women the same political rights as men.

It is indeed a notable list, that of the women who led the fight for political equality, Secretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Lucy Stone Blackwell, Catherine Brown Blackwell, Mary A. Livermore, Anna Howard Shaw and Carrie Chapman Catt.

In 1870, chiefly through the efforts of Lucy Stone, "The Woman's Journal" was founded. For many years it was published under the management of her daughter, Alice Stone Blackwell. Now it appears as "The Woman's Citizen" - a splendid and interesting monthly which keeps one abreast of political movements of interest to women in a perfectly non-partisan spirit.

The passage of the equal suffrage amendment has not yet put women on an absolute equality with men in the eyes of the law all over the United States. You have all read of the attempt to put a blanket enactment through Congress to attain this end, and the opposition to it by many sincere workers who believe that this will do away with laws affording women special privileges, such as shorter hours, improved conditions for work etc. I must confess that I did not follow this controversy with sufficient attention to come to any conclusion of my own as to which view is the correct one, and I had not sufficient time to look up authoritative opinions on the subject.

Many of the Southern states, particularly those in which the Code Napoleon was in force during colonial times are the worst sinners in this respect. In general women have been less active politically in southern states, altho' we have the interesting spectacle of "Ma" Ferguson, as governor of Texas, while the newspapers are full of discussions as to whether "Ma" or "Pa" actually wields the power. One hears little of Governor Nellie Ross in Wyoming, she seems to be as successful, at least, as the average man.

Most of the first instances of women actually filling an important office, such as congress-man, or perhaps I should say congress-woman, came from their choice by their constituency to take the place of the dead husband. In every instance of which I have read, the woman, whether chosen or have been received or her husband filled the position with dignity and credit. These positions are so commonly filled by women now that they are no longer news as in the days when the news which the first woman representative shed in voting for war with Germany filled every paper.

Law in some instances and customs in others still prevent women from exercising many of the rights which male voters claim. In Illinois for instance women are not permitted on juries, while in this state jury service by women has become a commonplace. It is rather difficult to obtain thoroughly up-to-date information on the exact status of women in the various states, so that I shall not enter into more detail on this subject.

I shall read some excerpts from recent articles on woman in politics, one by Elizabeth Marbury, or well known New York woman who has been prominent in the Democratic party, the others by anonymous women. They agree on this point, that if women are not to be "counted out" in politics they must concern themselves not only with world movements such as peace, prohibition and conservation which involve chiefly the signing of petitions and writing epistles to congressmen and senators who return answers of mastery in direction, but with ward caucuses and county conventions.

There has been a certain amount of criticism, which appears to me very unjust, because women in the six years or more of full suffrage have not effected a complete reform of American politics. It is quite true that the women have not held together in a woman's party as some observers seemed to expect, but as workers in ^{the} organized parties their influence has certainly been great and almost invariably favorable. Everyone admits that women of education and position have interested themselves in their civic duties to a much greater extent than men in the same position did heretofore, and are stimulating the men to greater interest. Political reforms are notoriously slow, and another ten or even twenty years, with a new generation brought up in full enjoyment of the franchise will be required to tell the real story of women in politics.