

“Why Homemakers Need the Ballot,” by Helen Train Tannehill
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Why Homemakers Need the Ballot.

While firmly convinced that all adult intelligent human beings of who are amenable to the law and subject to taxation should have the right to vote because it is their natural right as citizens, because its influence will be broadening and educative to themselves, as well as because they need the ballot for self-protection in their life work; and while believing, therefore, that all women should share the suffrage with men, I will only consider the question of suffrage for wives and mothers. I thus confine myself to less than the topic assigned me; for fathers, as well as mothers, should be engaged in home making.

Although it appears to many minds self evident that the business woman needs the ballot, her work being similar to that of men, yet it is none the less true that the mother should be defended and educated by this most potent influence.

While the reform of the laws is not in itself the fundamental thing in ethics, it is nevertheless an important factor, more perhaps as furnishing a standard of conduct than because of the punishment of the wrong doer. As long as we have laws at all, we should try to make them good. And the dignity and experience thus gained by women would react in enabling them to see more wisely how to govern their own households, in addition to the State's being enriched by the housewifely knowledge and experience of women. By this action and reaction we would thus get mutual and continual progress. Women would also command a respect from their sons which it is difficult for a disfranchised class to obtain. This respect, besides being proper to the dignity of motherhood, would enable mothers to impress moral truths upon the minds of their sons, especially their duty as men, to keep their manhood as a holy trust free from strain.

Here we come to the question of personal purity. What an influence against the licensing of houses of professional prostitution would be wielded by the enfranchised wives and mothers of America! As our civilization becomes older, and population concentrates for successive generations in a few centres, we approach slowly but steadily the old world idea of legal license for, and medical inspection of professional prostitute women. I have not time to discuss this question in detail, but it is of profound importance. Those who wish extended information, will find it in the *Philanthropist*, a magazine devoted to reform, especially legal, on this line, and edited by Aaron M. Powell, who has also written a book on State Regulation of Vice. Mr. Powell has devoted over 20 years exclusively to this work, both in America and abroad, and he is an earnest advocate of Equal Suffrage.

Mayors are frequently elected who favor license, some ignorantly, no doubt, but others for reasons not so honorable. In most towns, no attempt is made to ~~drive out~~ close the houses, and arrests are made only when the quiet of the neighborhood is disturbed. I know a town in Ohio in which is a house which never has been raided in 15 years. The Chief of Police told me that he knew the character of the house, but that it was his policy never to raid houses which were not noisy. I am aware that it is said that vicious women would have a bad influence at the polls. If that should keep good women away, then how many good men ought also to be absent from the polls; for everyone knows that there are a great many more prostitute men than women. The Mayor of an Ohio City said several years ago to me that 5 to 1 would be a very conservative estimate. To say that the good influence of all the virtuous wives and

mothers of America would be counter-balanced by that of professional prostitutes is so scandalous an assertion, that to state it is enough to show that it is false. And I cannot believe that the more intelligent and earnest mothers would see these or any other pitfalls in the path of their children without doing all in their power to remove the danger. Therefore let us increase the power and intelligence of mothers.

While our laws show much improvement in the property rights of women during the past 10 or 12 years, the statutes governing the personal rights of wives would be a disgrace to a savage state of society. Even among the lower animals the rights of motherhood are respected. It remains for man to descend into the very depths of hell, and to present to us the shameful spectacle of an otherwise cultured community in which the wife is legally held in chains to gratify the more than bestial lust of her husband. We need a mighty national awakening on this subject, such as we have begun to have in raising the age of consent. Let us no longer claim that we are a civilized nation, until our statutes governing marriage ethics are evolutionized—until women are free to follow their own conscience and reason in determining when they will assume the holy responsibilities of motherhood. How can men possibly know when their wives are best fitted, even physically, for bearing healthy children, to say nothing of the higher aspects of mind and soul. The prostitution of the marriage relation is the foundation of all prostitution, and, again, the root of this marital prostitution is in the selfishness and indelicacy of those men who have not enough modesty and self-respect to shrink from intrusion upon women in this most sacred and noble function. When, with the help of self-respecting mothers, this law shall have been reformed, and when men shall, in considerable number, have been so purified in soul, it will scarcely be necessary to have the rigid laws which now govern ante-natal murder, and means of preventing conception. The latter crime is practically universal among the younger married women, who realize the sin of old time large families of children. It is resorted to not, as some claim, because women rebel against motherhood under normal conditions, but because of the brutality of husbands who force motherhood upon wives who have already as many children as they can properly care for, or who have not yet recovered from previous births, or who, because of poverty or ill health, are unfitted for wise motherhood. Also, the participation of women in lawmaking would give a basis of intellectual communion between husband and wife which would be wholesome and loving and would lessen the demand for the unnatural physical relations which the loathsomely depraved appetites of men crave continually with their wives.

So much is constantly said of the gain to the Temperance Cause which Equal Suffrage would bring that I need only allude to it here.

Let us consider widows. The mother left alone in the world with children to raise is often both business woman and housewife, and needs the ballot on both accounts.

It is sometimes said that the husband can vote for the wife. This is absurd on the face of it. He cannot vote for his wife without failing to vote for himself. This is injustice towards the man. If the mother has a special function in the home, then of course the father cannot represent a person fundamentally different from himself. If women is not fundamentally different from man, then the reasons for his voting apply equally to her.

Many women theoretically opposed to suffrage are glad to have the opportunity to vote when they become enthusiastic on some special question. In the village where I live there is no waterworks, but they have recently voted for this improvement. The day before the question was put to vote fell on a Sunday, and a threatening fire broke out during church. Many were the groans from the "bucket brigade" as dainty Sunday gowns were deluged with sooty water. When all was over, hardly a woman was to be found unwilling to vote upon that question.

Is it not just to ask that those who desire the privilege of voting on some question should desire ~~for~~ ~~others~~ a like privilege for those interested, perhaps in all branches of civil government? It is evident, also, that women cannot vote thus on special occasions without due qualifications as voters under ordinary circumstances.

We thus conclude that woman, both as wife and mother, needs the fullest enfranchisement; not that she may evade her high and holy calling, but that she may perfect herself in it.

Helen Train Tannehill.

Will Mrs. Baldwin please announce that I solicit correspondence from those interested in any branch of Purity.

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