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A PLEA FOR UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE.

BY WM. LLOYD GARRISON, JR.

[Delivered at Portland, Oregon, Oct. 20, 1881, at the second evening session of the Woman Suffrage Association of Oregon.]

Mr. Garrison, of Boston, was introduced by the Rev. T. L. Eliot, and spoke as follows.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:—Holding both by inheritance and conviction the belief that human rights and responsibilities are not limited by the accident of sex, I esteem it a privilege to stand upon your platform. To a Bostonian, finding himself four thousand miles away from home, on what he has been accustomed to consider the outskirts of civilization, your city is a perpetual surprise. He finds here the same kind of people, the same books, the same homes he has left behind, and it is difficult for him to realize that Portland is not a city of New England. If anything more were needed to preserve the illusion, here is the familiar and time-honored Woman Suffrage convention. How well I know it! Year in and year out, through discouragement and ridicule and apathy, doomed to repeat the old argument, to answer for the thousandth time the objections raised by timidity and prejudice, the weary yet unwearied advocates of simple justice compel the attention of the public.

How many times with exhaustive eloquence and unanswerable reasons these stale objections have been demolished!

—“the time has been,
That when the brains were out the man would die,
And there an end; but now they rise again,”

and we are forced again and again to “slay the slain.” But tiresome as it is to continually repeat “line upon line and precept upon precept,” and to labor to prove that two and two make four, such is and always must be the work of the reformer.

In Massachusetts our cause moves upward and onward, steadily and surely. We have attained the partial School Suffrage for women, and every year petition the Legislature to submit the question of full Suffrage to the people's vote. It is customary now, when the question comes up in the Legislature for discussion, for the opponents to raise no objection, but simply vote it down. The report of the committee and the weighty speeches are on the side of woman's enfranchisement, but with a dogged persistence the majority continues in the negative, although with diminishing prepon-

derance. This year a woman was admitted as a delegate to the Republican State convention in the person of the eloquent and gifted Mrs. Mary A. Livermore.

It is a warfare, however, where no retreat can be sounded, and until the right is conceded the yearly appeal and agitation are as certain as the seasons.

In passing through Wyoming Territory recently, it was gratifying to hear from Governor Hoyt a testimony to the beneficial effect of Woman Suffrage there, in the interest of morality and good government. The Governor mentioned as a surprise the fact that no woman had yet made application to him for office. Not that any reason exists why competent women should not hold office, but it shows how little personal ambition has been stimulated by the attainment of the right to vote.

A few days ago, at Olympia, in Washington Territory, where it was my privilege to mingle with the members of the Legislature in a social way, I expressed my hope that before the Territory was ready to be admitted as a State, the constitution would provide for equal Suffrage and thereby avoid the agitation its omission was sure to entail. When we remember how difficult it is to eradicate a wrong once crystallized in organic law, and how absurdly binding bad precedents are, we cannot overrate the importance of a young State guarding, in the beginning, against such manifest injustice. But for the shortsightedness and willingness to compromise principle shown by the framers of the United States constitution, in allowing a recognition and protection of slavery in its famous obnoxious clauses, the long degradation of our politics and the incalculable sufferings of our civil war would have been averted.

A last refuge of many intelligent people, who are too enlightened to oppose the right of voting on the ground of sex, and yet not ready to accept impartial Suffrage, is the plea that the franchise is too broadly exercised already and should be limited. Although this is the essence of toryism, and a distrust of the great principle that a republic is “a government of the people, by the people and for the people,” it is the fashion of many to urge it when the claims of woman are presented.

In the first place, if it were true that Suff-

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frage should be limited, the answer is, that when the same limits apply to men and women alike there will be no ground for complaint on the score of injustice to women. At present the objection is irrelevant and impertinent, not touching the question at issue.

In the second place, is the objection to universal Suffrage a sound one?

The underlying principle of our great experiment of self government is that "government derives its just powers from the consent of the governed," which includes the humblest member of society. Not from the consent of the rich, of the educated, of the strongest, but of the governed. It was a momentous experiment based upon an abiding faith in human nature, a conviction that the average wisdom of all is safer than that of any portion, however favored. It took into consideration poverty and ignorance, trusting to the innate desire of humanity for order and good government. It was assumed that, although the principle might be severely tested, as enlightenment increased, fostered by popular education, government would improve and the responsibilities of the ballot have an elevating effect.

So our national experiment was launched upon the broadest principles of justice, and although the framers of the government were inconsistent in not embodying in the constitution the principles enunciated in the Declaration of Independence, and applying them impartially without distinction of sex or race, the declaration will last for all time, because it is as broad as humanity. But until our laws accord with it there must be an aggressive conflict. Partially as the experiment has been applied, and although Europe has poured into our midst hordes of ignorance, poverty, and criminality, to be assimilated, the nation has stood the strain marvellously. Wisdom is justified of her children. We have undergone commotions that would wreck monarchies, and in every great crisis what has saved us? Not presidents, nor capitalists, nor scholars, but it is the uprising of the whole people—the ground-swell of popular feeling—that always decides the issue in the interest of right and safety. Talk as we may of the Irish or colored vote, each class has the right to represent itself, no matter if its representatives are unsavory or bad. Nor can the virtue and intelligence of the country afford not to have ignorance and poverty send their representatives to speak for them.

They are the warning dial that indicates to all eyes the magnitude of the degradation in our midst. We cannot afford to overlook or forget it. Inasmuch as the dial's hand shows its increase, so much more has the alarm to be sounded and regenerating influences set to work to rescue

society, which otherwise, lulled in a fancied security, might awaken too late. Upon the walls of our representative government let the whole nation's figure be thrown and the shadows be as prominent as the lights. Republicanism can not only bear the trial but can not spare it. We are too far on the voyage to put back. The ship has incurred its chief dangers because too many of its crew are kept under the hatches. Let them up into the day. Welcome woman to the rights and responsibility of an untrammelled ballot.

There is great need of constant agitation in this young State of Oregon until your object is attained. And it not only benefits woman. All moral effort based on fundamental principles elevates the entire community. New England owes its preëminent intellectual and moral position to the constant conflict of ideas. While, unfortunately, the church so largely reflects the average public sentiment and too often finds little difficulty in being at peace in the presence of sin, provided the sin is popular, the true spirit of the gospel is to be found in the various humanitarian reforms of the day.

In a new and growing country like this, where the wonderful resources of nature are developing so rapidly, and wealth comes easily, there is danger that the material may overshadow the moral progress. Professor Bryce, the English member of Parliament, who has been travelling with our party—a most acute and sympathetic observer—was much impressed by this tendency.

Such associations as yours and others of kindred purpose have, therefore, a regenerating and uplifting influence. Unfortunate is the community where there are no isms. Because of the crudities and extravagancies of well-meaning but over-zealous friends, who attach themselves to every reform, do not allow timid consciences to excuse themselves from their share in the work. When the sole objection to a movement is alleged personal dislike for its advocates, be sure that the objectors have no answer for your arguments. Hold them to a discussion of principles, and do not be drawn aside by personal criticism,—the shelter of apathy and opposition.

The great work is to touch conscience by carefully considered and just appeals to the best sentiments of human nature. The statute book will surely record your progress. In days of discouragement, which always come, certain that the cause is nearing to its triumph, we can comfort ourselves with Whittier's lines:

"Thus, with somewhat of the Seer,
Must the moral pioneer
From the Future borrow;
Clothe the waste with dreams of grain,
And, on midnight's sky of rain,
Paint the golden morrow!"