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Significance of the Woman Suffrage Movement



*Session of the American Academy
of Political and Social Science
Wednesday evening, February 9, 1910*

PHILADELPHIA
The American Academy of Political and Social Science

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THE INADVISABILITY OF WOMAN SUFFRAGE¹

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The problem we confront is not the mere problem of the ballot. That is but a feature. That ballot business is only a single aspect of a vastly larger whole—and the outdistancing conspicuity into which that single aspect has been femininely foisted, suggests nothing so distinctly as it does the logical infirmity of mind which constitutes one of the weaknesses, and I might also say, one of the charms of the feminine constitution. Woman, of course, has a great deal that man has not, but her premises and her conclusions are apt to live so far apart as to fail of becoming more than imperfectly acquainted. This is spoken with no flavor of disrespect. Neither sex has everything; otherwise there would have been no advantage in having two.

Biologists tell us that the higher we go in the scale of animal life, the more the respective functions of the two sexes become differentiated, more and more widely separated from each other in their quality, aptitude and mission. From which we have to conclude that the finer the type of human civilization, the more widely apart man and woman will become, in all that relates to the ingredients of their personality and therefore to their interests and their respective spheres of service.

That is the first criticism to be passed on what is just now transpiring, that it is not being conducted on the basis of principles that have been thoroughly canvassed; that an attempt is being made to accomplish something without first discovering whether it fits logically into the framework of sociological principle and historic trend.

No; we men have put woman on a high pedestal; not so far above us that we cannot reach her, but so far above us that we cannot reach her without reaching up. She will have to be infinitely careful or she will knock herself off that pedestal, and when she gets down to that point where the only recognizable differ-

¹Extracts from an address delivered in New York, December 17, 1909.

ence between her and man lies in the unlikeness of her garments and in some anatomical discrepancies, her supreme prerogative will all have been sacrificed, her distinctive influence as woman will all of it have gone.

Woman will get all she wants if she is woman in her way of getting it; but if she is man in her way of getting it she will not get more than half of what she wants. So far as she resorts to purely masculine implements in her attainment of a feminine victory she will count only as man. One woman will count only as one man, whereas by endowment of nature and of God she ought to count as one and a fraction, perhaps two. Votes do not settle anything. The settling is all done before the balloting begins. Votes simply register what has been settled previously. If women will remain women, and very much so, and will recognize that as such they stand on higher ground than man and will *stick* to that higher ground, they will do the settling; whereas, if they come down to man's lower level they will have to take their chances and will mean no more in the shaping of events than they would have done had they been born members of the other sex.

The distinctive genius of woman is lodged not in her logical nor in her executive faculties, but in her sensibilities. Of course we are not so ignorant of history and of biography as not to know that there are exceptions to that, and very marked exceptions. For instance, we have not forgotten Queen Elizabeth, who, however, in her general composition was far more masculine than feminine. We remember too that it is reported of Mary Somerville that she was the only person, male or female, that perfectly comprehended the *Mécanique Céleste* of La Place. But even so, the exceptions are insufficiently numerous to invalidate the assertion, that woman's genius is lodged in her sensibilities and therefore in her faculty for appealing to personality, for the world is governed by heart and not by intellect, and woman has the heart; that is she has, if she is finely feminine, just as it is the caloric thread, not the luminous thread, of the sunbeam that makes the trees grow. So that whatever work woman does that does not involve the exercise of sensibilities is to that extent a waste of woman.