

The Claims of Women

Kate Amberley

Kate Amberley became President of the Bristol and West of England Women's Suffrage Society in 1871. As outlined here, she created a Ten Point Plan, demanding that the '...same wages should be given for the same work' and 'that there should be no legal subordination in marriage'. Her article was originally published in the Fortnightly Review the same year. It was based on a lecture she had given at Stroud in May 1870. Her son, Bertrand Russell, was born in May 1872.

*If the education is obtained,
I do not see why the pay should not follow*

Great authorities have spoken, from time to time, in favour of equality of the sexes; but argument, however logical, falls so powerless when it is met by the ponderous battery of feeling that we must try to enlist this great engine on our side by showing those women who are at present contented, how great is the misery to which the present state of society can give rise. I will endeavour to show them in what way they can assist their less fortunate sisters, and thereby hasten, not, alas, a millennium, but at least a time when every woman will have free scope to cultivate and employ all her faculties and energies, and will be further taught that it is her duty to cultivate them, and a time when, in the eye of the law, she will be the equal of man. Let us bear in mind, when tempted to turn in disgust from the consideration of these claims, for fear that the lovely ideal of woman as she is would disappear were they granted, that 'the useful is noble, and the hurtful base'. As I have said, it is not possible to meet and convince some of our sensitive friends on the field of logic; let us try to meet them on their own ground, namely, that of feeling. I shall appeal more especially to women; for if this battle is to be won, women must be roused from their indifference. When they are united on the subject, the opposition on the part of men would soon cease.

How does an ordinary man of the world answer when he is asked if he is in favour of women voting. He does not say, 'I am afraid of their influence in the elections: they would all be Tories'. He does not say,

‘It would subvert the political and social order of things now existing: they might all be Radicals’. No; he generally smiles benignly and says, ‘I do not think ladies wish for it’; and turning, if he can, to some pretty, doll-like girl, he will appeal to her to confirm his statement; which I regret to say she usually does, and he considers the matter settled. ‘Why should such fair angels be converted into political drudges?’ he will say; and yet till all, or at all events a large number of them are ready to claim a larger share of freedom, we can hardly expect the mass of men to give up the exclusive right to those privileges which they now possess. The history of each reform tends to show us that no class will ever give up any advantage or privileges it may have without a pressure from without. Let the question be political reform, or abolition of slavery, or religious equality, we seldom find those interested in maintaining the abuses clear-sighted enough to help in their removal; and the line of opposition they generally pursue is to descant on the incapacity of the aspirants to power. The distinguished American preacher, Theodore Parker, points this out in his discourse on the Public Function of Woman. He says, ‘You know what haughty scorn the writer of the apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus pours out on every farmer “who glorieth in the goad”, every carpenter and blacksmith, every jeweller and potter. “They shall not be sought for”, says this aristocrat, “in the public councils; they shall not sit high in the congregation, they shall not sit in the judges’ seat, nor understand the sentence of judgment; they cannot declare justice.” Aristotle and Cicero thought no better of the merchants: they were only busy in trading. Miserable people, quoth these great men, what have they to do with the affairs of state—merchants, mechanics, farmers? It is only for kings, nobles, and famous rich men, who do no business, but keep slaves. Still, a great many men at this day have just the same esteem for women that those haughty persons of whom I have spoken had for mechanics and for merchants.’

We have no right to expect any difference in the progress of this reform, which there is not only one class, but a whole sex, interested in opposing. As in those reforms just mentioned, it is not in reality any more advantageous to the possessors of power in this instance to maintain the inequality. Interest and possession, however, so dim the eye of reason, that it cannot see the greater good which looms in the distance to the disinterested vision. Every argument which has been used during the agitation for reform would apply now. The workingmen of this country must have been tired of being told that they were uneducated, unfit for the franchise, that they were virtually represented, or that their interests were

safe in the hands of MPs. I am happy to say, though this language was addressed to them scores of times they did not believe it, and persevered quietly and constitutionally till they gained their point. I hope that their access to power will not at once make them conservative in the sense of wishing to keep everything as it has been, and lead them to think that the past, instead of the future, is the thing to rest on and live in. Interested motives, contempt, general dislike to change, and fear of competition, certainly enter into the objection felt by many men for this equality of the sexes, but do not exhaust their reasons against it. There is a large class amongst men who would be justly indignant at any mercenary idea being attributed to them, and who object on the score of sentiment. They dread the disappearance of the gentle, loving, yielding woman, and seem to expect the whole fair sex to be turned into unfeminine monsters.

Mr. Mill might be a magician in the dark ages, to judge by the terror often expressed of the effect of his wand. These alarmists seem to think that, should his incantations succeed, Rip Van Winkle might now take his long sleep, and on waking find all the world peopled by male beings. If this indeed were to be the consequence, I should sympathise heartily with his opponents. But have none of us known women who have, from youth up, been educated with their brothers, nurtured in the feeling of complete equality; others who have taken part publicly in the affairs of the day, and even preached in churches, none the less true women for this training? I refer to some in the Society of Friends, who have consistently carried out this idea of human equality, because they considered it as part of the essence of Christianity. Among these, to allay the fears of our sentimental opponents, we might point to one who is a perfect type of woman as she can be; one who had no false shame or timidity in advocating in public all that liberty and humanity dictated; one whose voice has been raised for near fifty years in the cause of freedom and equality, of all races and sexes, in public meetings, in the privacy of her home, in crowded places of worship; one who, clothed in the neat and simple dress peculiar to the Quakers, joins to their courteous, gentle, and loving demeanour which she possesses in a pre-eminent degree, that calm and peace of a mind at rest with itself, that liveliness and even playfulness of a cheerful disposition, that quick and warm sympathy which is one of the cherished attributes of the gentler sex; a loving wife and honoured mother. I am speaking of Lucretia Mott. Hers is a name that will be long remembered in her own country, though little-known as yet in this.

Another reason why some men oppose any step in this direction is that they are so anxious for the comfort and welfare of the softer sex, that they

must protect it from the world and all its hardships and competitions; a worthy wish, no doubt, but one arising from a mistaken principle, and which would be of more use if these protectors were enlightened as to the theory of free trade in labour, and trusted to its effects on the welfare of the protected class. Much more might be said of the objections brought forward by men as reasons for these claims being withheld; but we will pass on to see why, as a matter of feeling, the sympathies of all womankind should be with us. I appeal to their feelings; not that feeling is the safest guide at all times, but because until women have undergone some mental training they will be guided more by emotion than by reason. Too often we are told by them, 'I should be no better off if I had my own property or a vote'; or, 'I like trusting to myself better than to rights'; 'What do women want with colleges? why cannot they be happy and quiet at home?' or, again, 'I should hate to be a doctor or a lawyer, women are not fit for it; they had better look after their husbands and children'. The people who argue in this way fail to perceive that in so doing they are only asserting their own happiness, or their own comfort, and are entirely forgetting the thousands, I might say millions, of women who are alone in the world, who have neither parents, nor home, nor friends, nor fortune of their own, and who are driven to seek these for themselves or to die.

Imagine for a moment the case of a slave woman as she used to be in the Southern States of America, surrounded by the inevitable horrors of that degraded state of society; she may happen to be the petted and pampered darling of a fond master, living in luxury and sure of his indulgence; and when the cry of anguish arising from her fellow-slave strikes on her ear she is only annoyed that any harsh sound should disturb her peace, and impatiently exclaims, 'Why cannot that woman be happy as I am instead of complaining and trying to change her lot?' Perhaps the lot of that other was to work incessantly for a mere morsel of food. Perhaps she was past work, and was about to be sold off away from her hut and her children. Was it wonderful she should raise her voice and wish for some change? Was it not rather wonderful that one woman could so selfishly and indolently enjoy life, because the evil she saw working all around did not touch her individually? We are apt to forget that the priest and the Levite who looked and passed by on the other side are not the examples we would wish to follow; let us look, then, at these sores, and see if we cannot aid in binding them up. To descend to details. Have, for instance, these happy mistresses of comfortable homes ever spared a few moments from their bliss to cast their eyes on a report of the *Governesses' Benevolent Institution*? It is hardly possible, or we should not hear them urge as an

answer to this movement that woman's work is at home. Home is very well where there is one; but what becomes of the work of the fifteen thousand governesses who have no money wherewith to get that home? It is to attain that coveted end, to possess either for themselves or for young brothers and sisters or aged parents, that loved home that so many seek employment in the world.

From the way in which some of 'home' advocates talk, an inhabitant from another sphere might fancy it was a free gift to every human being, to be had by wishing for it; instead of a luxury hardly earned by the labour of its possessor or of its predecessors. The remuneration given to women who enter this career, nearly the only one open to them, is a salary varying from £20 to £100 per annum; out of this they have often to keep relations from absolute destitution. The smallness of the pay comes from the market being so over-stocked, often, indeed, with inefficient workers. But where can they get a good education? What else can they turn their energies to? How are they to get bread? The fact that fifteen thousand women are driven to seek work for themselves is argument enough that by opening more professions, more educational advantages to them, we shall not be guilty, if guilt it is, of alluring them away from their homes to the deadly temptations of the outer world. These benevolent institutions and parallel ones are of use, no doubt, in their day; but those who support them must see that their help, generous and useful as it is to individuals here and there, is but a palliation of an evil, whose root lies deeper and must be cured from the foundation to be effectually eradicated.

This is the number seeking work in one direction; but if we turn to the census of 1861 we shall see that there were in Great Britain, in round numbers, six millions of women over twenty years of age. Half of these were wives, widows, and daughters having no occupation, and so, we presume, well off; one million wives of farmers, shop-keepers, &c., and two millions were engaged in independent industry. I think these figures speak for themselves, and that the cause of two millions is not to be overlooked.

This brings me to the saddest argument that can be addressed to people of feeling and refinement on behalf of the rights of women. Could they be convinced that out of the more than fifty thousand homeless women who lead, in the towns of this country, an existence of moral suffering, of abject helplessness and sin, thousands are certainly driven to it by real want, by the absence of any opening for their industry, their energy, and their capabilities; by the cheerlessness, the hopelessness of their lot; by the absence of education which we have neglected to provide for them; could,

I say, women be convinced that this is so, would they again lightly say 'What is that to me? I should be no better off with this, that, or the other?' No, rather would a life of devotion to that cause seem a small gift to atone for the indifference they had ever felt. This is no place nor time to enter into particulars or to prove the grounds for my convictions; but for the sake of those who will candidly consider the subject I will refer to facts adduced by those who have studied it—by Mademoiselle Daubié, in her recent work on 'The Condition of Women among the Poor in the Nineteenth Century'; also to the books by Acton and Parent-Duchâtelet. They have furnished us with such illustrations of existing evils as must appeal to the compassionate feelings of every fellow-woman; and in the struggles depicted in them to get food and occupation she will see the sign that there is need of amelioration in the industrial position of women, and that we require the justice that can remove causes, as well as the charity that palliates effects.

One of the advantages I hope for in the admission of women to political power is that, their sympathies being strong, they will bring their interest and energy to bear on many injustices of social life, and not so readily acquiesce in the idea that these evils must be borne, and that legislation is powerless to make any impression on them. I think we have experienced in a certain degree the fact that when women see evils they set to work practically to cure them in the limited way open to them. We may be proud of the work done by Miss Rye in emigration; by Miss Carpenter in workhouses, reformatories, and Indian education; by Miss Octavia Hill among the dwellings of the poor in London; and by many others. Would not these ladies be qualified to vote for a member, and to judge of the social and political questions of the day?

I have dwelt mostly on the good to be gained by the women of the industrial classes of society; and as they are at least six times as numerous as those of the upper or idle classes, their cause deserves to be heard first, and what is an injury to them should be removed even at the expense of some of the pleasures or seeming advantages which are supposed to be consequences of our actual state of society. I said that the change should be made, if necessary, for the good of the many; but I do not doubt that there will be no exceptions to those who will reap benefit from this equality of the sexes; for, be the woman rich or poor, married or single, idle or working, it will bring her an increase of happiness by raising her as a moral and intellectual being; and in her improvement, how can man as her companion, and man as her child, fail to taste its fruit? In confirmation of this view it is a pleasure to have the authority of so eminent a man as M.

de Tocqueville, whose advocacy is the more valuable as he does not consider that men and women have by any means the same destiny, and consequently he cannot be suspected of partiality. After giving very high praise to Americans, he says, 'If I am asked to what I attribute the singular prosperity, and the increasing strength of this people, I should say it is to the superiority of their women'. He finds the good effects of democracy in destroying to a great extent this inequality of the sexes as it has destroyed other inequalities; and he thinks it has made woman the equal of man in that country. The Americans, he says, have applied to the two sexes the great principle of political economy which at present regulates industry. They have carefully divided the functions of man and woman, so that the great social work may be better done. I must venture to question the second part of M. de Tocqueville's assertion; for I think that, though the Americans are unfortunately behindhand usually on the great free-trade doctrine, in this case they have been better in their actions than their professions, and instead of 'carefully dividing the functions of men and women', they have opened, or rather not shut, many careers to them which used to be considered the sole province of men. Thus in the United States we find nearly the whole Treasury department worked by female clerks; we find many female doctors, female ministers of the Gospel, and even a female judge. As it is more than thirty years since M. de Tocqueville went to America, perhaps in his time the rapid march of democracy was not as much felt in this department of social life as it is now. They are still fighting there for the political franchise, the denial of which is a badge of inferiority and a real grievance which they still share with their English sisters. It is hardly likely that it will continue; a nation of men who really consider the other half of the nation their equals will not long maintain an inequality when aware of its existence. M. de Tocqueville's strong and emphatic praise of American women will be, I trust, some little reassurance to those who dread that any increase of liberty, knowledge, or power must make that dreaded being known as a blue stocking or a *femme savante*.

Miss Martineau has also pointed out admirably in her 'Household Education' how absurd is the argument that knowledge unfits women for their work, and asks us if we find men attend less well to their counting-house or their shop for having their minds enriched and their faculties strengthened. She gives her testimony to the worst-managed households being those of the most ignorant women. It seems, indeed, so obvious that the improvement in the social condition of any persons must increase their self-respect, their independence, and that if more is expected of them they

will produce more, that the only marvel is how the opposite idea should ever have arisen. Woman, as well as her stronger partner, is a human being first, and has the nature, rights, and duty of one; free scope, equal privileges, and the same standard is all that they require. It is not expected that this will turn the world upside down, or that we shall often see a husband put in the position of Hooker, the divine, who, when receiving a visit in 1585, from two old college friends, had to excuse himself in the midst of the discourse as he was obliged to go and rock the baby's cradle, while a series of similar household disturbances brought the visit to a speedy conclusion. That some women neglect, like Mrs. Hooker, their peculiar sphere, has happened before any talk of emancipation took place, and may, no doubt, happen again; but more education generally makes a more intelligent workman, so we shall not expect to find many Mrs. Hookers who, for the sake of my argument, it is right to say, was a very ignorant and uneducated helpmate.

For this improvement in female education we have much to do. The same means of University training should be open to them, and many of the endowments at any readjustment of their funds should be shared by girls. As a practical instance of the disadvantage they now labour under I will mention Miss Pechey, one of the ladies who have been studying at the University of Edinburgh. They were admitted to the University last November with the distinct statement that they should be subject to all the regulations as to matriculation, attendance on classes, examinations, or otherwise. The lectures for ladies were, however, to be given at a separate hour. Miss Pechey fulfilled all the regulations, passed the same examination, and came out third in a class of 236 in chemistry. There were four Hope scholarships for this class, to be held by the first four students. Miss Pechey most naturally expected to get hers; but, wonderful to relate, it was refused to her because the instruction, by order of the University, had been given at a separate hour. An appeal to the Senatus only confirmed this refusal, though it decided that the women were entitled to the usual certificates. Is this fair play? And, again, is it a thing to be proud of that Miss Garrett, an English lady, should have been obliged to go to Paris, and get from a foreign University a degree for medicine refused to her here.

In the opinion of many, labour is undesirable for women; in the opinion of many others, it is unnecessary. But, if both these opinions were true, and even if we made it our object that labour for money were never forced upon women (which is far from being the case at present), an improvement in their general position would still be needed, in order that they might be better fitted to labour in the fields of art, science, sociology, politics,

literature, and society, according to the powers and tastes that all admit them to possess. If in this change woman lose some of those hitherto peculiarly feminine attributes, she will have gained others; what she loses in timidity and sensibility, she will gain in courage and endurance; what she loses in intensesness but narrowness of sympathy, she will gain in breadth. If she lose her fervent religious realisations, she will embrace a calmer but not less noble faith. Her attributes may vary a little; but they will still be feminine attributes, or they will not cling to her. What is beautiful in her nature must be true, and what is true need not fear the inroads of any new opinions or new heresies. If these new attributes are untrue, they may have their day, but will die out; and in the experiment we may hope to have elicited some truth as to what this complex feminine nature is really capable of.

Before leaving this part of the subject, I must refer once more to the unsexing argument. Is idleness the one crowning beauty of woman, that work is an object so much to be dreaded for her? Or is it useful work only that is dreaded, or remunerative work, or possibly work that must be performed outside her home? If this be so, how can we tolerate the 779,000 domestic servants that work in Great Britain, for are they not all women working for their living away from home? Is remunerative work the bugbear of our protectors? I fear there is some jealousy of the competition of women on the part of men; for an eminent medical man lately advised ladies to take to pharmacy when they wished to be doctors, and had the requisite education for the profession. Now, in pharmacy or in hospital nursing there is nothing intrinsically different, as to the fatigue of the life or the delicacy of the work, from doctoring, except that the latter requires a higher education, and consequently commands better pay. If the education is obtained, I do not see why the pay should not follow; and why the woman capable of it should not earn her thousand a year when she can, instead of being content with a hundred in the pharmacy, or possibly forty as a nurse. I will agree with my opponents if they say it is not the work done nor the education given that unsexes a woman, but some kinds of labour, some kinds of misery and want of education that unsex her. I believe that those who are afraid of this she-monster, the unsexed woman, are often thinking of such cases as that of the women working in coal-mines, crawling nearly on their knees, with scanty clothing and begrimed in dirt; or perhaps of the sad specimens of female humanity that haunt the police-courts and bad neighbourhoods of towns. If these specimens are in their minds, I will agree with them that a woman can indeed appear most unwomanly; but we must differ again as to what was the cause of this

degradation. It is not from work, not from mixing with men, nor with the world, that this change is effected, but from the same causes that deteriorate the men whom they mix with—ignorance, idleness, poverty, recklessness, vice, and the crimes that follow in their train. These are the causes that unsex women, and make a monster of the being who is capable of shedding such a halo of softness and feeling over the frigid world. But it is not the equality of women with men that is responsible for these degraded forms of womankind; and it is precisely to sweep away these results of our present system that I wish to see women in a higher position in the world. Miss Parkes, after saying that she would like to see many more means of livelihood open to women, expresses a hope that it will be but a temporary arrangement; and that the idea will never be established that women can shift for themselves, and thereby make men less mindful to provide for the women of their family.

Mr. Theodore Parker says that the large class of unmarried women is peculiar to classic and Christian civilisation alone, and that in Christian countries this class is increasing rapidly, and to them the domestic function is very little, often nothing. He does not think that this state will last, as marriage is necessary to the soul and body of man; consequently he hopes this is a state of transition from the time when every woman was a slave and dependent on some man, to a state of independence, where there will be no subordination, but the two will be co-ordinated together. I cannot be so sanguine as to imagine that the balance of the sexes will be so equal, but the temporary stage is one of such great suffering, and must be of such long duration, that we are bound to do all in our power to alleviate it, not dimming our eyes to the facts as they at present exist. We have neither harems nor Mormon homes, on the one hand, for the surplus women who look to matrimony as an occupation; nor, on the other hand, the convents of the Roman Catholic countries, which so admirably filled in their day that longing felt by women for work, a home, a noble life, and devotion to a cause.

It is not work, then, in itself which unfits people for their proper function in life, but a work that is not adapted to their capacity. Perhaps it will be said that this is all very well for the poor, but that ladies in the upper and middle classes of life are the ideals of what women should be, and that you will have no iconoclasts breaking this beautiful image which we have hitherto worshipped. The lady, par excellence, is then to be kept from work and the world, to preserve all those maidenly and matronly charms which are so much prized by men; in plain English, the rich woman is to have no profession but marriage offered to her, that those who do marry may be of

the stamp hitherto approved by men. Granted that this is their first profession, what is to become of their energies before this happy crisis, a period often of some duration, owing to the difficulties in the way of early marriage? What is to become of the childless, of the widows, of the spinsters? Are all these to sit at needlework, and dawdle out their day visiting, reading without purpose, and envying their happier companions? But I will not admit that even for the wife and mother a limited sphere of action is desirable, or that the Greek wife described by Mr. Grote in his book on 'Plato', is to be our ideal. Mr. Grote says:— 'We must remember that the wives and daughters of citizens were seldom seen abroad; that the wife was married very young; that she had learnt nothing except spinning and weaving; that the fact of her having seen as little and heard as little as possible was considered as rendering her more acceptable to her husband; ... that her sphere of duty and exertion was confined to the interior of the family. The beauty of the woman yielded satisfaction to the senses, but little beyond.'

Can we wonder, if this was the kind of companion destined to engross the affections of men, that her destiny was a failure, and that among the Greeks marriage was looked upon as essentially commonplace, and that, as Mr. Grote tell us, the wife was quite unable to call 'that pitch of enthusiasm which overpowers all other emotions, absorbs the whole man, and aims either at the joint performance of great exploits or the joint prosecution of intellectual improvement by continued colloquy?' Where the mental inequality exists unfelt and uncomplained of, it is generally because the great aims and intellectual improvement have disappeared under the deadening influences of perpetual contact with a commonplace mind. It is strange that there should not be a greater difference between the lives of women existing at such different periods and in such different surrounding circumstances; for in the life of the married lady held up to us often as the ideal type there is much similarity to the Greek picture we have just considered. She has much spare time. If she live in luxury and wealth, servants, nurses, schools, governesses, in fact, all that money can give, take all the small cares and duties of household life off her hands. Let us recall the old hymn which tells us who finds work for idle hands to do. Her mind is empty, her hands are not required to work; there are no great interests for her; and she is doomed to the life of inactivity, mental and physical, which is thought fitting by the public opinion of her class. Could not this ample leisure be employed in some political, scientific, or social work, according to her aptitudes?

Any attempt made or felt by women to be desirable in the direction of

new work is too often crushed in the bud by that fatal advice inculcated so strongly in the education of most girls; that the highest merit of woman is not to be spoken of for good or for evil. A glorious contradiction was given to this theory of womanly excellence in the past, when the first female martyr died for her faith in the sight of thousands of spectators. And to come to modern times, is the life of the Queen one that is devoid of the great interests of political work, official work, and social work? Has this constant public career, these public ceremonies in which she was the central figure, this cultivation of mind which she brings to bear on the duties she has to perform, made her one whit less a real woman, a loving mother, a sorrowing widow, and a ready sympathizer with all forms of sorrow and suffering that come to her notice? She has been held up as a model for English women; and that this has been done shows that the beauty of her domestic life has not been impaired by the public life she has led, and by the great national interests that she has made her own, nor by the shouts and acclamations of multitudes who always rush to welcome her wherever she appears.

I trust now that the time is passed when idleness is a thing desired, and that work will evermore be looked upon as a good thing in itself. If needful and good for the mass, surely each one is the better for contributing to that general good. Remember a saying of an ancient philosopher:—‘What is good for the swarm, is good for the bee’. Taking now for granted that the deterioration of women will not be the effect of this change, let us see how materially they can benefit. In the case of the married woman, the right to her own property and earnings will be a great boon in unhappy unions. Where the marriage is happy there will be no need for interference on the part of the law; and, except as regards property, guardianship of children, and divorce, on the same conditions for both, the law cannot enforce equality in marriage; the rest must be left to the private arrangement of each couple, and enters into another sphere.

In the case of those desirous of being married, but waiting many years from absence of sufficient means, surely the woman would be happier, better off, if she were able to employ that time in amassing money to hasten the end in view, than pining in idleness through the best years of her life. The original cause and the cause of the long duration of the present subordinate position of women has been sometimes, and perhaps truly, considered from the Darwinian point of view to be owing to the struggle for existence in which the weaker beings must always be subdued, and, in some cases, even trampled out; and it is asserted that our position is only an effect of that law. Let us grant it is so, for the sake of argument. In

former times force was the only power in the world. As civilisation has gone on, the heroic and military virtues have given place to the more amiable ones, and each age has had its type of virtue. The present type is one to which woman can aspire as well as man. In the age of military heroism a woman could seldom distinguish herself equally, though Joan of Arc was an exception to the rule; the field was generally given up to the physically strongest. With the growth of the more refined virtues she took a higher place, and struggled into intellectual existence. That she has been fit for this existence cannot be denied by those who make possession a test of fitness, nor by others who look to the fruits of this moral development of woman in such instances as Mrs. Fry, Madame Guyon, Hannah More, Madame Roland, Madame de Stael, Mrs. Somerville, Miss Carpenter, Miss Cobbe, and an innumerable host, who have done work in various spheres.

Now that Government, the arts and sciences, have all thrown a gentler glow over the aspect of modern life, the sphere of action is still further enlarged, and by her power to gain admission to that which is still withheld from her, she will prove her right to political existence even to the mind of a thoroughgoing Darwinian. That this emancipation may be accomplished, it is certainly necessary there should be some struggle, in the sense of agitation and of efforts made to remove existing grievances; hence have arisen societies, discussions, bills, debates, and petitions. The more women help in this agitation the sooner will they all start fair in the race; and till women have votes, those things which concern them alone are sure to be made to give way to those that are pressed for by the constituents who have power at elections. If we believe in representative institutions we must be convinced of the material advantage to women in the acquisition of a vote. Political power is a protection, and it is in that sense, and not as a right, that we demand it for women. Much has been done in the last few years in the education of the public on this subject through the means of literature, the press, and speeches. We often hear a feeling expressed that a polling-booth would be no fitting place for a lady. But I confess that my experience teaches me that a polling-booth, in the early morning, is a far quieter place than the hustings on nomination day, or the public market-place on polling day; yet these two places have been sanctioned by public opinion as quite suitable for the wives and friends of candidates at elections. Even if it be a little unpleasant, a trifle noisy, and if an occasional flour-bag or egg finds its way to the sacred precincts, the lady is supposed to be able to bear it with equanimity for her husband's sake. I ask her to go through much less inconvenience for her own sake and that of her country.

Mr. Mill first proposed to give the political franchise to women in 1867, when seventy-five members voted for it in a house of two hundred and seventy-three. Amongst the seventy-five were found two most distinguished members of the present Government, Mr. John Bright and Mr. Stansfeld. Mr. Jacob Bright brought in his Bill for removing the electoral disabilities of women this year, and the second reading was carried by a majority of thirty. On the motion for going into committee it was, however, thrown out. The ignorance of women of any movement in the world of politics is often mistaken for apathy; but once show them that any practical grievance would be attended to at once, if they were the holders of political power, and had authority to question their members and make their vote depend on his answer, and they would become as keen politicians as the men they live with. No sooner was the municipal vote granted to women than, in the small town of Leicester, between two and three thousand put themselves on the municipal register. Does this look like indifference? An immense step has just been taken by women in connection with the election of School Boards. The keen interest taken by them in this matter of education, led not only to their voting, combining, and canvassing, but also to their becoming candidates. Miss Davies and Miss Garrett, M.D., owed their wonderful success in a great degree to the desire felt by women to entrust their interests to one of their own sex; but as women alone could not have made up the 47,000 votes given in Marylebone for Miss Garrett, we have a sign that men have no objection to be represented by a woman. The elections were carried on so much on the plan of the parliamentary elections, that it has served as a test of the capacity in women for the function of voter or candidate, and must have disposed of the objections urged on the score of incapacity and unfitness. It is to be hoped that women all over the country will come forward as candidates for School Boards; and by the way in which they carry on their contests, will show that in assuming this public attitude they do not adopt the well-known male electoral vices, but bring the feminine virtues they are credited with to their aid. If this be so, and we have less lying and humbug, less treating, less intimidation, less unscrupulousness, and less rowdyism, with our female candidates, we shall all rejoice in the day when women began to share the wider interests and larger life of men.

Great steps are also being taken in the higher education of women; a college, giving the same education as that of Cambridge, has been opened at Hitchin, and various courses of lectures in London and Edinburgh by University professors. This, however, is too large a subject to enter on here. Many, moreover, are willing to go with us in the education question,

but say that, when education is what they call finished, women should not seek to go further through the golden gate of knowledge. But to expect a woman to cultivate all her faculties and her mental powers, and then to acquiesce in a life of inactivity, 'a life of nothings, nothing worth', would be unreasonable. If she asks that the same opportunities be open to her as to men, her demand is only just and rational; nor is it a loss to herself only, but the community also sustains a loss of force, labour, and energy by barring the door to every external occupation to one half of the human race. Have these timid people so little faith in nature, so little faith in their power to win a woman, or in her instinct to be a true wife and mother, that they must hedge this rebellious creature round so that she may have no outlet except into matrimony? When she enters into it, cannot you trust her to find out how far it engrosses her whole being. Precisely in proportion to their enlightenment will women on the whole see more clearly what their true work is, and that that work need not always be identical with that of men, nor yet so opposed that the men must work, and the women must weep.

With progress, men break into varieties in their employments. Why should not women follow the same law of social economy? When all is open to them, it does not follow that they will become soldiers and sailors, iron-workers and blacksmiths. The law of natural selection will operate here as throughout creation, and what they are fitted for they will perform; if they do not perform it, they will soon be replaced by the fitter instrument for that particular work: but in the new order of things we have never yet had fair trial. It still remains to be seen if they cannot fulfil the offices of doctors, of preachers, of educators, of clerks, of poor-law administrators, of printers, of reporters, of shop-keepers, of book-keepers, as well as these offices have been filled already. The relief of the poor has been considered as a fit sphere for woman for some time, and the reason that, amidst all the good they have done, there has been so much mischief in charity, is the absence of the sense of responsibility in their dealings, and their ignorance of political economy. These two defects would, I hope, be remedied in a state of society such as we wish for. It will be noticed that in the spheres of work I have indicated for women, I have not mentioned any that can be objected to on the physiological ground that long-continued muscular exertion is injurious to them.

Having now passed in review, certainly in the most cursory manner, the various obstacles to those changes, both in public opinion and in the law, which we, who are supporters of the claims of women, are anxious to effect, I will briefly sum up the measures which we conceive to be required

in order to secure that equal justice, which is all that we demand.

- 1st. We desire that there should be a great improvement in the education of girls, and a restoration to them of those endowments originally intended for both sexes, but which in some instances have been appropriated exclusively to boys.
- 2ndly, and as a natural sequence to the first requirement. That equal facilities should be granted to women for the attainment of the highest education and of University degrees, in order that their special faculties may not be consigned to compulsory idleness, but may be turned to the benefit of society.
- 3rdly. That all professions should be open to them, and especially that no new Act, medical or otherwise, should actually exclude them as they are excluded now.
- 4thly. That married women should no longer be debarred from the separate ownership of property, on the same terms as married men.
- 5thly. That a widow should be recognised by law as the only natural guardian of her children.
- 6thly. That the franchise should be extended to women as a means of power and protection in all matters affected by legislative action.
- 7thly. That political and social interest and work should be open equally to them, so that if there be talent or aptitude in any of them the State may not be the loser, alike by the exclusion of those qualities which they share with men, and of those which are characteristic of themselves.
- 8thly. That public opinion should sanction every occupation for women which in itself is good and suited to their strength.
- 9thly. That there should be no legal subordination in marriage.
- 10thly. That the same wages should be given for the same work.

But I hear some of you ask—‘All this being granted, *cui bono* and I answer you simply—We hope and wish to try if an infusion of justice, of new vigour and new life, of warmer sympathies and larger hopes into women’s lives, will not alleviate some of the suffering of this struggling life. If it alleviate but few, it is well; if it have the effect I anticipate, it will do more. At all events let us hope. ‘*Die Welt wird alt und wieder jung, Doch der Menschhofft immer Werbetterung!*’* and the day will be sad when we become sceptical of individual and social progress.

In conclusion allow me to refer to the chapter on the family in a beautiful book on ‘The Duties of Man’, by the great Italian patriot, M. Mazzini; where, after dwelling on the beauty of family life, he says:

‘Like every other element of human life, it is of course susceptible of progress. Seek in woman not merely a comfort, but a force, an inspiration, the redoubling of your intellectual and moral faculties. Cancel from your minds every idea of superiority over woman—you have none whatsoever. Long prejudice, an inferior education, and a perennial legal inequality and injustice have created that apparent intellectual inferiority which has been converted into an argument of continued oppression. Man and woman are varieties springing from the common basis—Humanity. There is no inequality between them, but—even as is also the case among men—diversity of tendency and of special vocation. Are two notes of the same musical chord unequal or of different nature? Man and woman are the two notes without which the human chord is impossible. Consider woman, therefore, as the partner and companion, not merely of your joys and sorrows, but of your thoughts, your aspirations, your studies, and your endeavours after social amelioration. Consider her your equal in your civil and political life. Be ye the two human wings that lift the soul towards the Ideal we are destined to attain.’

*The world is getting old and young again, but people always hope for improvement!

The portrait of Lady Kate Amberley was drawn by her brother-in-law, George Howard, Lord Carlisle, in 1864.