

# OPINONS OF WOMEN ON WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE.

MRS. DAWSON BURNS.

It has been argued, that had women the power of voting they would in some instances show how unsuitably that power would be used, or even utterly absurd. Even were it so, let it be remembered that non-suitability, or the abuse of the privilege, does not disfranchise a man. Here are two glaring anomalies: A man may drink as much as he pleases, far beyond the bounds of moderation and respectability; may be as ignorant and brutal as he pleases; may be quietly breaking every law that should honestly bind him to his home, his wife, and his children; may be utterly incompetent to estimate either the character or intelligence of the man for whom he is asked to vote; yet, let him only live in a borough as householder or lodger, paying a yearly rental, and he possesses the right of voting at Parliamentary elections. Contrast this case with that of a woman who has all her life maintained an honourable position; guided her house with consummate judgment; has been first and foremost in various benevolences and schemes for her country's purity and elevation; can always give an excellent reason for the judicious opinion she has formed; yet, whether widow or spinster, as a householder paying taxes, or a lodger renting apartments of the required value, is denied the opportunity of exercising that tact, that judgment, that influence in the election of

candidates whom she deems best qualified to legislate for the urgent wants and necessities of the times.

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MISS JEX-BLAKE, M.D., L.K.Q.C.P.I.\*

If I correctly understand the British Constitution one of its fundamental principles is that Taxation and Representation should go together, and that every person taxed should have a voice in the election of those by whom taxes are imposed. If this is a wrong principle it should be exchanged as soon as possible for some other, so that we may know what is the real basis of representation in this country; if it is a right principle it must admit of general application, and I am unable to see that the sex of the taxpaying householder should enter into the question at all. The argument respecting the “virtual representation” of women under the present system seems to me especially worthless, as it can be answered alternatively, thus;- If women as a sex have exactly the same interests as men, their votes can do no harm, and indeed will not affect the ultimate result; if they have interests more or less divergent from those of men, it is obviously essential that such interests should be directly represented in the councils of the nation. My own belief is that in the highest sense the interests of the two sexes are identical, and that the noblest and most enlightened men and women will always feel them to be so; and, in that case, a country must surely be most politically healthy where all phases of thought and experience find legitimate expression in the selection of its Parliamentary representatives.

SOPHIA JEX-BLAKE.-Sept. 1878

\*(Sophia Jex-Blake (1840-1912). Started out as mathematician at Queens College, also taught in Germany and U.S. After the return to England, she began training as a doctor. The only place at the time which would admit her was Edinburgh

University, although they refused to grant her the exam papers, i.e. to register her as a doctor once she passed the exams. This resulted in public debates, and in 1876 a bill was passed that enabled women to complete their medical education on the same grounds as men. Jex-Blake practiced in Edinburgh until she died, and was an active member of the Suffrage Society there.)

MISS PECHEY, M.D. (Berne), L.K.Q C.P.T.

I maintain that the present subjection of women to a position of political inferiority to men is calculated seriously to retard the advancement of the nation, both intellectually and morally. Only by giving full scope for individual development can a state become truly great; and the full extent of individual development can alone be secured by granting equality of rights to all alike without distinction of sex.

EDITH PECHEY.—July, 1878.

MRS. EILOART

*(Author of "Some of our Girls," &c, &c.)*

I do not believe that the wrongs the sufferings and the claims of women will ever meet with due consideration until they have that share in legislation which the franchise alone can give them.

ELIZABET EILOART.—July, 1878.

MISS ANNIE KEARY

*(Author of "Castle Daly," "A Doubting Heart," &c.)*

MISS ELIZA KEARY

*(Author of "Heroes of Asgard," "The Little Sealskin," &c.)\**

It is because we think that not only women but the men themselves would be benefited by the association of the sexes in the acts of

legislation that we wish to see the suffrage extended to women. Though it has been said that nothing is so like a man as a woman, it is not to be denied that the difference between them is a root difference and that neither is complete without the other—wherever they work together, they work better than apart. The household is ruled jointly by man and woman in practice if not in theory, and it seems to us that the very fact of their essential difference makes it, not desirable merely, but needful that the influence of both should be everywhere felt. Whom God hath joined together, let not conventionality and prejudice keep asunder.\*\*

ANNIE AND ELIZA KEARY. –Sept., 1878[6]

\*Annie Keary (1825-1879), wrote a number of books, both children's and adults', of which *Castle Daly* (1875) is the best known. The novel was considered to be the best Irish novel of its time. Elizabeth Keary was Annie's sister, and they co-wrote several books, among them *Heroes of Asgard*.

\*\* (Play on the biblical "What God hath brought together, let no man tear apart.")

### MISS SIMCOX\*

(*Hon. Secretary of the Shirtmakers' Association*).

I can only give the same reasons for desiring the political enfranchisement of women that I should give for desiring the political enfranchisement of anyone else; e. g., of the agricultural labourers now, of the manufacturing towns before the first Reform Bill, and of male householders and lodgers before the last.\*\* The chief of these reasons is that I think every member of a society has duties towards that society and owes it a debt of service in return for the innumerable benefits of social and civilised life. And this debt of gratitude and service cannot but be ignored or repudiated by any persons who find themselves permanently and deliberately excluded from civic fellowship. A disfranchised class is either politically ignorant and indifferent, or disaffected. Ignorance and indifference in reference to the welfare of the community, on the

part of half its members, though these be only women, seems to me a graver social evil than even positive disaffection in a smaller class. Yet this is so serious a danger that hardly anyone would deny that if a body of discontented men thought the franchise would content them, that safe and inexpensive remedy should be administered at once. *A fortiori*, then, should the remedy be tried in our case, since we are, to a woman, either unwholesomely discontented with our political status, or else unwholesomely indifferent to the highest interests, social and political, of the community which has a right to our loyalty.

EDITH SIMCOX.–Sept., 1878[8]

\* Edith Jemima Simcox (1844-1901). Trade union's activist who together with Emma Paterson established a number of unions for e.g. shirtmakers, tailoresses/tailors, bookmakers, nailmakers etc. In 1875 Simcox and Paterson were the first women delegates ever to attend the Trade Unions Congress (Glasgow). Among Simcox's many pieces of writing are *Natural Law: An Essay on Ethics* (1858) and *Autobiography of a Shirtmaker* (1900).

\*\*\*"During the nineteenth century three reform bills were passed in Britain which significantly extended the male citizen's right to vote. In 1832, the First Reform Bill was passed which extended suffrage to £10 householders, effectively enfranchising the more affluent of the middle classes. One of every six male citizens had the right to vote. The Second Reform Bill was passed in 1867 and extended the vote to the entire middle class. Somewhat fewer than half the male citizens were able to exercise their right to vote. Finally, in 1884, the Third Reform Bill gave universal suffrage to male citizens in Britain." Source: <http://english.cla.umn.edu/courseweb/3113/Terms.html>)

### MRS. PATERSON\*

(*Hon. Secretary of Women's Protective and Provident League*)

For workingwomen especially, I should hope for important advantages from the removal of the political disabilities of women, not so much on account of immediate and direct gains, as from the strengthening of the power of self help. Long tradition and habit have left them only the hope, often but a very faint one, that men

know, and will do, all that is for their best interests; they cling to this hope in their industrial life, and allow their wages to be ground down, halfpenny by halfpenny, until at last they can think of nothing but how not to starve. Though only a small proportion of working women might have qualifications entitling them to the franchise, their present hopelessness and helplessness would be lightened by the removal of the injustice which places every one of their sisters, however intelligent, however good and useful a member of society, in the position, as some writer has said, of a “political outcast.”

EMMA A. PATERSON.- Sept., 1878.u[9]

Emma (née Smith) Paterson (1848-1886). Founded the Women's Protective and Provident League ( the first women's trade union) in 1875. The union was modelled on Paterson's experiences With unions during travels to the US, and represented such trades groups as dressmakers, bookbinders, artificial-flower makers, tobacco, jam and pickle workers, shop assistants and typists. After her death Lady Dilke (see note above on Mrs Pattison (Dilke) took over, and in 1901 the Union changed its name to Women's Trade Union League.

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