

"Woman's cause is man's; they rise or sink  
Together, dwarfed or Godlike, bond or free."

*(Tennyson)*

**The Case for  
Women's Suffrage  
And  
Objections Answered**

by THOMAS JOHNSTON

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Price ONE PENNY.

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Printed and Published by THE FORWARD PRINTING AND PUBLISHING  
COMPANY, LTD, 164 Howard Street, Glasgow.

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AND

**Objections Answered,**  
by THOMAS JOHNSTON<sup>i</sup>

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Should Women Vote in Parliamentary Elections ? It is the live political issue of the day. On train, 'bus and boat, in my lady's drawing room and in the "Fox and Grapes" saloon, in factory, in mine, in literary societies, in the cotter's sheiling and at the street corner, the question of Woman's suffrage is undoubtedly the most frequently discussed political issue of the hour. And yet, despite all the discussion a vast amount of ignorance prevails ; ignorance regarding the civic position of women in other countries, ignorance as to the facts on which the claim for the Franchise is based, ignorance as to the results which will ultimately follow the inclusion of the female in the parliamentary Voter's Roll. It is the purpose of this pamphlet to state briefly the case for woman's suffrage and to answer the objections which are usually offered to it.

## **The Case for Women's Suffrage**

The first, the strongest, reason why women should vote in Parliamentary elections is, Because they are Taxed, and because Taxation without Representation is Unjust. Women have Income Taxes to pay. Tea Taxes on figs, raisins, currants, sugar, houses and land. Of course, some women pay no Income Tax or Land Tax, or House Tax, but every woman in the land who drinks tea or uses sugar pays a tax to the Government. She has taxes imposed on her for the upkeep of the Army, for the Navy, for wars, and these taxes are imposed on her without her consent, and indeed, very often against her will. This is tyranny. It is more - it is legalised robbery.

One great Political Party (the Liberal Party) has long had inscribed on its banners and programmes the words "Taxation Without Representation is Tyranny." Yet women are to-day taxed against their wills, and they are given no voice in the spending of the money raised. It is unjust.

Class after class have emerged from this bondage. The barons at Runnymede forced their Magna Charta from the King, the middle classes forced their right to a participation in the government of the country and in the levying of taxes in the Great Reform Bill of 1832; in 1867, the householder (the artisan) was given the right to enter the Councils of the Nation, and in 1884 the agricultural labourer was granted the primal right of citizenship; but the women class - the women are still regarded by the State as in the category of paupers, lunatics, infants and criminals, they are still taxed and have no right to discuss the spending of the money so raised. They are not citizens : they are from the standpoint of citizenship still slaves.

**Unequal Laws.**

The second argument in favour of "Votes for Women" is the fact that the laws of Britain bear unequally on men and women. Man alone has made the laws, he has made them without considering the needs and requirements of women, he has made them in his own interest and he has manufactured thereby different codes of morality for the husband and the wife, the father and the mother, the brother and the sister, the bachelor and the spinster.

Under the Law of England to-day (there are modifications in Scots Law) a man can secure divorce on simply proving the sexual unfaithfulness of his wife. But the wife, in order to secure a divorce from her husband for this same unfaithfulness must in addition prove cruelty or desertion.

Think what this means to many an English woman!

The unmarried mother is considered by the law to be the sole parent of a child not born in wedlock, and the man has only a slight legal liability. Thus where there is any stigma or blame the woman bears it alone. But the law looks with a different eye on the legitimate children : the father is the legal parent and the mother only becomes a legal parent on the father's death.

Many a child mother, deserted by the (at least) equal participant in the responsibility for the "disgrace," becomes mentally deranged, and in a moment of hysteria either drowns the child or leaves it on a roadway or a stair to die. Here man-made law steps in with a charge of Infanticide and sentences the poor helpless woman to a long period of brutal imprisonment, while the real author of the crime, the coward who has deserted the woman, is allowed to go scot free. He is not even summoned to the court to share the public odium. Before the law he is guiltless, he has done no wrong.

Woman has to obey laws she has no hand in the making of, laws which bear very hardly upon her, and she is refused the only lever by which she can alter and remedy these evils - she is refused the Parliamentary Vote.

## **Women's Wages**

Economic power follows political power. That is to say, any class which is underpaid and oppressed requires to have political power (in this case, the Vote) ere it has the remotest hope of becoming well-paid and free. If women had the Vote we should find Parliamentary candidates touting for their support, hearkening to their grievances,

bidding one against the other for the Women's Vote. As at an auction sale, the highest bidder, if his cheque be considered sound, gets the article, we should find candidates vie with one another in proposing schemes for the amelioration of the lot of the underpaid women. To-day the candidate leaves the women of the constituency out of account. All his promises and attentions are given to the men ; he only begs the women to come and canvas for him. His programme is of male reforms, he talks of the rights of man, and his "man" does not include woman.

Yet, is it not the case that women require reforms more urgently than do men? Their needs are greater, and no one promises them anything. Him that hath not is given nothing more, whilst for him that hath a little, of that little be only the power to put a cross on a ballot paper, is promised the kingdoms of the earth and heaven and every additional kosmos the imagination of the candidate can soar to.

Cruel as are the conditions, and small, pitifully small, as are the wages of most men, women's wages and conditions are worse. The average male worker's wage has been calculated to be about 18s., but the average woman worker's wage is only about 7s.

Cadbury and others have issued a carefully compiled book on "Women's Work and Wages," in which we find the following. -

#### GENERAL DRESSMAKING

##### Average Wages

		Under 18 Years.	Over 18 Years
General Dressmaking,	...	4s 9d.	11s. 6d.
Bodice Hands,	... ..	5s. 0d.	10s. 0d.
Hats, Caps, Bonnets,	....	---	12s. 0d.
Babies' Millinery,	...	----	10s. 0d.

These figures take no account of the frequent periods of no work and short time ; no account of holidays. They are simply the averages of the wages paid in these trades. Of course there are trades wherein the women workers are even worse off. The average wage paid to women over 18 at cartridge cutting is 8s. 6d ; bedstead-ornamenting, 9s ; carding hooks and eyes, 5s. 11d. ; and wrapping hairpins, 5s. 6d.

How can a woman over 18 years of age live on 5s. 6d per week? She cannot do it ; and too often in her despair she has recourse to that pitiable trade of the streets wherein, as has been said, "the newest

beginner is paid the highest wage."

And the conditions under which many women slave out their lives for a miserable pittance ! In stinking, rickety garrets, so near the slates as to freeze in winter and choke with heat in the summer, sewing themselves blind and bent ! No Factory Act gets near them, no laws of safeguard shield them. If women had the Parliamentary Vote they would have the handle to the only tool by which they can ever hope to improve the conditions under which they work and live.

## **Other Reasons**

Women should have the vote :

Because no sex, or class, or race, can have its welfare properly and intelligently safeguarded unless it has a direct influence on the legislature.

Because the more important and lucrative positions in Society to-day affect women very closely and will never be satisfactorily dealt with if the women's view be not considered. What man feels the force of the evils of intemperance like the drunkard's wife, his sister, his mother? The Housing Question! who feels its urgency and importance like the woman who lives day and night in the house. The death rate of infants, the waste of child life, the evils attendant on the employment of married women in mills, factories, etc., unemployment, low wages, the care of the aged ; is not woman more fitted to deal with these than man?

Because woman is the educator of the child ; and what woman can properly educate and train a child if she herself be not properly educated? Education simply means a drawing out, and if women are cribbed, cabined and stunted in their mental growth, if they are bound and gagged by silly little conventions, if they are forbidden to widen their minds by speculation and discussion on the problems of life, if they are denied the rights of citizenship, if servility and not independence be asked of them, then can we expect other than that the child will be improperly trained and badly educated?

## **In Other Countries.**

But, if women are still treated as infants in "free" progressive Britain, other nations have admitted the inherent justice of the women's claims and have conceded them the Franchise. In Democratic New Zealand, in Republican America, in Autocratic Russia women have been raised from servility to citizenship. In New Zealand the women were granted the Franchise in 1893 (and, mark this, in 1898 their influence largely helped to force an Old Age Pensions Bill through the Legislature). South Australia gave them the Franchise in 1894, and West Australia in

1899. The results were so satisfactory that in 1902 Sir Edmund Barton, the Federal Premier, brought in a Bill to give them the vote in all elections for the Federal Parliament. Since then Women's Franchise Bills have passed the New South Wales, the Tasmanian, the Queensland and the Victorian Parliaments, though, in the case of Victoria, it has not yet been given effect to in law. In some parts of the United States of America women have had the vote given them. In Wyoming they have had it for over 20 years. They also vote in the State Elections in Utah, Colorado and Idaho. In Oregon, a Women's Suffrage Bill passed both Houses of Legislature but was lost by a small majority on a popular vote, 48 per cent. of the male electors who recorded their votes being in favour of the Bill. In 1901 the New York Legislature passed a Limited Suffrage Bill giving all qualified women the right to vote in all propositions to raise money by Bond or Assessment. The same rights are granted women in Louisiana and Montana. It seems a very senseless condition of things this. Here it is acknowledged that a woman has a right to say whether or not a tax should be levied upon her. She is deemed qualified to express an opinion on the intricacies of finance, she, as a matter of justice, is allowed to say whether or not her money shall be or shall not be taken by the State for State purposes ; but she is neither considered fit, worthy nor qualified to help in moulding the laws she has to obey. Still the principle of women's right to vote is admitted, it is a sort of half-way house, it is better than the condition of things which obtain in this country. Again in Finland,<sup>ii</sup> under the iron heel of the Bureaucracy of Russia, women over 24 years of age have the Franchise and are entitled to sit in the House of Representatives.

## Some Objections Answered.

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When any measure of reform is proposed, there are always innumerable silly little objections raised to it. Every reform indeed has to run the gauntlet of three stock arguments, three chunks of nonsense that the innate conservatism of man keeps fresh and handy, and ready to shy at all things new: - "It is against the Bible." "It will not work." "The time is not ripe for it."

"It is against the Bible!" Well, if you only try hard enough you can make the Bible prove anything. The Bible was used as an argument against Wilberforce when he wanted to free the slaves ; but surely no one to-day will say that we ought to have chattel slavery because there are some passages in the Bible indicating that people once believed in it,

and surely everybody knows that the Bible was written hundreds of years ago, when environments were different, when ideas were different, when traditions were different when conceptions of ideal justice were different from what they are to-day. If it is right to free the slaves despite the Bible, it is right to free women despite the Bible.

"It will not work." A hoary old piece of nonsense this ! It did duty when railways were proposed, when Parliament itself was proposed. When every reform, civil, mechanical, every reform that has ever broadened lives or cheapened production was first proposed, there always arose the prophets, the seers and the wiseacres, the prediction mongers, the calculators, the explainers-away. They have proved everything a failure beforehand. Did they not prophecy that the Catholic Emancipation Bill would land us in Anarchy ; that the Telegraph was impossible, that the Atlantic Cable was a hallucination, that the Ballot Act would result in Revolution ? They did. But progress swept past them and proved their prophecies vain.

It so happens indeed that the opponents of Women's Suffrage are bereft of even this argument. (?) Women, as has been shown, have got the vote elsewhere, and are using it with credit to themselves and benefit to the States that have had the sense to give it to them. But even in Britain they have the vote to-day. They vote in Municipal, School Board, Parish Council and County Council Elections, and no evil effects have followed. As a matter of fact the principle of woman's right to vote was admitted by our Constitution up to the Great Reform Bill of 1832, when for the first time women were legally Disenfranchised.

The last stock argument is that the time is not ripe for it. The time is always ripe for justice, it is always ripe for doing that against which no conclusive reason can be offered and no satisfactory argument advanced. The question is not one of time (if it were, the time is long past) - the question is whether the proposal is just, is honest, is reasonable.

## **The "Unsex Argument."**

There are people who say, and who say sincerely, that they believe it would "unsex" women if they exercised and intelligent interest in the laws by which they are governed and in the taxes they pay. But no biological change appears to take place when a woman votes at Municipal or School Board or County or Parish Council Elections. She votes, and still (the surprise of it!) remains a woman. In other countries we have mentioned - the other countries where women have the Franchise - no sex change appears to have taken place. Woman there still is woman - a more intelligent woman, a more womanly woman,

and less a coddled doll, but still woman. Her outlook on life may be broader, and she may have the hardihood to use the grey matter of her brain for purposes other than trimming gee-gaws and assorting feathers ; but surely the world is richer in consequence. Surely a more developed intelligence has not unsexed her. And (let us banish humbug!) we do not consider this unsex nonsense when we send the tax collector to the widow or raise the price of a mill girl's tea.

### **Woman's Place at Home.**

"Woman's place ought to be at Home," says another, meaning thereby that her sole interest and business in life should be housewifery and maternity. Where woman ought to be is entirely beside the question. Her proper sphere *may* be in the Zenana, in Canada, in Commerce, in the Nunnery, or at the wash Tub and Cradle ; but the question we must face is, where *is* she to-day? We know that at the time of the last census 27 per cent. of the self-supporting population were women. In the Factories of Britain the number of women employed is almost double the number of men. There are in England and Wales alone 130,000 Women Trades Unionists. "Woman's place is at home"? Well! there are thousands of women who have to labour outside to provide the wherewithal to keep their won homes. There are thousands of women lodgers. There are thousands of married women who are forced to work in factories (as at Dundee), in forges (as at Cradley Heath), and in all sort of occupations all over the country, in order to supplement the meagre and insufficient wages paid to their husbands. There are thousands of women having no homes. And the economic conditions of our time are slowly, but none the less surely, driving the female in ever increasing numbers to typewriter or factory for a living. The father's and the brother's wages are in most cases insufficient to keep the daughter and the sister at home. The Home, as an institution, frequently depends for its very existence on the fruits of the labour of its female members.

But suppose every woman did manage to stay at home. Is not her work of as much value to the State - is not her labour in cleaning, tidying, food buying, cooking, and in the rearing of children of as much value to the States is the labour of men who bottle beer, wheel barrows, or raise prices of food by gambling on the Stock Exchange? Does she not bear a share of the taxation still ? Has she not to obey the laws still, and would she not be a better wife, a more attractive daughter, and a more capable mother if she were allowed to develop her intelligence and stimulate her faculties by exercising an interest in the affairs of the Sate of which she is, willy nilly, a unit ?



And lastly, why should I and my sex, simply and solely because we were born in such condition as induced the doctor to decree that we must in time wear trousers, arrogate ourselves the right to perform the thinking processes for the other half of the human race?

### **Women do not want the Vote.**

This objection should rather be put : some women do not want the vote. Some slaves did not want freedom ; they had been kept in slavery so long that their stunted intelligence could not visualize anything else. Furthermore, any woman who does not want the vote need not use it ; she can stay away from the polling booth. There is no proposal to make voting compulsory. Women who do want the vote cannot wait till all their sisters are converted. All their sisters may never be converted and surely it is writ plain enough in all history that there was never any change or reform effected that had the combined assent of every one concerned. If women wait on unanimity they will never have the Franchise. But it has been calculated that over 1,250,000 women have asked for the vote. The deputation that waited on Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman on May, 1906, to petition for the vote numbered over 350 persons and represented some 259,000 women. The largest petition ever sent to Parliament was sent and signed by women over 20 years ago. It begged for the Franchise and was so bulky that it has to be wheeled into the House of Commons on a trolley. All sorts of women - Liberal, Co-operative, Primrose, Temperance, Textile Worker, and University - have, during the last 40 years, petitioned for the vote.

In other countries women seem to prize their votes. In New Zealand, according to the "Official Year Book" for 1902, the proportion of electors of each sex that voted was: - Males 78.44 ; Females 74.52. In England, at the first Municipal Elections, 14.415 or over 50 per cent. of the women entitled to vote went to the polls.

### **She is not "Intellectual" Enough.**

Most opposition to Women's Enfranchisement lies behind this assumed intellectual superiority of man. But let us look at the facts Professor Meinert (quoted by Bebel in his book "Women") estimates the average male brain to be from 90 to 100 grammes heavier than the average female brain. But there are vast differences in the weight of the brains of male geniuses, so much so that it does not appear as of the brain weight has any relation to its capacity or energy. For instance, the brain of the Zoologist Cuvier outweighed the brain of the great scholar Hausmann by no less than 635 grammes, or over 6 times the difference between the average male and the average female brain. But taking the

size of the bodily frame into account, the brain of women is really larger than that of man ; and it is possible (as Bebel says) "that the mere cerebral mass is nor more a measure of mental strength than bodily size is a measure of bodily strength." The Ant and the Bee exceed the Sheep and the Cow in intelligence, an tall and powerful people as a rule are inferior to people of small and insignificant appearance. In the one case the natural energy has been expanded in developing the flesh and the bones, in the other it may have been expended in developing the activity of the mental faculties.

But woman is "intellectual" enough to be taxed ; she is intellectual enough to sit on the British throne, to be part discoverer of Radium, to write popular novels, to take First prize in International Law (despite the fact that the chivalrous benchers would not allow her to study in their library), to be schoolmistress, doctor of medicine, civil servant, canvasser at political elections (she may bring voters to the very door, but must not herself enter), and voter at Municipal, Parish Council, School Board, and County Council Elections. Surely she is capable of exercising equal "intellectuality" with the Worcester elector whose "intellectuality" consists in discovering the candidate who will give him the biggest mug of beer, or the thousands of electors who are classed as illiterates, being unable to read the English language on the ballot paper?

## **Unfitness for War.**

It is sometimes argued that woman should not be allowed to vote because of her physical unfitness to be either soldier or policeman, and because the responsibilities of voting and legislating for war should only belong to those who in the last resort could bear arms.

But we do not confine the male Franchise to the physically fit. The male franchise is not given for alacrity in the "goose" step, or ability to see a target, or because of power to apprehend "drunks" or peer through a keyhole with the aid of a bull's-eye lantern. We get the vote because we are taxed and because we have to obey the laws of the country in which we live.

Again, no one would suggest that in time of war we should (say) rush to the universities and drag out the Professors to the fighting line. They would be worse than useless ; they would only hamper the other fighting men. They are unfit for war ; but like women they perform a useful social function, and unlike women they are given the vote.

## The Adult Suffragists.

The last objection is usually made by people who do not object to giving women the Vote, but who say that the Vote should not be given on a property qualification. They say that *all* sane men and women over the age of 21 should be allowed to vote, and not only those who have a property qualification. They declare that if the Women's Enfranchisement Bill becomes law, only the richer women will be given the Franchise, and that these richer women will probably use their votes against the interests of the poorer women. They say that the poor woman has to obey the laws and has her food taxed even as the rich woman ; and that it is a palpable injustice to give the Vote only to the richer woman, who has less need of it. They declare that under the Women's Enfranchisement Bill the artisan's wife, the poor female lodger, and indeed the vast majority of women, with the exception of women rich enough to own property, will be disenfranchised still.

Well ! what are the facts ? It is undoubtedly true that the married woman who does not own property in her own name will still be disenfranchised, but short of wiping out the property qualification as the basis for the Franchise altogether there is no way to cure this ; and it is no argument against giving *some* people justice, to say that *all* people are not getting it. In fact, the men who raise this objection to the Women's Enfranchisement Bill *themselves hold the Vote on a property basis*; and we do not hear of them refusing their votes because there is still a large number of men whose property is insufficient to enable them to vote. The man who says he is for Adult Suffrage, and nothing short of it, takes precious good care to clutch tight his own vote. And why an Adult Suffragist who holds his own vote on a property basis whilst a portion of his own sex is disenfranchised, should object to a woman holding a vote under similar circumstances is one of these things that badly want explaining.

As a matter of fact the women who would come under the Women's Enfranchisement Bill would be mostly the women who vote in the Municipal Elections, widows, etc. (the poor in the vast majority). And in addition, the decision of the Court of Appeal ("the Latchkey Decision"), allowing the Franchise to men who have unrestricted access to a bare, unfurnished room at any time, no matter whether they pay £10 a year or not, would, if the Women's Enfranchisement Bill passed, qualify thousands of poor women lodgers. In London alone 100,000 men were enrolled by this decision. A thorough classification made by the I.L.P. in the town of Nelson (Bradley Ward), in Lancashire, showed that, even if the property qualification were the test, only 7 women out of 468

could be classed as working women. On the Bolton Municipal Register there are to-day 5234 women voters, and of these 4752 are working women—that is over 90 per cent. The fears of the Adult Suffragist are therefore groundless. Indeed, even were Adult Suffrage law tomorrow, woman would not have the Vote except special provision were made for her. She is not a person within the legal meaning of the word, and a special Act is and would be required to qualify her even for Adult Suffrage.

In Austria, the Government have proposed Universal Suffrage but the following from the *New Age*, of 20th December, 1906, will show that Adult Suffrage does not necessarily mean Woman's Suffrage :-

"The new 'Universal Suffrage' Law in Austria makes no provision for women's enfranchisement and so Vienna has its "votes for Women" agitation. 'Universal Suffrage' does not exist as long as women do not have the vote,' declared Dr. Adler, the Leader of the Austrian Social Democratic Party. 'We cannot call it universal suffrage when half the population is excluded, we fight for women's political representation with all our power.'"

#### FINALLY.

This tract pretends to do no more than briefly state the case for Woman's Suffrage, and answer the objections customarily made to it. It is written so that he and she who runs may read ; and as its purpose is simply to stimulate interest on the bare question of the votes, it takes no cognisance of any "advanced" views on the future relations of the sexes. But it should never be forgotten, especially by men who have aspirations to moral, social and intellectual progress, that the, what John Stuart Mill called, Subjection of Woman, and her abject economic and political dependence on man, must inevitably, by crushing the intellect and initiative of the mothers of the race, render futile and vain the progress, advancement and development of man.

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<sup>i</sup> **Thomas Johnston CH** (1882 – 5 September 1965) was a prominent [Scottish socialist](#) and [politician](#) of the early 20th century, a member of the [Labour Party](#), a Member of Parliament (MP) and government minister – usually with [Cabinet](#) responsibility for [Scottish affairs](#). (wikipedia)

<sup>ii</sup> This is the spelling in the original, and was that used at the time.