

IS WOMAN FIT FOR SUFFRAGE? - PERHAPS NOT. WELL, IS MAN?



The Office Radical Thinks Not, and He Overwhelms the Philosopher by Some Cases in Point.

ushered in; that they will reform everything and install a Paradise on earth. They haven't done anything of the kind in Colorado. It's just as gang-ruled as it ever was, and the legislation there is just what it would have been if women had never had the vote."

"You anti-suffragists have got us suffragettes coming and going," said the Radical, derisively. "In one breath you argue that women voters will be hysterical and sentimental, and in the next you argue that they won't. You base the first argument on theory and the second on fact. When we meet you on the first you switch over and occupy our ground. Excuse me for saying so, Phil, but your logic is essentially feminine and proves that you are unfitted for the ballot."

"That I am?" repeated the Philosopher, indignantly.

"Well, that men are," said the Radical, unmoved. "As a matter of fact, to change the subject slightly, the great question is not, Are women fitted for the ballot? It is, Are men fitted for the ballot? I'm inclined to think women are not, but I'm dead sure men are not."

"We haven't made such a mess of it for the last 125 years," said the Philosopher, ironically.

"We've blundered through," admitted the Radical. "The sweet little cherub watches over fools, drunken men, idiots, and American voters—although it may be tautology to differentiate between the last two classes."

"What's the matter with us, anyway?" demanded the Philosopher.

"Well, you'll see if you'll go back to that hogwash you talked in your opening paragraph," responded the Radical. "I mean that poppycock about the solemn task, the grave deliberation, the best powers of the mature masculine mind. Listen to any two American adults discussing politics, and see if your description fits."

"In 1896 I went on the stump and exhausted the powers of my intellect expounding the meaning of 16 to 1. As I descended from what rank literary outsiders call the rostrum, an intelligent-looking workman, who had been following my argument with knitted brow, stepped up to me and said: 'I don't know that I understand this question fully. If we have free silver will we have to carry around these damn silver cartwheels in our pockets instead of greenbacks? Is that what 16 to 1 means?'"

"I told him it wasn't, and he said, 'Then I'll vote for Bryan.'"

"After the election we applauded ourselves mightily and patted ourselves on the back about the intelligent American workman, who had spoken out in trumpet tones for the national honor and rebuked the demon of repudiation. I heard a couple of these noble freemen arguing the issues of the day just before that election. Were they talking about the standard of value, the purchasing power of the dollar, and all those things which the mightiest intellects of the Republic had been expounding to them for four months?"

"Well, they weren't. One of them was saying, 'Did you ever have good times under a Democratic administration? Tell

me that.' 'No; but this man Bryan is on the side of the poor.' 'Never mind that. Did you ever have good times under a Democrat?' 'No.' 'Well then, whatnell are you talking about?'"

"Unquestionably," said the Philosopher, in his forensic manner, "the ignorant or careless vote is large, but what carries the elections is neither the selfish and interested millionaire nor the uninformed proletarian; it is the intelligent middle class, which reads and weighs."

"Oh, yes, the class to which we belong," interrupted the Radical. "Let us throw the usual bouquets at ourselves. Well, I'm here to tell you that the uninformed proletarian, as you call him, makes up his mind just as philosophically as we do, and not a jot more."

"I was talking last night with some of these intelligent ponderers that go into a cloister when they're thinking about public affairs, according to you. First they started talking about the Mayor."

"What do you think of Gaynor?"

"Oh, he's a crook."

"Just like that. They talked along in that strain for a while, and finally I couldn't resist butting in and asking, 'But what has he done?'"

"Why, you dub, don't you know?"

"No; I thought he had given a pretty good administration. What has he done?"

"They were almost carried away with merriment. Finally one of them recovered breath enough to ask, 'Haven't you read what he did about the subways?'"

"No; I hadn't heard that he had done anything about the subways."

"Haven't you read about Corrigan?"

"Yes, I read that he had lost his temper and said some unpleasant things about Corrigan. But what has he done?"

"Why, good Lord! Isn't what I've told you enough?"

"Your intelligent thinker makes up his mind according to the current of the crowd. He hears somebody say on the back platform of a street car, 'Roosevelt is no good, or, 'Taft is a stuff, and sees a cartoon or a headline endorsing that view; and then he tells his co-philosophers the next time he meets them, 'That fellow Taft is a sad disappointment, and they go out and repeat it to some one else. And that's the way public opinion is made."

"A year ago one of the most intelligent of our friends was shouting Roosevelt's praises. Day before yesterday I remarked that I thought the average public man was a pretty good sort of fellow. 'Yes,' he agreed, thoughtfully, 'I suppose that's so. I suppose even Roosevelt has his good points, though they're hard to discover.'"

"What has happened to Roosevelt since a year ago? He is the same Roosevelt he was when our friend was lauding him to the skies. He couldn't give a reason for the life of him, any more than my friends who were glibly dismissing Gaynor as a 'crook' could give one. It's in the air, that's all, and our friend follows the crowd. Could your uninformed proletarian do any worse? What is the essential difference between his frame of mind as to Roosevelt and that of the two workmen whom I heard discussing Bryan?"

"The Mayoralty of New York is the graveyard of reputations, as somebody said of South Africa. But it isn't because we don't have good Mayors. It is in the

temper of our people. After a Mayor has held office a couple of years the intelligent philosopher you've been halting gets vaguely tired of him, he doesn't know why. Every little thing he does is magnified into a mountain; he becomes a 'crook,' or a 'fool,' or any opprobrious thing you may happen to think of."

"Ten or fifteen years after he has retired from office we are talking about 'the good old days when Blank was Mayor.' But while he is in office—"

"Oh, bosh," said the Philosopher.

"Bosh, eh?" asked the Radical, aroused. "Can you think of any Mayor from Hewitt to McClellan who hasn't become unpopular in his term of office? It doesn't make a particle of difference whether the man is a Van Wyck or a Low, a Gilroy or a Strong. Every one of them has become the target for hoots and hisses. Some of them have deserved it, some haven't. This restless, unsatisfied population here won't stand for either kind."

"You were speaking of Taft," said the Philosopher. "That case bears strongly on my argument. The blast of unpopularity that blew on Taft a year or two ago was an evidence of the discriminating judgment of newspaper readers. They approved of Taft, but they condemned him for one act—his indorsement of the Payne tariff."

"Nothing of the kind," retorted the Radical. Your memory is too short. Taft was condemned for everything he did and didn't do; for attending banquets, for riding in railroad trains, for everything and for nothing. When he indorsed the Payne tariff it gave a handle, that was all. Your middle-class philosopher was not willing to weigh patiently and discriminatingly what Taft was doing and set the good against the bad; he seized on everything he didn't like, and his discriminating verdict was handed down on the street corner and in the barroom in the following language: 'Oh, he's a big stuff.'"

"We felicitated ourselves much on the election of last year, and there was much talk about your discriminating and unfoolable voter. I asked a dozen of my friends why they were going to vote for Dix or Stimson. They all gave different reasons, and every one of them was flimsy. The men who said they were tired of Roosevelt couldn't tell me why; he was identically the same Roosevelt he was when they were throwing up their hats for him."

"One man said he had 'got onto Roosevelt.' I asked him what Roosevelt had done which was in any respect different from the things he had been doing for ten years past. He couldn't tell me, of course. It was in the air, this thing of being tired of Roosevelt. What I maintain is that if the voter were the intelligent being you say he is, he either would not have been for Roosevelt in the first place, or would be for him still."

"Then take this insane license of speech which we permit ourselves in talking of our public men. It is a serious thing to call a man a 'crook.' If the man in the next street did something you didn't approve of, you would not use abusive epithets about him; but the President, the Governor, and the Mayor are not men to you, they are names, and there is nothing of flesh-and-blood about them. So you permit yourself a license



of speech from which you would shrink in horror if anybody applied it to Tom or Jack."

"In the city of Washington there is none of this. Even if a public man's actions are open to grave suspicion men hesitate long before applying the worst construction. It is not because of the corrupting influence of government life, as is often said; it is because the public men there are the neighbors of the Washingtonians, are human beings and not mere lines of type reading 'Dix,' or 'Taft,' or 'Gaynor,' as they are here, and gentlemen are not as violent toward flesh and blood as they are toward names and abstractions."

"You've been talking about men, not measures," reminded the Philosopher.

"Well, what is our judgment on measures?" retorted the Radical. "Of all the men who criticised the Payne tariff I couldn't find one who knew what was in it. It was just 'in the air' that the tariff was bad. It was bad, as a matter of fact, but I couldn't find any of your grave and reverend middle-class thinkers who could tell why."

"I knew a man who cut his friend's acquaintance in the hot days of 1896 because the friend was for free silver, or against it, I forget which. Anyway, I asked this Spartan to explain the silver question to me, and found he didn't know the first thing about it."

"If the city government fails to remove an obstruction from a street after being requested to the man whose request was turned down waxes indignant and votes for the Republican candidate for President, and explains that it is because he favors a 'high tariff.' If the tariff bears heavily on a man's receipts he votes for a Democratic candidate for Mayor, and explains that it is because he thinks the Republican county organization is a 'bunch of burglars.'"

"Well, about woman suffrage," said the Philosopher, who had been trying for a long time to dam the Radical's flow of eloquence. "Do you really think woman is fitted for the ballot?"

"Probably not," sported the Radical. "But she can't be any more unfitted for it than man is, unless she loses her mind."