

SPEECH

OF THE

HON. D. R. BIGELOW,

ON

FEMALE SUFFERAGE,

DELIVERED IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
OF WASHINGTON TERRITORY LEGISLATURE.

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# WOMAN SUFFRAGE:

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MR. SPEAKER:—Legislative bodies, through all their history, have been laboring to solve the problem of human government. There is a perfect rule, laid down in God's Holy Word, to govern nations as well as men. But no nation has yet implicitly followed the rule. The rule is plain nevertheless. Namely that the natural rights of every human being are the same. The desire for liberty and equality or for self government is also inherent in human nature, never eradicated, however long crushed down and smothered by custom, ignorance, and oppression. It is not confined to races, to classes or to sex. There seems always to have been many obstacles, whether insurmountable or not, that never have been surmounted in applying the rule. We know from the Sacred Record that there has been from the primitive days of the human race, a faithful few who have adhered to the Divine command "do unto others, as ye wish others to do unto you;" but justice and mercy were soon trampled under foot by barbarism, and the world became a world of violence and robbery, wherein the rights of the weak were disregarded and might became the law of the world. Human wisdom cannot always clearly distinguish, in the wars, and conflicts of the world's history, when and where civilization and human freedom gained or lost. But this we know, that education is one grand

whole through all time. And it seems to me a subject well worthy the attention of the American people, to consider *why* one half of our population are denied all voice in civil government. And if there has been heretofore good reasons for it, if the civilization of the world is not far enough advanced to remove those reasons, and farther, which I consider far the most important question of all, can christian civilization be perfected without the help of the most moral half of the world? Among savages physical force is law supreme, and woman is always a slave. You trace woman's civil inferiority in the governments of the world to the same source. The nations of the earth have been built up by wars, and conquests. Woman as a class being physically inferior has never acted a conspicuous part in such triumphs. Hence it naturally followed, because she was physically inferior, she should be made civilly inferior also. Great deeds, as the world rates greatness, have been performed, and great nations reared to an imperious position, by superior physical power. Profane history does not light us back with much certainty beyond ancient Egypt. And there we see the scepter and the sword swayed by the Pharohs with a degree of pride and power that concentrated in one man the vital forces of the whole nation to an extent never surpassed, if equalled in the annals of time. They indeed exacted and received Divine honors. They embalmed the dead; they built pyramids, cities and monuments never since surpassed, and in some cases never since equaled. But the true glory of the world is not found in any of these. Thebes, with her gorgeous temples and palaces, lies sixty feet under the sands of the desert. The pyramids indeed remain; but the inscriptions upon them, intended to hand down to latest generations the renown of their founders, have become riddles and the Egyptian mummy is frequently used for fuel to drive the locomotive over the land of the Pharohs. There was at that time no such thing as the people known. One man thought for all. Surrounding nations were robbed of men and treasure to glorify the king. The multitudes that built the pyramids and their cotemporary massive

architectural wonders, lived in reed huts, daubed with mud, ate coarse food, and were driven to their tasks by the lash of the task-master. It is true that at this distance of time, we know not how much of this vigorous system was necessary to compel wandering tribes to become a nation, or how much force was necessary to save civilization in its cradle from being smothered by barbarism. But that was between thirty and forty centuries ago; and through all these ages, with perhaps what may appear to human view as temporary relapses, the world has been slowly but surely tending to a higher civilization. Greece and Rome made a long step forward in human liberty and equality, and in the development of mental and moral power, more perceptibly in the mental. But yet they were largely indebted to the prowess of their arms and the spoils of the conquered for their renown. The historian tells us that "Rome glittered all over with the spoils of a ransacked world." It is conceded that Greece reached the zenith in mental power. It is said in this respect, "She filled the trumpet of fame." But the highest glory of the world is not in that. You must link manhood with immortality, to make it truly great and noble. The world was made for man; and the objective point aimed at in human destiny is the perfection of manhood, not alone of the few but of the many. To accomplish this, human society must be developed in the physical, mental, and moral, or spiritual. The first two without the third being like a ship at sea without rudder or compass. Nations like men write their records upon the tablets of time, by physical, mental and moral power. Moral power is not so apparent as the other two. It is more silent in its operations. But it has always had great influence in the world notwithstanding.

It was their religion, whatever it was, that was the central idea of every nation named in history, held the nation together, and gave shape to their institutions and laws. It was awe of, and hope of reward from a higher power, that constituted the only security for public virtue and private worth. If their religion was idolatrous, it was the controlling power of the nation and determined its character. No state of barbarism, and no

state of civilization, but christian civilization ever did do justice to the weak. The religion of Jesus Christ alone gives equal liberty and justice to the weak. We will not here argue the truths of christianity to those who are disbelievers. We only point to its precepts and offer human experience as testimony that they are just what is best for human happiness in this world, without looking beyond. And then we show beyond dispute that christian civilization is the highest now known among men. We are indebted to God's revealed will for all civilization. Civilization is more or less imperfect, just in proportion as Divine light shines into the human soul. The infidel that discards religion is indebted to religion for all the morality he possesses. He got it from being in sympathy with his fellow men, and partaking of the spirit of society around him. Without christian civilization, men prey upon the weak of their own species, like beasts of prey; with it, the arm of the strong protects the weak and strikes for universal humanity. The world had achieved great physical, mental and moral triumphs, before the coming of Christ. But oppression was the prevailing rule of the world, not only of the stronger nations over the weaker, but of the strong over the weak within the nation itself. Since that time The Sun of Righteousness, the sun of liberty, and the sun of learning, have all been shining upon the world with increasing power. They are indeed all one. All for one purpose, to light humanity to its highest destiny. The present times have been schooled by the experience of ages. Without going farther back, what a rich legacy has the last five hundred years bequeathed to us. What sublime triumphs in the world of mind. How much has been done towards giving man's mental and moral nature the ascending over the physical, or the animal part of man. And what a preparation for enthroning man's moral nature absolute ruler over the other two. Within that time gun-powder and machinery have forever dethroned brute force, from swaying the scepter of the world. The art of printing has placed knowledge within the reach of the masses. The people have become so radical as to dare to think

for themselves. The Bible with the chain broken, with which Antechrist had bound it, has shed its truths directly upon the hearts of men. All these things prepared the way, and matured the seed, to plant a new continent with civil and religious liberty. They have been planted here, vindicated and enlarged by two wars, they have been from the first the grand central idea of the nation.

Yet with all that man has gained in self-government, woman in America has less political privileges, than in any other civilized nation. In England, for instance, political rights and privileges are confided more to classes than sex. Only one *man* in five can vote. A certain number of the aristocracy of both sexes, have exclusive political privileges, and woman is not debarred from many offices, not excepting the highest office of the nation. England has an aristocracy of class; America of sex. The theory of our government is, that all sovereignty is in the people, that all who are governed by the law, should have a voice in making that law. Yet this is not the practice in case of one half the nation. The Scripture argument used by some that man is to rule woman, I think is not warranted by the record. I do not understand the Scriptures to make woman any the less a free moral agent than man. I understand her to have the same accountability to God and to the government, as man. If so I know of no argument in Scripture or elsewhere to deny her the same privileges, whether woman is physically or mentally inferior to man, does not effect the question. Men differ physically, mentally, and morally, but all have the same natural rights. If we concede to man superior physical and mental power, we must still concede to woman superior intuition and moral power, which gives her the advantage in the highest development of humanity. But it is by no means universally conceded that woman is mentally inferior to man. Many of the most powerful masculine minds from Plato to the present time have been of the opinion that woman is no way mentally inferior to man, when she has the same opportunities and inducements to exercise her mental powers. Men as a general rule have the

political honors and emoluments of the world, the lists not being open for woman to enter. Yet when called upon, woman has never shown herself inferior in politics to man. The names of Maria Theresa, Isabella and Elizabeth stand so high in the worlds history, that but few male sovereigns, stand above them. Man has generally claimed the whole field in the arts and sciences. Yet many feminine names have a world wide fame, for excellence in sculpture, in painting, in mathamatics, in astronomy, and in every art and science that man can master. It is not fifty years since it was thought disruptable for a woman to be an author. Quite as much so, as it is now for her to vote. And some of the first female writers that became distinguished, published their early productions under a masculine name, until their merits became indisputable. And now our female works and writings constitute the pure gold of our literature. It is but a few hundred years back that a woman was no more permitted to learn to read, than a slave was in one part of our country before the rebellion. So long as brute force ruled the world, man made women his slave. And in proportion as christian civilization gains power among men, in the same proportion, does woman approach equality with man. And that woman who labors to banish the religion of Jesus Christ from the earth, labors to destroy the power that has made her what she is. All the rights woman have up to the present date, are a boon given by man. The world has always practiced similar assumptions of power, not only with sexes, but with classes. The ruling few for the time being, have always been slow to extend or divide their privileges with those not possessing them. A great deal of the democracy of the world has striven only to level down to themselves, while they were equally determined that no lower class should come up to their level. If the theory of our government be correct, no human being has within himself the sovereignty of another. "Sovereignty is an inalienable, individual, natural right, that every human being possesses." Sovereignty is in the whole people, and every individual is an integral part of that sovereignty. If this is not true, then might makes right, and every



individual has a right to rule any and all other individuals if he has the power to do so.

But it is said that woman may trust man to make laws for her. No class of men ever did make just and equal laws for another unrepresented class; and our whole system of laws demonstrate that man has never done so for woman. Our nation has reached a high position among the nations of the earth. Our most important interests, now to secure advancement and perpetuity to the nation are educational and moral. Without a high development in this direction, free government is impossible. The fall of nations has generally been preceded by the decay of public virtue and private worth. It is conceded by the best masculine minds of this nation, and of the world, that woman surpasses man in developing the educational and moral faculties of mankind. These are the two interests, now arrayed against ignorance and vice. This is now the great war, upon which the fate of our nation depends just as certain and surely, as it did upon the issue of the great rebellion. What would be thought of a general while the battle waxed warm, and victory hung in the balance, who should disarm the best half of his army?

The politics of the nation is run now largely by money. It is boldly asserted by the knowing ones, that legislation, is and can be controlled by the same means. Is it not wise to use all the means we can to enlarge the moral basis of our liberties? It is admitted that it is not good for man to be alone in making a home. Government is but a national home. And the co-operative influence of woman is just as necessary in community, in the Church and in the State as in the home. It has proved so in every instance in which it has been tried. Temperance societies have proved far more efficacious and permanently useful when organized on the basis of equal co-operation of men and women. The presence of the true woman has never failed to purify, cheer, beautify, promote and elevate every laudable enterprise. The startling idea has even struck some minds that there is nothing fit to be done for the promotion of human interests that is not

fit to be done in the presence of woman. What assurance have we that woman has reached the nearest to equality with man, or to the extent of her powers for usefulness? The savage will tell you that woman is only fit for a slave. The Chinaman will tell you that woman has no soul, and the surplus female children in China are destroyed the same as we destroy a surplus of kittens. And the only argument they have, when you sift down to it is that it always has been so; and both the Chinaman and savage will tell you that woman is in her proper sphere. Advancing civilization has made great preparation for woman's enlarged mental and moral development. History takes us back to the time when woman pounded or ground the grain for bread, and my own memory runs back almost to the time when the housewife spun the yarn and wove the cloth to clothe the whole family. It might then with some propriety be said that woman had no time for mental development. But now the rivers turn the spindles and ply the looms, the sewing machines, the knitting machines and other labor-saving inventions, give woman more time for enlarged mental culture and usefulness. Some of them say to men you have guided the Ship of State for forty centuries and the shores of time are strewn with the wreck of nations all the way; let us bear a hand at the helm with you.

But man says that woman must confine herself to the duties of being mothers of Washington's, Franklin's and Newton's. If I mistake not history gives no record of a great man that did not have a great and noble mother; and mothers qualified to rear Washington's and Franklin's are not themselves accidental. They owe their development to perhaps centuries of the growth and progress of their race. We see how slowly races of mankind rise from lower to higher types. The habits, physical, mental and moral all tending to advance or retard human progress. The better the development in one generation, physically, mentally and morally, the higher will be the standard in all of them in the next generation. And of the two the highest possible development of all the female faculties is of the most importance. It has been found in the experience of educating

the Indian tribes, that an educated man marrying a heathen wife the children always went back to barbarism. But a heathen man marrying an educated woman the children were saved to civilization. The only instance in the history of our nation, of the father and son both being President, was in the case of the Adames. And in reading the life of the wife of the first President and mother of the second, we are forced to admit she was as true a patriot and as great a statesman as either the husband or son. Is not the American female mind tending too far away from such a model? It is said that over fifty papers and magazines, and hundreds of men are supported chiefly by keeping the females of republican America posted upon the fashions of the aristocracy of Europe. When the Empress of the French swayed the scepter of fashion, it was immediately, regardless of expense, telegraphed to America what the Empress wore at breakfast, what at dinner, what at supper and what at this and that ball. The Empress had a nation to supply her treasury. Her elaborate jeweled dresses, worn but once, were paid for largely by the destitution of the poor of all France. It is beyond my depth to demonstrate just what the effect of fashion is upon civilization. But it has become a maxim that the children of fashionable mothers never become distinguished. I have heard that it was said by one lady of Olympia, of another lady, that she was a perfect lady because she did not know how to do anything. The present laws and customs of the world do not offer inducements and opportunities for woman's highest development and usefulness. The blacksmiths arm becomes powerful by swinging the sledge. The mind too, must have vigorous exercise, or it will find when it attempts to grapple with the great problems of human destiny, that its grappling irons are leather, instead of barbed steel. Nations are made up of individuals, and the sum total of individual development determines the vigor and vitality of the nation. This rule is not alone applicable to one half of the nation. Life is a great responsibility. And that human life is a failure that does not do something to make the world better. Hence it follows that the larger the sphere

of usefulness the nearer the perfection of life. It is now no more true that woman's home duties give her no time to be useful in the community, and in the rights of franchise, than it is of man. Neither is it true that doing these things makes a woman any the less a good mother and housekeeper.

Among the Quakers woman has the same rights and privileges as man. She may do any public duty she is able to do; and the Quaker testimony is that those women who are best informed and are the most publicly useful, are also the best mothers and housekeepers. The acknowledged ablest preacher now in the sect is a woman. These things are called unfeminine simply because woman is not accustomed to to them. If the argument is good that mothers ought not to have the right of franchise because they have no time; then all other women ought to have the right. Because the argument can not apply to them. But the fact is there is no class of American citizens, that have more at stake in the laws that regulate the community in which they live, than mothers, and as a class could be more safely trusted with representation in making them. It was said of the Lacedemonian mother, that she raised her child for the State. It is none the less true of the American mother. But if she is not herself a part of the State, the State may counteract all her influence and power for good over the child. A mother is not often able to raise the character of her child much above the standard of the community in which she lives. And that standard is made by the laws and customs of the people. The mother may wear her life out for her children. But she can not always keep them at home. And if the laws of the community license schools all around her home to destroy her child, has the mother no interest in those laws? "Lot saved himself in Sodom, but he could not save all his children." Intemperance is now considered, by the best men of the world, as the greatest hindrance to the world's conversion. Enough money and time is wasted by it in this nation to give every child in it a classical education. It demoralizes the nation to an alarming extent. There is no place safe from its blighting influence. It

has thickened the tongue of prayer and babbled its sacred nonsense around the communion table. It is an unmitigated curse, in the family, in the community, and to the State. Nowhere does its blighting power fall with greater force, than upon the homes of our land. The wife sees her husband so crazed by drink that the lives of herself and children are in jeopardy. She finds herself, and her children destitute of food and clothing, and and if she goes out washing, and earns a dollar, her husband is entitled to the money, and if paid to the wife the husband can collect it again by the laws of the land. Has women no interest in the laws regulating these things? The wife may be the noblest of women, and the husband the meanest of men. The mere fact that he is a male makes him a sovereign and a law maker. We can determine the rank of a nation on the scale of civilization by its laws. In our government all laws are made through the ballot. And when all the men have voted, we say we have got the voice of the people. Whereas in fact we have got the will of only half. It is no more the will of the people, than it would be if the women voted, and the men did not. But it is said if women vote, they must be soldiers, work on roads, and do all kinds of masculine work. It does not follow. All men are not required to do these services. If you concede to mankind the ability to govern themselves, you must concede to them sense enough to put the right persons in the right places. "The world is tending towards an universal diffusion of knowledge and privileges. The ballot is a great educator to forward this result. The ballot gives responsibility, and a sense of responsibility is the first lesson in self government. Then educate the voter and the nation is safe. The ballot is a high privilege of sovereignty to the poor and weak. Their strongest safeguard against oppression." Those who took at the mere machinery of politics and elections, as at present conducted, say it would be unfeminine for women to be there. The ballot moulds this nation for good or evil, and anything about it unfeminine is unmanly also. It is the presence of women that is wanted to remove these objections. The presence of women purifies literature, secures do-

veny at public dinners, and at public speaking. And we may safely conclude it would do the same in politics. It is necessary that women exercise the right of franchise in order that the temperance, educational and moral interests of the nation be fully and fairly represented, and to secure their ascendancy. To recapitulate in few words; If women was wronged when she was a slave, and further along when she was not permitted to learn to read, at what point is she fully righted short of equality with man? And if our government rests on the will of the people, why do we retard civilization by denying representation to the most moral half of the nation. If women has been kept in reserve so many centuries while man has been fighting civilization up to the dawn of the supremacy of the third and highest development of the human race, is it not time to bring up the reserve and make the victory sure?

“Besides such triumphs

The laurels that a Cesar reaps are weeds.”

But I think that women should decide this question for herself. If I understand the principles of self government, man has no more right to say that woman shall or shall not vote, than woman has to say the same of man. As a matter of natural right I know of no valid argument, to deny franchise to woman, any more than to men. The fashionable female portion of our country do not want to vote. Because they do not want to make the exertion which the duties of citizenship would require. And here we find the origin of the idea, that it is feminine to do nothing. In the absence of necessity for exertion, the tendency of the human race is to run out always. The vigor of this nation in all its departments, is constantly replenished from the ranks of the poor, where necessity compells exertion, and exertion produces development. In the history of all the nations of the past, when the rich became enervated by luxury and idleness, and the poor debarred from advancement the remaining history of the nation was short and ignoble. In our form of government, the more universal the right of franchise, the greater the security to individual rights, and the farther in the future, if ever, will be

the day when monopolies and aristocracies, shall bar the door to individual advancement and independence. There is no question but that woman as a class, stand upon a higher moral plane, than do the men. Their votes are needed to raise politics towards that higher plane. It is not then so much the question, whether woman has a right to vote, as it is whether it is her duty to vote, to save the nation, and perfect civilization.