

The Revolution.

PRINCIPLE, NOT POLICY: JUSTICE, NOT FAVORS.—MEN, THEIR RIGHTS AND NOTHING MORE: WOMEN, THEIR RIGHTS AND NOTHING LESS.

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The Revolution.

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IS VOTING A NATURAL RIGHT?

In various articles which have been published both in favor of and opposed to the extension of suffrage to women, a great deal has been said of the "natural right of suffrage." Now, if there is any one thing which more than another has tended to create confusion, it is the use in this connection of the words "natural right of suffrage." And the reason of this is, simply, that there is no such thing as the "natural right of suffrage." The words are meaningless. The natural rights of every individual are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and none other. To conceive of a man, considered without reference to his fellow-men, as possessed of the right of suffrage is an absurdity. The existence of a society is the necessary condition of the existence of this right. When men enter into the compact of society they surrender into the hands of government part of their natural rights, and, in exchange, are endowed with certain political rights. Suffrage, originating in government, is a political right and has nothing whatever to do with natural rights.

This quotation is from an article in a recent number of the *Round Table*, and supposed to have been written by a woman. It is only by possession of a compact style and other enviable faculty of writing that so many mistaken notions can be condensed into so small compass. At least so it seems to this editor.

If there be any such thing as natural right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, there must inevitably be some equally natural rights attending them. And yet the *Round Table* writer declares "the natural rights of every individual are, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, and none other."

And again, the writer says, "when men enter into the compact of society, they surrender into the hands of government part of their natural rights, and in exchange, are endowed with certain political rights."

Which of their only three natural rights are surrendered is unfortunately not told us. The Declaration of Independence seems to presume more than "three natural rights;" for it says, "among these," as though there were more than three, perhaps many more. Again the Declaration calls these natural rights "inalienable;" that is, as the best dictionaries say, cannot be legally or justly alienated, or transferred to another." Here there are serious collateral difficulties at the outset.

And again, do only men thus surrender? And is their consent asked and obtained? because the same immortal instrument asserts that governments "derive all their just powers from the consent of the governed." Humanity is at last discovered, thanks to moral mariners compasses and Columbuses to have two hemispheres, a

female as well as male. There are women as well as men—more women generally, it is claimed, than men. When their consent was ever asked, much less obtained to this surrender of their rights, history even forgot to make a memorandum. When they gave it, is surely not recorded. And yet women are governed, woelessly governed sometimes; but where came the power, if only from "the consent of the governed" do governments derive their authority. Again our *Round Table* writer asserts, with assurance pleasant to behold, "Suffrage originating in government, is a political right, and has nothing whatever to do with natural rights." This also may require farther consideration. For, tracing phenomena back to first principles, some learned pundits came to the question, which was first, the egg or the hen? The conclusion hitherto is (with true Sir Roger de Coverly liberality), that much may be said on both sides. In old anti-slavery times, political abolitionists used to insist that "slavery was a creature of law" and therefore a political party must immediately be formed to resist it. And whoever would not join that party was no abolitionist. But the more radical class answered, "if slavery be the creature of law, of what is law the creature? Is there not a grandfather as well as father?" And so they still claimed a hand in the contest. Was there "just government" before suffrage? and if so, whence came it? Who governed rather but a usurper before he was chosen, and had "the consent of the governed?" the same that governs woman to-day without her consent, the majesty of might; taxing her without representation, and compelling her to obey most rigorous and cruel laws, without her consent; without her even being consulted either as to the making or executing of those laws. The same that has fined, imprisoned, whipped naked, branded with red hot irons, burned alive and hung without ever trying one mortal one of them by "a jury of her peers;" in Old England or New, in Europe or America, since the star of Bethlehem illumined the world!

But to return to the question of natural rights.

It may be that government by man over man is in itself unnatural; a lawless and monstrous usurpation. If so (and that is the faith of multitudes), then there is an end of the argument. But accepting the prevailing idea of human constitutions and laws, and of natural rights, is it not inevitable that every natural right must carry with it every condition necessary to its possession and enjoyment? Without the latter what would the former be worth? Or how could it be said to exist at all? The right of suffrage is as old, as sacred and as universal as the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It is indeed the complement of all these, and their only safeguard. The right to life would be nothing without the right to acquire and possess the means of its support. So it were mockery to talk of liberty and the pursuit of happiness until the ballot in the hand of every

citizen seals and secures it. The right of life to the born slave is no right, if his possessor may deprive him of all possible means for its preservation. He may live, but it is only by the sufferance of another. So of liberty—To man, to the white man, the ballot is its bread and water, light and air, without which it is nothing. Woman may have privilege, but she can have no right which the male citizen is bound to respect. The right to give implies the right to take, and suffrage has been taken from woman in New Jersey within the last half century. But as justly and perhaps more properly woman might have voted it from man in the same way. Being in the majority, why should she not if either be deprived of it, in the very name of modern democracy? The right of the black man to the ballot was not earned at Olustee or Fort Hudson, Fort Wagner or Fort Pillow. It was his when life began, not when life was paid for it under the battle-axe of war. We talk of giving right of suffrage to black men, and some in the plenitude of their generosity propose to extend it also to women. It is proposed to make educated, cultivated, refined, loyal, tax-paying woman, worth hundreds of thousands in gold, but whose wealth in money is the least of her value to society, equal in rights to the servants who groom her horses, dust her carpets, and scour the pots and pans in her kitchen. Not many are thus magnanimous, though a few are. But most even of these think they are conferring a favor, a boon, not restoring a long withheld and most sacred right. Suffrage may be regulated but not restricted. For no male however white, was ever born with three ballots in his hand, one his own by birth-right, the other two to be conferred on or withheld from woman and the black man, at his pleasure or convenience. Our trade in right of suffrage is contraband. It is bold buccaneering on the commerce of the moral universe. If we have our neighbor's right of suffrage and citizenship in our keeping, no matter of what color or race, or sex, then we have stolen goods in our possession; and God's search-warrant will pursue us forever, if those goods be not restored.

Suffrage was never in the hands of tyrants or of governments, but by usurpation. It was never given by them to any of us. We brought it; not bought it; nor conquered it; nor begged it; nor earned it; nor inherited it. It was man's inalienable, irrevocable, inextinguishable right from the beginning. It is so still; the same yesterday, to-day and while earthly governments last. It came with the right to see and hear; to breathe and speak; to think and feel; to love and hate; to choose and refuse; or it did not come at all. The right to see came with the eye and the light; to hear, with the ear, and to breathe, with the lungs and the air; and all these from the same infinite source. And has not also the moral and spiritual nature its inalienable rights? Have the bodily organs, which are but the larder of worms, born of the dust, and dust their destiny—have they power