

WHY? by Elizabeth Robins



This document reproduces the original printing in *Everybody's Magazine*, VOLUME XXI, Number 6, December 1909, pp. 723-738.



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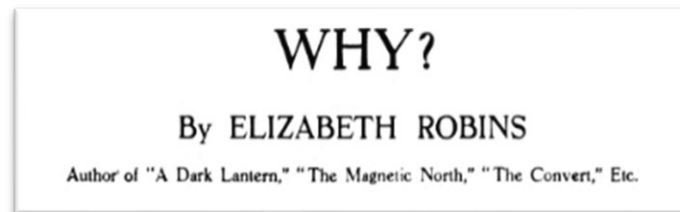
Page images 745 to 760 correspond to page numbers 723-738.



This magazine version, printed in the United States, is interesting for two reasons: First, illustrations in this edition supply graphic photographic evidence of the growing influence of public demonstrations and protests. None of the photographs are directly associated with ER's text. Second, the head note explains that Robins was invited to author the article by the editor. The only record of the editor's name, John O'Hara Cosgrave, is in the masthead to each issue. ER was not commonly referenced as "Mrs. Robins." Though married to George Richmond Parks in the late 1880s, she reverted to her birth name except when taking a pseudonym. By 1905, her well-known brother had married Margaret Dreier and was often "Mrs. Robins" in news articles.

The essay is also published in *Votes for Women* 3 Dec. 1909-4 Feb. 1910: 153; 163; 179; 196; 211; 226; 259; 275; 291 (as recorded in Sue Thomas bibliography). Best source for *Votes for Women* in electronic format, LSE collection, <https://lse-atom.arkivum.net/uklse-dl1wr03015>. Also, there are select issues at Google.

Once published in the two periodicals, *Everybody's Magazine* and *Votes for Women*, it then became a stand-alone pamphlet, published by WSPU. Sue Thomas bibliography notes that this pamphlet went through three editions by 1913. Separately printed as a pamphlet by the WSPU, the pamphlet form of the essay may be available through Interlibrary Loan as an electronic document; it is in the Gale *Nineteenth Century Collections Online: Women and Transnational Networks* and can be requested through OCLC Document Exchange.



Further notes on this first publication:

We know from Robins' private correspondence that she shared pre-publication drafts of this with the Christabel and Emmeline Pankhurst, among others.

Inexplicably, this magazine printing ends without the important last several paragraphs gathered as the answer to 10. "Why, after all, do women want the vote?" Consult the version that published in *Votes for Women*, or the pamphlet, or the chapter from *Way Stations* at the Robins Web, bottom of page 191 to page 195, <https://www.jsu.edu/robinsweb/waysta/way10why.html>.

Again, the complete versions of the text can also be found as Chapter Ten (X) of *Way Stations*. Robins collected her Suffrage speeches, published letters and essays into this volume, published in 1913. Pagination may be different in this book edition across the printings in the US and in Great Britain.

Online editions of *Way Stations* are held in most major repositories. In addition, there is a chapter-by-chapter hypertext version at the Robins Web.

Link: <https://www.jsu.edu/robinsweb/waysta/index.html>

VOL XXI
DECEMBER

ALUMNI ASSOCIATION
PROPERTY.
EVERYBODY'S
MAGAZINE
NO. 6
1909
DO NOT TAKE FROM ALUMNI ROOM.



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WHY?

By ELIZABETH ROBINS

Author of "A Dark Lantern," "The Magnetic North," "The Convert," Etc.

EDITOR'S NOTE.—On the night of June 29th in London, thousands of English women gathered round the House of Parliament to support a deputation headed by Mrs. Pankhurst in an attempt to present to the Prime Minister a petition praying for Woman's Suffrage. A great concourse of police were assembled to preserve order. An Inspector of Police who stopped Mrs. Pankhurst had his face slapped. Stones were thrown through the windows of Whitehall, and one hundred and twenty women were arrested. The editor of "Everybody's" saw this extraordinary demonstration, and asked Mrs. Elizabeth Robins, the distinguished English novelist whose connection with the cause of Suffrage is well known, to explain why English gentlewomen had so far departed from the traditions of their sex as to resort to violence to gain a privilege a Liberal Government had seen fit to deny them. In the full exposition that follows, Mrs. Robins states the grave causes justifying the suffrage agitation in England, and our readers can decide

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whether her logic and argument in support of the contention that women's votes will cure certain communal wrongs, have equal bearing on conditions in America.

1. Why are women of all classes in England banding themselves together to work for political enfranchisement?

2. Why are women subscribing through a single society alone, the Women's Social and Political Union, £50,000—nearly \$250,000—a year to the cause?

3. Why will nurses, artists, librarians, teachers—professional women of all sorts—give up congenial work to labor twice as hard on half pay or none for the Suffrage?

4. Why will well-bred girls and older women sell Suffrage papers in the street, exposing themselves to the scant civility of the police and the horseplay of rowdies?

5. Why are they ready to accept the alienation of many of their friends and most of their menfolk?

6. Why, instead of petitioning for justice, are the women now demanding it?

7. Why, instead of helping to elect another Member to support the Suffrage cause in Parliament, are women going themselves in deputation to the House of Commons?

8. Why, rather than abandon a dangerous

and often health-destroying agitation, have hundreds of women gone to prison?

9. Why, if these are good tactics, were they not employed before?

10. And why, after all, do women want the vote?

These are among the questions people in America and Great Britain are asking. Yet, though I speak under correction, these are questions that I am convinced many persons, in England at least, do not wish to have answered.

Not only the idle and brainless, but many able and busy men ask only: How shall we silence these women? When nurses, Poor Law guardians, teachers, district visitors, University Settlement folk, women factory inspectors, medical women—when such experts come forward with their evidence, what happens? They are told in more or less direct terms that the authorities do not want their evidence.

I do not pretend to know how much longer the practice will be pursued of refusing a hearing to reputable, public-spirited experts,



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MRS. DRUMMOND, MRS. PANKHURST, AND MISS CHRISTABEL PANKHURST SURRENDERING THEMSELVES TO THE POLICE.

when these experts* are guilty of being women. But I know that only one of the two main results of that refusal is clear to the man in the street. The result that is clear is: the stone through the window of the Government office.

The other result is of the same nature as that mischance which, it is whispered at London dinner tables, recently befell the King. Among the relays of relations visiting His Majesty, it is said there was recently a small princess whose beauty and liveliness brought upon her the special notice of

her august host. At some purely domestic luncheon she was given the seat of honor. Far from feeling any proper embarrassment at her elevation, she made bold to converse at her ease, and in the middle of an observation on the part of His Majesty, the small princess interrupted.

"When I am speaking," said the King, "you must be still." The child sat obediently silent, eating her meal. At last His Majesty, thinking he had been perhaps over-severe with his little kinswoman, patted her kindly on the shoulder: "Now we can listen to you, my dear."

"Oh, it is too late now," said the little princess. "I was only going to tell you there was a caterpillar in your salad. But you've eaten it."

A similar experience awaits those who refuse the testimony of the eager eyes and clear, practical brains of "the women who know." But the result is at times even more serious. For the caterpillar is eaten not only by those

* Among others coming under this head, the Prime Minister has refused to receive the deputation of Women Doctors and another of Head-Schoolmistresses.



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MRS. PETHWICK LAWRENCE ACKNOWLEDGING THE GREETINGS OF HER FOLLOWERS OUTSIDE HOLLOWAY GAOL UPON HER RELEASE, APRIL 17, 1909.

in authority who decline to be warned. It is eaten by the innocent multitude who have had no chance of being warned. It is for them that we are mainly concerned, rather than for the comfortable minority so ready to be soothed by the Anti-Suffragist assurance that nought is amiss except with Suffragettes, and that behind the stone-throwing, behind the thousands of orderly meetings, behind the \$250,000, is mere hysteria or hooliganism. The women who say that are not all so ignorant as they pretend. Many of them, rather than

break through some small social convention, will sit as still as the little princess and see the caterpillar go down with the salad. These are the "safe" tactics—warranted to ensure general approval.

Yet, in obedience to my editor, I will assume that there are, as he thinks, certain persons waiting to have a few of the unpalatable facts pointed out. I will answer seriatim the questions propounded at the beginning of this paper, devoting the greater portion of my space to consideration of the first, which comprehends the last—*Why, after all, do women want the vote?* The first question on the list is: *Why are women of all classes in England banding themselves together to work for political enfranchisement?* There seem to be three reasons.

1st. Because women have discovered what men said they never would perceive, namely, that the higher interests of all classes are the same; and though the workingwoman has the more obvious and pressing need of this reform, the woman of the upper and middle class has, in her fashion, equal need of it.

The very foundation of women's activity to secure the vote is a keen sense of wrongs and a conviction that through Suffrage they might be righted.

2nd. Thinking women have found that to work for the public good without working through the laws is to salve one's soul with mere charity-mongering. It is to scratch at the surface instead of striking at the root of evil.

3rd. All sorts and conditions of women have come to realize that each class has urgent need of the support of the other in hastening this reform.

Now the reason the reform is urged with less unanimity and vigor in certain other countries is that the need for it is less fully understood by the women of those countries. Why is the need more widely known to English women?

(1) Because for two hundred years the "political woman" has been a factor in English social life.

(2) Because, earlier still, English women of the upper class inherited and carried on traditions of the responsibility of the fortunate toward the less fortunate. The natural attitude of the great lady, and of the vicar's wife and daughters, has been imitated by those who wish to establish their credit in the community. This survival of a feudal usage has its drawbacks in a tendency among the poor toward servility, and a tendency among the rich toward condescension. But in that it has brought some actual knowledge between class and class, and a

human relationship, it will probably save England from the more violent encounters between rich and poor that the future may bring in other countries.

As a result of these two forces, while the Woman's Suffrage movement owes its commanding proportions to the working class, the needs and views of these women have been given their publicity, and their collective weight, through the organizing power of educated women. For forty years or more, women of some leisure and enlightenment have been serving on school boards, as Poor Law guardians, on hospital and organized charity boards, on vestries. And the Suffrage agitation will prove itself invincible in England because in front of the inarticulate army of the workingwomen there are these leaders who have learned leadership quietly, slowly, through the years that lie behind.



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SUFFRAGETTES PARADE AS SANDWICH-
WOMEN.

I have given as part of the answer to the first question on our list, women's discovery of the futility of hoping to effect social amelioration without getting at the roots of evil. The roots of civic good or evil are the laws



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RELEASED PRISONERS IN THE SUFFRAGISTS' PROCESSION IN LONDON. ON EXTREME RIGHT IS LADY CONSTANCE LYTTON.

that govern the community. Women in England have no share in framing or administering the laws under which they live; and, as is inevitably the case with any factor of a community not recognized in its formal organization, English women suffer injustice under English laws. Yet I have heard excellent meaning men say the law showed women favoritism. They believed it—so blunted had become their sense of justice. Under examination, this "favoritism" turns out to be the mere rags of survival of the old chattel-view of women, laws like that of coverture—not framed for the good of the wife, but for the convenience or greater safety of the husband—laws which a saner view of the sexes will do away with.

On looking closely into this "favoritism" shown women by the English law, we find facts such as these:

A man can not only will his property away from his wife and leave her penniless—he can even will his property away from his children and leave them penniless, charges upon a penniless widow.

In the absence of a will or settlement, a woman, married or single, can inherit land only if she has neither father nor brother living.

In the case of the death of a son or a daughter the mother inherits nothing from either. The whole of their property, even if it has come from the mother's family, goes to the father, or to the father's next of kin.

In that home in which woman is told she is to "rule as queen," she has not only no control over any portion of the means of livelihood (unless she owns or earns it herself), or even the material contents of her house—she has no legal right in or control over her own children, unless (significant exception) they are born out of wedlock. She cannot, even if she is a widow, appoint a guardian to act for them after her death, if her husband has already appointed one.

The mother may by deed or will provisionally appoint a guardian to act jointly *with the father* after her death. If the court is satisfied that the father is not fitted to act as sole guardian, it may confirm the appointment. This last wears an air of quasi-justice, but, like all other laws, it must be interpreted and applied by one sex only, by the sex to whom the father's interests inevitably make the surest appeal.

But if the laws bear hardly on women of education and means, do they deal **more**

mercifully with those obviously more in need of championship—with the ignorant and the poor? Certainly many of the reasons, legal and other, that actuate women of property to demand a voice in equalizing the laws, are different from the reasons that actuate the hard-driven workingwoman; but the two classes find a meeting point in the conviction that representation in the government is necessary to the righting of their respective injustices.

Let us examine some of the facts (I take them almost at random) which have brought the workingwoman to the point of revolt.

Broadly speaking, the fundamental difficulty is that the law has not kept pace with the economic changes which have thrust women into industry. For women have been thrust into industry—by the increasing complexity of modern life, by the tremendous and inevitable forces of combination. The very nature of the home has changed. Women's home work of other ages—spinning, weaving, baking, brewing, soap and candle making—has been taken from the home to the factory—and women perforce have followed. Two members of the family—perhaps more—now work outside the home instead of one. And—mark this—in just so far is the family less an economic unit, less capable of representation by one person. Women, working in the same general economic conditions with men, should have the same legal recourses.



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SUFFRAGETTES WELCOME MRS. LEIGH AND MISS NEW ON THEIR RELEASE FROM HOLLOWAY GAOL.

These they have not; and it is significant that the modern representatives of the women whose distinctive work was first removed from home to factory form the largest and most powerful group of organized women to-day demanding the vote. These are the textile workers, who, as a result of organization, have higher wages, better environment in labor, a higher standard of home comfort, and more generous provision for their children and their own old age, than any other group of working-women. Yet what of their security, their hope for the future?

Thousands of women outside the textile trades are working, without let or hindrance, for a starvation wage; sweated labor is not only

permitted but is even encouraged by the Government; and thousands of women workers are forced into the ranks of the unemployed. Yet, with all the difficulty women encounter in getting decently paid work, when they *have* got it, the Government, in the person of its President of the Local Government Board, Mr. John Burns, now advocates taking this well-paid textile work away from them and giving it to men. It is proposed that married women (a great proportion are married) be compelled to stay at home. No question of asking the women what they think about this proposal. But what they think about it may be inferred from the fact that the threat of interference with the right to work has given

us 96,000 Suffragists. The manifesto of the Lancashire Textile Workers says :

"The position of the unenfranchised working-women, who are by their voteless condition shut out from all political influence, is daily becoming more precarious. They cannot hope to hold their own in industrial matters where their interests may clash with those of their enfranchised fellow-workers or employers. The one all-absorbing and vital political question for laboring women is to force an entrance into the ranks of responsible citizens, in whose hands lies the solution of the problems which are at present convulsing the industrial world."

A friend of mine fell into talk with a tidy, contented-looking mill-woman of thirty odd

in a tram car the other day. The woman spoke of her home with pride.

"It doesn't suffer, then, by your being so much away?"

"Oh, no. I have a housekeeper." At my friend's evident surprise she explained: "A nice oldish body who isn't up to mill work, but keeps the house and children as neat as a pin."

"Children? You think it's good for them to have their mother so much away?"

"They're away themselves a good bit. They go to school. But it is good for them that my thirty shillings a week makes us able



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SUFFRAGETTES RAID MR. ASQUITH'S HOUSE.



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MISS SPOONER, A SUFFRAGETTE, CHALKING ON THE PAVEMENT DURING THE WORCESTER ELECTION.

to feed and clothe them decent. And it's good for the housekeeper-body who hasn't a house of her own, to have mine to work in and earn her bread honest." It would have done some of the legislators good to hear that woman's views on the proposed restriction of women's work.

"What will you do," asked my friend, "if Mr. John Burns carries out his scheme?"

"Eh?" said the woman. "If he does that, I suppose we'll have to clem (starve)."

Those who would like to believe that the law, or at all events its administrators, can be trusted to show special "favoritism" to women, should take counsel also with Mrs. A—of Chelsea. She is the wife of a mechanic, who ill-treats her so that she goes in fear of her life. She took her little boys the other day to the police court and applied for a separation order. The magistrate told her to "go home and do the best she could." The children, who had seen the indignities and the physical danger to which their mother was subjected by their father, received in the police court a further lesson in the duties of man toward woman. They heard this symbol of justice and of ultimate power—the awe-inspiring magistrate—tell their mother that

she had not yet suffered sufficient injury at the hands of her husband to have earned the right to live away from him. The learned opinion was that "a man was entitled to knock his wife about a bit." Whether the magistrate was shameless enough to use those very words—as reported by the woman—or whether he merely showed her that was his view of the husbandly prerogative, the effect upon his audience was the same. The law allowed men this privilege. Indeed, that the law should do so excited little surprise in the minds of persons familiar with the petty fines imposed upon notorious wife-beaters, and the frequently proved fact that it is legally a more reprehensible act to steal a loaf to feed your starving family, than to give the mother of that family a pair of black eyes.

But to be beaten without redress, without even hope of future legal protection—that is not the worst that may come of this "go home and do your best," which is all the law has to offer. Of the women who have sorry cause to know that, is the wife of a day laborer living not two miles from Westminster. Mrs. B— was another applicant for a separation order (since divorce is too dear a luxury for any of this class).



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SUFFRAGETTE PROCESSION LEAVING HYDE PARK AFTER THE RELEASE OF MRS. PETHWICK LAWRENCE.

The ground of Mrs. B——'s plea is the infidelity of her husband. "You can't get a separation order for that."

"Well, but he brings the woman home—he keeps her in the house."

"That is no ground."

Then the magistrate is given the heart of the grievance. The husband insists on having the interloper in his wife's bedroom. No redress. Because the husband has not turned the wife out, because he professes himself willing to support her, the supplanted wife is refused a separation order. She is coerced into accepting the degrading conditions laid down by the man inside her home because all the men outside (represented by the magistrate) say these degrading conditions are just and legal. Those legislators who propose to make it illegal for married women to work outside their homes do not even begin by doing away with the age-old legal abuses which any day may make a woman's home the worst place for her on the surface of the earth.

If a woman of the kind whose story I have just told is still young enough and strong enough, just one way of escape is opened to her this side of death. For that woman (and many another) there is no salvation from

moral degradation except the chance to earn her own living. If this woman has a daughter or the ear of any young woman, is it to be supposed she will not urge the girl to get some means of livelihood other than, or in addition to, the profession of wife? It is a proof of the mortal need women feel of economic independence that, against natural inclination and iron-bound tradition, more and more women leave their homes in search of work, in spite of the stumbling blocks placed in their way, and in spite of the unfair discrimination made against women's work, merely because it is done by practically a slave-class.

In no department of human action have we found more plainly manifest the law that the evil growing out of injustice ultimately rebounds upon the doer, than in this of discrimination against women's work because it is not done by men. To-day, though men still insist on the maintenance of the principle that women should be paid less for precisely the same service, they are beginning to realize that it does not always operate in favor of men, and they are crying out, not against its injustice, but against its more palpable ill-effect upon themselves.

It was during a recent by-election in the north of England that I first came face to face with the bitter feeling on the part of the workingman against his underpaid rival, the workingwoman. A strike of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers had been in progress for many weeks. As is well known, these north country engineers are among the most intelligent and highly paid workmen in the kingdom. To get them to vote in the way best calculated to serve the women's cause was an end worth striving for. The Government might ignore voteless women—they

could not afford to ignore this body of highly organized workmen armed with electoral power. It was natural, therefore, that the President of the Women's Social and Political Union should accept gladly the first invitation ever given a woman to come and address a branch of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers.

The meeting, held in a large room over a bar, was packed with workmen, but it became plain, as we made our way through the crowd, that this opportunity to present the women's point of view was in the nature of a fluke. The resolution had presumably been passed when only a few of the men were present. The majority would never have agreed to it; and the majority were present now to register their disapproval.

I have never been at an indoor gathering where I felt the atmosphere more distinctly hostile. The chairman made a speech that was half apology, and begged for fair play.



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MISS "MAY DREW" INTERCEPTS THE RIGHT HON. WINSTON CHURCHILL, M.P., PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE, ON HIS WAY FROM THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

Mrs. Pankhurst rose to talk to men whose anxious thoughts had been concentrated for weeks upon their own bitter struggle, men who knew nothing of the woman's movement. I noticed how many of the workmen never so much as looked toward the woman standing there in the cloud of tobacco smoke and talking so quietly. I saw how, little by little, whispering, grumbling groups dissolved, unwilling eyes were turned upon the speaker, and the pipes were put out. These men were at least listening. For she was talking to them not about votes for women, but about the men's

immediate problem; talking as a fellow-citizen and one who had studied politics and worked with men for thirty years for public ends. Although non-partisan, and refusing to "take sides," it was plain she knew more about the grounds of the great strike than many of the professed politicians who came from Westminster to instruct these men. She had their attention, held in that vice that never lets go till the last word falls.

Even the big man with the hunched shoulders, who had sat with averted eyes, was slowly turning his grizzled head. I was glad of that till I saw the look in his face. The speaker had summed up the situation. "And so after all these weeks you are still idle."

"We are idle," said the grizzled engineer, "but our machines aren't." There was a second's hush. "There are women behind them," he said. Like low thunder the muttering of the displaced men went through the room.

The speaker's face grew bright. It was precisely the opening she wanted: "And if women *are* sitting at your machines, whose fault is it? You are quick to blame the women. Which of you blames the men with full stomachs who employ those hungry women as strike-breakers? Which of you blames the people most to blame of all?—the husbands, fathers, brothers of those women, who have kept them ignorant and unorganized? I think myself women can do more suitable work than the making of screws and the polishing of brass fittings. But I am *glad* those women are doing your work on half pay!"

There was some disturbance upon that, but her practised voice rose over it: "It is the only thing, perhaps, that women can do that will bring their difficulties home to men. Of course, the state of things is evil. But you have the remedy and you won't apply it. Men shut women out of their unions and yet expect women to starve for the sake of those unions. You and your fathers have made it a tradition that women of your own class shall be overworked and underpaid—and then you dare complain that women accept overwork and underpay. Whose fault is it that women don't play the game? Yours, who refuse to allow them to learn it."

She hammered it into them red hot. But what frightened them, I think, was her showing how, for all that men could do, the woman worker was forcing her way into one industry after another. And, in truth, consideration of the statistics of displacement of men by women is a sobering exercise. Yet, as the speaker pointed out, men, who have all fields open to them, have not scrupled to take away women's work. Not only do men bake and brew, they

even knit and spin,* they sell lace and ribbons, they dress women's hair. What work have they left exclusively to women? The unpaid drudgery of the house; the work in sweat shops that men despise. But women are growing tired of this division of labor. "Not only amongst you here—everywhere!"

She showed how by ignoring the working-woman the workingman was cutting his own throat. "Many of those women at your machines would rather work at home. They can't afford to. Some of those women would rather set type or bind books. But these are skilled trades and highly paid. Your unions won't let women learn them. The technical training in this country is nearly all for boys. Women have to creep in wherever your misfortunes make an opening." "That's it!" somebody said at the back. "Your woman's a born blackleg!"

"She's born no different from you, my friend, in that respect. But she will sooner sacrifice herself to feed the children. She stands where your fathers stood before they learned coöperation. You men have got every good thing you possess by standing together. Now I've come to tell you—we women want to stand together. And we want you to help us. If you won't do it for

the sake of justice, do it for the sake of your own bread and butter. If any man in this room ought to be in favor of Women's Suffrage, it should be my friend, there, who is so angry at the thought of a woman working his machine for half pay." It was the



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TWO SUFFRAGETTES ARRESTED.

* "I saw a man working a special knitting machine, earning three pounds (about \$14.58) a week. He was waited on by a woman who earned ten shillings (\$2.40) a week. I asked the manager if the woman could not do the work at the knitting machine as well as the man. He said, 'Every bit as well; but the Trade Union rules will not allow it.'" (Lady McLaren in "The Woman's Charter.")

first time the Suffrage had been mentioned.

She showed them what cause even the few organized workingwomen had to know that political freedom must precede fair industrial conditions, and how hard the textile workers found it to prevent unrepresented labor from being cheapened. This was not a problem arising here and there out of a strike—but the constant, unending struggle. "Your only safety lies where our only safety lies: In equal pay for equal work."

It was a doctrine that pleased the engineers well. If they had to be paid the same, what employer in the Iron Trade wouldn't prefer an Amalgamated Engineer to a woman! Readily enough, now, they listened to what half an hour before would have fallen on deaf ears. They even applauded the sentiment: "You will never be safe, you will never yourselves be free till women are free. It is only the enemies of your freedom who are served by your refusal to stand by us in this struggle." She told them of the pains and penalties inflicted upon Suffragists. She spoke of her own prison experience. The men near the grizzled engineer seemed to be consulting with him. At the close of the meeting the big man stood up and said gruffly

that if the lady wanted stewards at her Town Hall meeting, he and about twenty-seven of his mates were ready to steward for her and see fair play.

The Amalgamated Engineers were as good as their word. Afterward, came other requests asking that other branches should be addressed. I saw much the same scene enacted over and over—the initial hostility giving way to interest and in the end to championship.

The Government lost that by-election.

If women of all classes are uniting to ask for the representation that shall give them justice, they are asking it also for another, more altruistic reason: For the sake of the children who have been unrepresented by that part of the community that stands closest to them, and is best fitted, by nature and through generations of experience, to understand their care. How have the children fared under the *régime* of men? What of the Government's dealings with the 234,792 children wholly or partly dependent on the State, according to the Local Government Board's own return in January, 1908?

It is not a pleasant thing to contemplate even on paper the answer to that question.



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A SUFFRAGETTE LAUNCH OFF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.



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MR. ASQUITH INTERCEPTED BY SUFFRAGETTES ON HIS WAY FROM THE MEETING OF THE NAVAL COMMISSION ENQUIRY.

The State keeps 22,483 of these children in workhouses. Here is a description of a Government nursery:

"It has often been found under the charge of a person actually certified as of unsound mind, the bottles sour, the babies wet, cold, and dirty. The Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble-minded draws attention to an episode in connection with one feeble-minded woman who was set to wash a baby; she did so in boiling water, and it died."

But this is no new discovery. A dozen years ago Dr. Fuller, the Medical Inspector, reported to the Local Government Board that "in sixty-four workhouses, imbeciles or weak-minded women are entrusted with the care of infants." Dr. Fuller wasted his breath. The abuse still flourishes. To-day, the Royal Commission reports, "In some of these workhouses it was frankly admitted that these babies never left their own quarters and never got into the open air during the whole period of their residence in the workhouse nursery.

"In some workhouses forty per cent. of the babies die within the year. In ten others 493 babies were born, and only fourteen, or three per cent., perished before they had lived through four seasons, while in ten other

workhouses 333 infants saw the light, and through the gates 114 coffins were borne, or thirty-three per cent. of the whole."

"If such a report," says Mrs. Barnett, wife of Canon Barnett, so long of Toynbee Hall*, "had been issued on the work of the Admiralty or the War Office, the whole country would have demanded immediate change. 'They have tried and failed,' it would be said; 'let some one else try'; and a similar demand is made by those who have seen many generations of children exposed to these evils, and waited, and hoped, and despaired, and waited and hoped again." This is one of the points where women wish to try.

I doubt, furthermore, if there exists in print a better plea for the urgency of Woman's Suffrage than that embodied in the Minority Report of the latest English Poor Law Commission. This eloquent and amazing document is largely the result of years of work on the part of Mrs. Sydney Webb. It has been more discussed, more written about in the few weeks since its appearance, than any

* An institution in Whitechapel, London, founded "to provide education and the means of recreation and enjoyment for the people of the poor districts of London."

utterance on this or on kindred themes within our memory. And small wonder, for what it reveals is an incompetence and a legalized cruelty in the treatment of the poor that would be beyond belief, did the report come with less authority, or had any one since ventured to deny its allegations, such as: that thousands of innocent children are shut up with tramps and prostitutes; that there are workhouses which have no separate sick ward for children, in spite of the ravages of measles, whooping cough, and other infectious diseases; that "young children, in bed for minor ailments, have next them women of bad character under treatment for contagious disease, and that other women in the same ward are in advanced stages of cancer or senile decay."

But since men's consciences are admittedly stirred by these volumes of indictment, why may we not reasonably hope that the abuses complained of will be abolished?

We may not hope that for a highly significant reason.

The worst concrete evil arraigned (the general Mixed Workhouse) was condemned root and branch as long ago as 1834. It has been condemned decade by decade ever since, by successive experts who had the ear of the Government of the day. The evil of existing conditions was admitted during a whole generation by the Local Government itself.

Men have *talked* about these evils for five and seventy years. It is now clear, we believe, that until that portion of the community standing closest to the problems presented by the care of the old and broken, the young children and the afflicted—until women have a voice in the mending of the laws on this subject, their inadequacy will continue to be merely discussed.

The next question asks: *Why will nurses, artists, librarians, writers, teachers, and other professional workers give up congenial work to labor twice as hard, on half pay or on none, for the Suffrage?*

For two reasons. Because the women enumerated above are of the kind whose personal experience has made clear the connection between the vote and wages. And because they wish to save other women from the same experience. Teachers, for instance, have given up posts in the National Schools to work for the Militant Suffrage party, knowing that the educational authorities will never allow them to return to work which,

though unfairly paid as compared with men's remuneration for similar work, was to these teachers all that livelihood may mean to women who earn their bread. They are fired to add their quota to sacrifices which others are making so that the women who come after may not find their hold on work more insecure than a man's, nor the salary less than a man's—for no reason in the world except that they are women.

A fresh illustration of how the action of politicians may directly affect women's work was afforded by the recent attempt to dismiss married women from the headmistressship of schools. Among others who were told that their services were no longer required—for no cause but that they were not single—was Mrs. Stansfield. This lady was already married at the time of her appointment. No one denies that she has made a distinguished success as a teacher. But she is to give up her profession because, if women are so indiscreet as to marry, they must lie on the bed they have made. "But why," Mrs. Stansfield asks, "should I be compelled to do the manual work of my house any more than thousands of other married women who employ cooks, housemaids, and nurses?" She, like the woman of the cotton-mill, is enabled by her earnings to employ a housekeeper. "I invite those who say that the home suffers to visit mine."

But Mrs. Stansfield is a mother. The sacred claims, etc. The lady tells us with pride and happiness of "two children whose births necessitated some months' leave of absence, no more than the breakdown in health to which all, single and married, men and women, are alike liable. During the last thirteen years I can thankfully say I have not been absent from school half a day on account of my own children." To any who maintain that the children of married teachers suffer, she offers to introduce her son of fifteen who is a Boteler scholar in the Sixth Form at the Warrington Grammar School, and her daughter of eighteen, who has just won an open scholarship at Oxford. Mrs. Stansfield further points out the penalization of marriage involved in the plan made by the authorities, and the loss to education involved in the removal from its service of the experience, the influence, and the motherly sympathy of married teachers. The present moment, evidencing, as it does, a quickened sense on the part of women of the

need to protest against injustice, is held by the educational authorities to be ill-chosen for pressing the marriage disqualification. As a result of their agitation, Mrs. Stansfield and the other married teachers are to be allowed to remain at their posts—for the time being.

4. *Why will well-bred girls and older women sell Suffrage papers in the streets, go about as "sandwich women," and suffer the scant civility of the police and the horseplay of rowdies?*

Many a sensitive woman has set herself this task out of sympathy with the far more wounding experiences that other workers in this cause endure. Women who cannot face prison and have little or no money to give, offer this particular service. But the Suffragist who sells papers, or advertises meetings in the streets, does not, I think, often realize that, besides bearing witness to her faith and earning a few shillings for a particular society, she is contributing no small share to doing away with the European equivalent of the Eastern woman's veil—that shrinking from publicity which has been elevated into a virtue, and which has so powerfully aided men in preserving their sex-dominance. She is contributing toward making the streets a less unfit place for decent women.

5. *Why are women ready to accept the alienation of many of their friends and most of their menfolk?*

Not because woman no longer cares for man's opinion, and not solely because she sees that a temporary alienation may be unavoidable. There are in operation two subtler reasons than these.

The first is the growing spirit of loyalty which makes a woman ashamed to side with the stronger party, from whom she stands to gain such obvious advantages, whether in the field of business or of sentiment. The second reason she accepts this alienation is because she is beginning to recognize woman's own share in the responsibility for men's blindness. She knows how it has been fostered by woman's slavish desire to please at all hazards. That old vice must go. It will die the sooner for men's learning, as soon as may be, that women are ready to suffer not only in material advantage, but in friendship and affection, if their doing so can make the position clearer, and so shorten the difficult days that lie between us and a better understanding. Of all the sacrifices women lay on the altar of the new faith, none perhaps costs so much as the alienation from

friends. Only the unintelligent will continue long to mistake the sacrifice for sex-antagonism.

6. *Why, instead of petitioning, are women now demanding justice?*

Not only because petitioning has been tried and has failed, but because women now see that by petitioning they kept alive a misapprehension already too old. It is misleading to beg for a thing that no man has a moral right to withhold.

7. *Why, instead of helping as before to elect another Member pledged to support the Suffrage in Parliament, are women going themselves, in hundreds, to the doors of the House of Commons?*

Because so many men sent there in times past to work for Woman's Suffrage have either been won over, by the more clamant voices of voters, to give precedence to voters' interests, or else the Woman's Suffrage candidate, once elected, has become hypnotized by the routine of the House, and by the growing sense of the helplessness of the individual member. Since it is so necessary, apparently, to remind legislators of unkept promises to women, women go to Westminster to do the "reminding" in the only effectual way. They are also there as a sign to the Government that the stewardship of the unjust steward is gravely menaced.

8. *Why, rather than promise to abandon a dangerous and often health-destroying agitation, have hundreds of women gone to prison?*

Because, of the two parties of Suffragists, those who want the vote in the dim and speculative future, and those who want it now, the Militant Suffragists belong to the latter group.

It was Mazzini, I think, who pointed out how often the way to reform has lain through prison. But this truth was not in the minds of the first Suffragists who went forward by that road. Not the farthest-sighted of them all had any vision of the moral awakening, the new birth of faith, the passion of comradeship born of pain—no glimpse of the direct good destined to come through prison was given those women who first adopted the so-called "militant tactics." They simply did the nearest duty with all their might—considering only the end, resolute not to mind how rough the road thither.

They appealed in the open streets for followers. With what looked like insane ignorance of human nature, before the "weak"

and "timid" horde they unfurled a strange new flag, inscribed: *To Prison for Freedom*.

And then the miracle happened. Instead of flying forthwith from leadership like this, a legion rallied. They followed into dark, unlikely places. Once there, the timid and the weak formed their sieges, possessed of an inexplicable new power. It enabled them to show steadfast faces and to feel no fear in their hearts.

Much talk was in the air of armaments and military duty. The rapidly growing army of women came to look upon themselves as soldiers enlisted in a holy war.

Here for the first time were women banded together (as men had so often been before), ready to make any sacrifice that might free them from an evil yoke. And above all—to do it NOW! To these new Suffragists, women's belauded patience had been the undoing of the race. Patience was a comfortable vice—vile, when practised at others' cost.

You may not approve of these women, but they have made Woman's Suffrage a living issue.

9. *Why, if so-called militant tactics are good tactics, were they not employed before?*

It may be argued that they are good precisely because they are employed only after other means have failed. They say (I do not know upon how good authority) that a young Suffragette, interrupted in the middle of her speech at a mass meeting by the question why, if these methods were advancing the cause, they had not been tried earlier, answered briskly, "Because I was at school."

There is more than audacity in that retort. This is preëminently a *young* woman's crusade. I have met but one older woman in the movement who does not get her strongest conviction of its not too-distant triumph out of the fact that the cause has won the young to its support. We have at last enlisted those without whom none of the battles in the ancient or the modern world would have been fought. Who, after all, make up the armies? The young. Who won Marathon? The youth of Greece. Who won Agincourt,

Waterloo, Gettysburg? The young. A distinguished survivor of the Civil War told me that the average age of his brothers-in-arms was eighteen years. Read the inscriptions on the stones, rank on rank in Federal or Confederate burying grounds. You will say to yourself: "How young these soldiers were—mere boys!"

So with our soldiers, the mere girls. It is the younger generation that is at the door. And with their coming naturally comes some modification of method. Henceforth—deeds, not words. But deeds more rational and less destructive than those that men have employed in the earlier revolutions. At least that is what we hope.

I do not mean to disguise the fact that those who, like myself, feel war to be a survival of barbarism, are accustomed to think of physical violence, not in women only but in men, as a recrudescence of the ape and tiger instinct that has been responsible for the thousand failures of humanity to attain a true civilization. I shall not deny that some of us winced at the stone-throwing. Therefore it may be well to bear witness to the fact that when we came to understand how little the stones meant violence, and how much they meant moral indignation against the abuse of physical force, we saw in them the instruments not of destruction but of building. For the stone-throwers thought as straight as they aimed. They saw that it was a plain question of: Which do you care more for, order or justice? They care more for justice.

I have heard Suffragists complain that they have had to apologize for these women. I do not know how they have dared do that. For however unpalatable, the truth is that to the so-called militant women the evils that other women bear are more intolerable than they are to the rest of us. These militant women are the women who cannot sleep in their comfortable beds as we do in ours, knowing the wrong that walks abroad. Those of us who do not openly aid and abet them may at least speak humbly of a devotion greater than our own.



Consult the head notes and see other editions for the conclusion to the essay; missing here are several paragraphs answering "Why" question 10:

"Why, after all, do women want the vote?"

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NEW YORK
THE RIDGWAY COMPANY, PUBLISHERS
1909

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Issued monthly. Yearly subscription, \$1.50 in advance. Single copy, fifteen cents

Foreign postage, \$1.00 additional. Canadian postage, 30 cents.

Copyright, 1909, by The Ridgway Company in the United States and Great Britain

Published by THE RIDGWAY COMPANY, Union Square, New York City

5, Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C., England

Entered at the New York Post-Office as Second-Class Matter

This page is screen shot 887 in the digital copy and begins a 150+ page advertising and editorial section as unnumbered page 1.

Notice the attention to the Robins article at the top of the header.