

Equal Suffrage

By Alice Stone Blackwell, Editor Woman's Journal

When a change is proposed, people ask "What good will it do?" The experience of the enfranchised states has already answered this question in regard to equal suffrage. In the words of Sidney Lanier, "It is idle to argue from prophecy when we can argue from history."

The following results are common to all the suffrage states:

(1) Equal suffrage has broadened women's minds and led them to take a more intelligent interest in public questions. Julia Ward Howe sent a circular letter to all the ministers of five leading denominations in the four oldest suffrage states—Wyoming, Colorado, Utah and Idaho—and to all the editors. She asked whether the effects of woman suffrage were good or bad, and she published the results of her inquiry. She received 624 answers. Of these, sixty-two were unfavorable, forty-six in doubt, and 516 in favor. The replies from the Episcopal clergymen were favorable, more than two to one; from the Baptist ministers, more than seven to one; from the Congregationalists, about eight to one; from the Methodists, more than ten to one; and from the Presbyterians, more than eleven to one. The editors were in favor, between eight and nine to one. While many other good results were mentioned, the point upon which there was the greatest unanimity was that the ballot had had a good effect upon the women themselves, in broadening their views and stimulating them to inform themselves on questions of public importance.

(2) It has given women added respect and dignity. Women of all the enfranchised states, from Mrs. Sarah Platt Decker down, have testified to this. As Mrs. K. A. Sheppard, president of the New Zealand council of women puts it: "A young New Zealander in his teens no longer regards his mother as belonging to a sex that must be kept within a prescribed sphere. That the lads and young men of a democracy should have their whole conception of the rights of humanity broadened and measured by truer standards is in itself an incalculable benefit."

(3) Woman suffrage has made it harder to elect candidates of flagrantly bad character. This is conceded even by A. Lawrence Lewis, almost the only respectable man in Colorado who has written against equal suffrage. In his article in the Outlook, which the anti-suffragists have republished as a tract, he says: "Since the extension of the franchise to women, political parties have learned the inadvisability of nominating for public office drunkards, gamblers, notorious libertines, retail liquor sellers and men of similar discredited occupations, because the women almost always vote them down."

(4) It has been a help to women in securing moral, educational and humane legislation. The legislative committees of the state federations of women's clubs in all the enfranchised states have learned this by experience. The testimony to it comes with especial weight and emphasis from women who had worked for reforms before and after equal suffrage was granted, and who have seen the difference. One of these, Mrs. Alice Park of Palo Alto, Cal., after noting the greater responsiveness of the solons this year, wrote: "One vote is worth a ton of voteless influence." Such testimony could be multiplied almost indefinitely. A specific list of all the improved laws

secured in the different suffrage states since women were enfranchised would be too long for the limits of this article. It can be obtained from the National American Woman Suffrage Association, 505 Fifth Avenue, New York.

(5) It tends to modify a too exclusively commercial view of public affairs. G. W. Russell, chairman of the board of governors of Canterbury college, New Zealand, writes: "Prior to women's franchise the distinctive feature of our politics was finance. Legislative proposals were regarded almost entirely from the point of view: (1) What would they cost? and (2) What would be their

lessened the power of the saloon in politics. In the twenty years since women were given the ballot in Colorado, no saloon keeper has ever been elected to the Denver city council, though before that it was common. Mrs. Deborah Knox Livingston, national superintendent of franchise for the W. C. T. U., points out that in the state of Washington there has been a gain of 115 dry towns since equal suffrage was granted, in California a gain of 475, etc. In Colorado, within four years after the granting of votes to women the number of no-license towns was more than quadrupled, and it has increased still more largely since. Commenting upon the defeat of state-wide prohibition in Colorado last year, Ellis Meredith, the head of Denver's reform election commission, and herself a strong advocate of the dry policy, wrote in the Woman's Journal of November 16,



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THE FIRST ONE EAST OF "THE MOTHER OF WATERS"
 (Illinois is now among the Woman Suffrage States.)—From the Chicago Tribune.

effect from a commercial standpoint? The woman's view is not pounds nor pence, but her home, her family. In order to win her vote, the politicians had to look at public matters from her point of view. Her ideal was not merely money, but happy homes, and a fair chance in life for her husband, her intended husband, and her present or prospective family." Louis D. Brandeis, at the legislative hearing on woman suffrage in Massachusetts last spring, said that he had formerly been opposed, but was now convinced that women's votes were needed, especially to help in the solution of our economic problems.

(6) It makes elections and political meetings more orderly. The Hon. John W. Kingman of the Wyoming supreme court has said: "In caucus discussions, the presence of a few ladies is worth a whole squad of police."

(7) It promotes temperance. Equal suffrage has nowhere brought about state-wide prohibition, but it has everywhere led to an extension of dry territory, and has markedly

1912: "It is because under our local option law conditions are so good and dry territory increasing so fast that many people feel we shall come nearer regulating the traffic in this way than by so-called total prohibition, with the police power in all the big towns opposed to it."

(8) It has increased the moral and law-abiding vote very largely, while increasing the vicious and criminal vote very little. Women in the United States constitute more than two-thirds of the church members and less than six per cent of the prison population.

(9) It has increased the proportion of voters who have had more than a merely elementary education. Owing to the growing tendency to take boys out of school early in order to put them into business, the high schools of every state in the union are graduating more girls than boys—sometimes two or three times as many.

(10) It leads to better enforcement of the laws for the protection of women and children.

(11) It helps to get adequate ap-

propriations for education. Several years ago I addressed a circular to the state superintendent of public instruction or the state commissioner of education in every state where women had the school vote, asking about the results. The large majority replied favorably. The Wisconsin superintendent gave a striking instance. In Madison, the proposal to build a much needed new high school building was carried by the women's votes. The old building was rickety and a firetrap. The Nebraska superintendent wrote: It has had many good results. For example, in the voting of school bonds where better school buildings were an absolute necessity, the bonds could not have been carried without the votes of the good and intelligent women. The instances are too numerous to mention."

How the Movement Has Grown

The first suffragist in America was Mistress Margaret Brent of Maryland, who in 1647 demanded "place and voice in the assembly," as the executor and representative of Lord Baltimore. In 1774, during the sitting of the first continental congress, Abigail Adams of Massachusetts, destined to be the wife of one president of the United States and the mother of another, wrote to her husband that she longed to hear that the colonies had declared their independence, and that she hoped the new code of laws would be more just to women than the old one. If not, she added playfully, "We are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation." The first prominent man in America to come out for woman suffrage was Abraham Lincoln. In 1836 he published in the Sangamon County Journal a letter to his constituents, stating that he was in favor of granting the ballot to all citizens who possessed certain qualifications, "by no means excluding females."

In this country the specific woman's rights movement grew out of the anti-slavery movement. The anti-slavery society was rent in twain over the question whether women might speak against slavery and serve on committees. The brunt of the fight for the right to speak was borne by Abby Kelley Foster of Massachusetts and Sarah and Angelina Grimke of South Carolina. Frances Wright, Ernestine L. Rose, Margaret Fuller and other earnest women wrote and spoke in behalf of equal rights for women; and for eight years, beginning with 1847, Lucy Stone, a farmer's daughter, lectured through the United States to great audiences and with singular eloquence. She was the first person by whom the heart of the public at large was deeply stirred on the woman question.

The first local woman's rights convention was held in Seneca Falls, N. Y., in 1848. It was called by Lucretia Mott, Martha E. Wright, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Mary Ann McClintock.

The first national woman's rights convention was held in Worcester, Mass., in 1850, and attended by suffragists from eleven states. The call was headed by Lucy Stone, and signed by eighty-nine persons, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Wendell Phillips, William Lloyd Garrison, Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Paulina Wright Davis and many other men and women of note.

The first local woman's rights society was organized at South Bristol, N. Y., by Mrs. Emily P. Collins, in 1848.

The first national organization aiming at woman suffrage was the American Equal Rights association, formed in New York in 1866. Lucretia Mott was the president, and