

## TOPICS OF THE TIME.

## The New Woman-Suffrage Movement.

THE recent active agitation in the State of New York of the question of Woman Suffrage was the result of an opportunity, namely, the Constitutional Convention. Those who so earnestly protested against a condition of wrong did not, we believe, claim that the "wrong" was an increasing one. In fact, it is generally admitted that the condition of woman, as such, before the laws, and as to her education and her general opportunities in the community, is, on the whole, becoming more favorable. Women are not declared to be getting fewer and fewer "rights" and advantages, but rather more and more, with advancing civilization. It was, then, not a new condition so much as a new opportunity that occasioned this special movement.

The difference of the new movement from similar agitations was in the character and social position of many of the women and men who were among the leaders. Men and women of ability and character have not been absent from the previous "crusades," but no previous one, in this part of the country, has had so much leadership or so much following of a supposedly conservative sort. To be sure, some of the old champions sounded again a certain familiar note,—the note which a generation ago met with the ridicule of the wise and the approval of the light-headed,—and this note was not so rare as some adherents must have wished in the new discussion—the old voice and proclamation of feminine revolt! The new crusaders, however, mainly based their claim on natural rights and absolute justice, on their new application of the principle of no taxation without representation, on the probable betterment of the position of women as wage-earners, on the good that would accrue to women and to the community by their enforced education in political duties, and on the improvement of laws and their administration to be caused by the admission of women to the suffrage.

While the entire movement was deeply deprecated by many thoughtful persons as having tendencies, and as being sure of effects, of an unfortunate character, yet so much study of, and thinking on, the fundamental principles of government, and on the relation of the sexes to each other, to society, and to the State, had not been done in this neighborhood for generations. It is not, then, a matter of surprise that a counter-movement should have sprung up among women, and that the earnest protest of women and men against the proposed change should have gone forth. Owing to this, and to the arguments presented on both sides, and to the intense attention attracted to the subject, many have been able to take a stronger hold upon the principles underlying all government, and upon some of the greatest problems of life.

The argument has at times been hot; it may have seemed at times not in all respects entirely frank. The most inescapable condition of humanity is sex; it is the element most carefully to be considered in the ques-

tion at issue, yet it has appeared at times that this aspect of the question was evaded by some of the most eloquent champions of a scheme which would plunge all womanhood into the welter of universal suffrage and partizan politics. The question involved is not only the right to vote, but also "the right not to vote"; for, at heart, the question is this: Shall men, at the request of some women, load upon all women, equally with men and in addition to their present burdens, the duties and obligations of civil government?

Other allied questions of a fundamental character also arise: Is complete Woman Suffrage the next logical step in the advance of civilization, or would it be an unfortunate *non sequitur*? Would the proper function, and use, and power of woman in the State be increased or impaired by so-called "equal rights," *i. e.*, equal suffrage? Will the suffrage be equal if extended to a sex that cannot physically endure the strain of duties implied in the suffrage? Could suffrage be called "equal" suffrage when mothers of families—upon whom the State depends in a peculiar sense for its very existence—would be under special disabilities as compared with single or childless women? Would it elevate or degrade the ideal of the suffrage to attempt to extend it to a class that could not, as a class, fulfil all of its duties and obligations, military, constabulary, juridical, and political? Should the system of government tend to build up or to impair the family and the home, and what effect upon the institution of the family would follow the extension of the suffrage to women? How can it be absolutely predicted that women's wages will be affected by this revolutionary device more than by economical conditions? And even if they should be affected favorably, would this device, under all the circumstances, still be desirable?

There are other questions more immediately "practical," perhaps; such as the effect upon the general suffrage,—and upon the present affliction of spoils and of bosses,—of the enormous increase of the suffrage along exactly the same lines as now; but we do not care to go into the subject at present with more detail, especially as in the August number of THE CENTURY many of the arguments *pro* and *con* will be given at length—by Senator Hoar in the affirmative and by the Rev. Dr. Buckley in the negative.

To-day women are not compelled as a class by our laws and our political system to the assumption of duties for which there is any suspicion of their unfitness. It is our own profound belief that women's work should continue to expand naturally along the lines of education, philanthropy, and the housekeeping interests of our local communities, and along the line of their general influence in the arts and sciences, and in society at large; and that her energies should not be compelled into a domain of untried and physiologically impossible civil obligations.

Some things are sure: if there is anywhere "oppression" other than through the laws of nature, and if this oppression can be lifted by human device, it

must, and will, be in some way; but above all, it is sure that there can be no conflict of interests between men and women. The development of one is the elevation of the other; the good of one is the good of both. But let no one be deceived by false analogies and evasions of the deepest facts of humanity, because the compulsion of all womanhood into the political arena (what the law allows to all at once becoming the *duty* of all) would be a revolution of greater magnitude and effect than any the world has yet witnessed.

#### A Martyr of To-day.

THE recent murder of Robert Ross by political roughs during a municipal election in the city of Troy occurred under peculiar circumstances of more than local significance. For years the government of that city has been a byword of national reproach for the audacity with which the criminal element has dared to defy the simplest and most fundamental principles of justice. So absolute was the control of the local boss,—now the junior Senator from the great State of New York,—that he is said to have boasted that he could elect a Chinaman as mayor of the city if he should so desire. The efforts of law-abiding citizens to punish frauds upon the ballot have been in vain—not for lack of conclusive evidence, but because of it. Grand juries have been unfairly chosen for the purpose of defeating indictments, and even the police have refused to serve warrants. In the face of all obstacles, the patriotic citizens of Troy did not relinquish their fight for the vital principle of honest elections, but knowing well the brutal element with which they had to deal they courageously faced the issue. The death of Ross in the discharge of the highest duty of citizenship has revealed to the American people an example of civic devotion and of self-sacrifice which should inspire decent citizens everywhere, while it should startle the indifferent into a realization of the desperate and dangerous character of the new generation of political spoilsmen.

Robert Ross was in an eminent sense a martyr to liberty. No man that fell at Lexington or Sumter gave his life to his country with more willingness or for a better principle. He knew the type of political rough he would have to deal with in undertaking his duty as a guardian of the election, for he and his brothers had been warned that their lives were threatened. That duty he undertook solemnly and without bravado. He was not inspired by partizanship, for he was a Republican advocating the election of a Democrat; nor by race prejudice, for he was a Scotchman advocating the election of an Irishman; nor by religious bigotry, for he was a Protestant advocating the election of a Roman Catholic. He was simply inspired by the most patriotic desire for good government, and it was in defense of this cause—the cause of every American citizen—that he was brutally murdered. Nothing is clearer than that he was the victim of the accursed Spoils System, which is daily bringing disgrace upon the American nation, and is spreading a blight of misgovernment upon every community over which it holds sway. The responsibility for this murder lies at the doors of those who have fostered or consented to the conditions which by an inevitable logic lead to such deeds. In these days of lawlessness it will not do to hold one's peace when a Senator of the United States permits, as it is well

known he might prevent, those encroachments upon the rights of citizens which make justice a mockery and representative government a jest. It is not a question of partizanship, but one of national self-preservation.

In what way is Ross's sacrifice to be given its proper accent and honor? His townsmen have already provided for a suitable memorial for his grave, and it is to be hoped that the spot upon which he died may also be marked in a way appropriate to its significance. But his service was to the nation, and it deserves another sort of recognition. What more appropriate and useful than to perpetuate his name in organizations to defend the purity of the ballot? The danger of the ascendancy of the criminal element in politics is a danger to men of all parties, and there is hardly a city of the United States where there is not need of a non-partizan body of picked men whose duty it shall be to exalt the sanctity of the now degraded suffrage: to agitate for the most perfect election laws, and for more severe penalties for their violation; to bring the force of public opinion to bear on the selection of registry and election boards; to scan and purify the lists of voters; to study the rights of citizens at elections, and to defend them at the polls; to become familiar with the personnel of the districts in which they are to serve as watchers, and to exert the whole power of the law on election day to insure the free casting and faithful counting of the vote. An appropriate name for such a body would be "The Robert Ross Association." In the *JUNE CENTURY* was recounted what has been accomplished by a few determined citizens in the redemption from ring-rule of the city of Montreal. The overthrow of the Brooklyn ring, and the conviction of McKane and his associates, were due to volunteer work of a similar character. The imprisonment of twenty-nine offenders against the election law in New York city was accomplished by exactly the sort of work which might be undertaken by these associations. Bearing the name of Robert Ross, they would at once be a challenge to evildoers, and a solemn proclamation of the serious nature of their mission.

For it is undeniable that within the past few years a new depth of political unscrupulousness and violence has been revealed. Wholesale bribery, cheating, and counting out, thefts of legislatures and downright murder, make an alarming record. These very crimes have revealed a sound state of latent public opinion; but what is needed is that public opinion should be not latent, but vigilant. Beside the question whether representative government shall perish through the perversion of the very machinery by which it operates, all financial and economic questions seem trifling.

For what avail the plough or sail,  
Or land or life, if freedom fail?

If the standard weights and measures of public opinion be tampered with, how shall we discover the will of the people? The Spoils System is a deadly upas-tree, which the nation has long been nourishing; its leaves are dropping upon us as never before; here and there we have broken a twig or lopped off a branch; but the time has come to root it up entirely. To do this, in nation, State, city, and village, is a purpose to which every good citizen should devote himself. The death of Robert Ross will not have been in vain, if it