

OPEN LETTERS.

What Women Can do Best.¹

THE question of granting political suffrage to women has been so fully discussed on both sides, that there would seem to be nothing more left to say for or against it. Yet the interesting articles of Senator Hoar and Dr. Buckley in the August CENTURY, so apparently exhaustive, leave two or three aspects of the question untouched. Senator Hoar makes a point of the fact that certain "remonstrants" of his own State have been inconsistent in objecting to women taking part in political government, when they themselves have held "political office." Those women whom he names, and a good many others also, who have served on State commissions, and are still so serving, do not hold "political office," strictly speaking. State commissions are intended to be non-partizan: the male members belong to all parties, the female members are non-voters; and all, however much they may differ in their views as to the tariff, the financial policy of the government, and the other questions which divide political parties, are concerned only in the management of charitable, reformatory, and penal institutions, sanitary matters, or other similar branches of State government. More than this, commissioners of charities are not elected, and are not paid. They are, I believe, in all the States, appointed by the governor for long terms. The office of commissioner on the boards named is almost always unsought, and often undesired and declined, for the reason that there is much labor and vexation involved, with no personal profit.

A certain portion of the duties of our State charitable boards can well be performed by women—that is, by such women as have been trained for the work by long service in private charitable societies. But there is another part of the work which requires the management of experienced business and professional men. The financial management of State charitable institutions few women are fitted to undertake—not by natural defects, but for the reason that a business training, such as almost no woman receives is necessary.

The women who have served on our State boards leave to their male associates the care of expenses, of building and repairing, and especially all matters pertaining to the duties of sanitary engineers or other professional men. Legal training and experience are very important in making up the whole number of members of such boards.

In fact, though the two sexes have exactly the same legal powers conferred upon them, they are performing duties much the same relatively as those which a husband and wife perform in the household. While the men are looking after water-supply and drainage, methods of heating and lighting buildings, cost of repairs or renewals, purchases of supplies, etc., the women of the board are occupied with internal matters of care and management, cleanliness of rooms, bedding, cloth-

ing, preparation of food, etc. Especially do women interest themselves in individuals. This is natural to the sex, to look into details, to examine special cases whose needs are peculiar. The minor wards of the State in particular need the maternal element in their care. In Massachusetts women have brought about great results by introducing a new system of placing children of tender age in families, instead of stultifying them in institutions—paying board for them when necessary, and exercising through a large organized society of "auxiliary visitors" a personal relation with every girl and young child. There is neither time nor space here to describe the work which women have done in Massachusetts for the charities of the State; but to sum it up, it has been of a maternal and feminine character, and relates to the care of children, of sick and insane persons, and to the reformation of delinquents and criminals, most of the latter being female offenders.

Thus it is seen that our honored senator does not enforce his point by the example of women commissioners, because they are performing feminine and maternal duties, and have been admitted to the commissions, formerly wholly composed of men, that they may perform such duties. It is true that they all vote at the board meetings. But such "voting" is very different from that of a political election. When these women vote to "accept a report," or to appoint an agent or officer to act for them, as they constantly do, or to expend a certain sum of money, there is no passionate excitement, no inducement to corruption, no element of partizan strife.

To deposit a ballot in a ballot-box at a political election requires little time, and, as we well know, neither brains, nor knowledge, nor principle. But the casting of a ballot involves far more than that act, if political power is to be exercised by women. Women, like men, in order to exercise power, must combine, must attend primary meetings and caucuses, and must enter the political arena. They must inevitably hold public office, must sit in our halls of legislation and in our courts of justice. They must enter into all these things without the training which business life gives to men. How many women know or can know anything about finance, a subject which so few men understand? And yet not only the "sinews of war," but the sinews of peace and stable government, depend more upon a sound financial policy than upon any other one thing. Macaulay, in his "History of England," states that the debasement of the currency during, I think, the reign of William III.—but I quote from memory—caused more misery than war, pestilence, famine, or any other cause. Certainly our Congress in recent years has shown ignorance enough in financial matters without doubling the amount of that ignorance. And here we come to what seems to us who are rebuked for being remonstrants against woman suffrage the most vital objection of all—the awful danger of *doubling the suffrage*.

Our country differs from every other nation, past or present, in being deluged by recent immigration. The

¹ Mrs. Leonard, having been named by Senator Hoar in his article in the August CENTURY, has asked the privilege of a public statement, which we gladly accord.—THE EDITOR.

enormous influx within ten years of persons who do not speak our language or understand our principles is a danger not sufficiently appreciated. We have given them too easily the ballot, fearing a worse evil,—a brute force having no power except brute force,—believing that the ballot will satisfy the man who without it would be a foe to all government. This danger, however, is not to be apprehended from women, who are non-combatants, and, as a sex in general, never think about government at all. But having given a share in government to tens of thousands who are unfitted for it, it is proposed with easy assurance to give it to millions still more unfitted. We must not look at the intelligent, virtuous, and high-minded women alone, who all have their peers and equals in virtue and wisdom among men, but at the female compeers of the ignorant and brutal men who menace our safety in holding political power. It is useless and unnecessary to go over the oft-repeated reasons why one sex is fitted for public life and the other is not; they are too familiar, and have been argued upon till the subject is threadbare. But the present extreme difficulty in settling the great questions on which political parties differ—the grave crisis, financial, industrial, and political, through which our country is struggling—should make every practical statesman hesitate before he seeks to introduce a new element of difficulty.

It is curious and interesting at any summer resort or other gathering of intelligent women to see the general profound indifference to politics—to any news of the day, however exciting, which relates to the affairs of the nation. Still more curious is it to observe, on questioning ardent female suffragists, how little they know about the great questions of the hour. They generally say, "Oh, both parties are terribly corrupt, but when women vote, politics will be purified." Will it? Are not women also possessed of mortal infirmities? Will not many women sell their votes, bargain for office, intrigue, combine with others for selfish ends? Where there is no temptation, there is no sin; but when power comes, and with it temptation, shall we find that God has created one sex "good," the other "bad"? Ah, no; women are like men, of the same time and race, only their pursuits, occupations, and habits of life differ; their sphere is domestic, their intercourse with the world far more limited. They now have power to do far more by influence in public matters, by an intelligent interest in schools, hospitals, almshouses, than they exercise; and it is lamentable that so few women care how the public charities of their own towns are managed. There is no good reason to think that the right of suffrage will increase that interest. A spirit of humane unselfishness leads men and women both to care for the unfortunate—and too few men care for them now, in spite of their right to vote.

I cannot forbear, in closing, to speak of the personal references which Senator Hoar has made. The women who have rendered most "public service" in his own State are unknown to fame. The women's prison at Sherborne was the result of the life-work of Miss Hannah Chickering of Dedham, who devoted thirty years of her life wholly to labors in prisons. She first formed the plan for a reformatory prison for women, under the sole charge of women, and lived to see her plan fully carried out in 1877. She, with other women, of whom Mrs. John Ware was one, petitioned six legislatures,

and labored incessantly to that end, before success was attained. Miss Clara Barton did not then live in Massachusetts, nor was she interested in prisons; but at the earnest request of her friend General Butler, then governor of Massachusetts, she undertook the management of the Sherborne prison for six months, in 1883. As is well known, her noble life-work has been in other fields. Prison management was distasteful and unsuited to her. The present head of that prison has given eleven years of service to the State and to unfortunate women, as a work of mercy; and though she is paid a salary, devotes her time and whole income to benevolent labors. The women who hold such public office are nearly if not quite all far from wishing to take part in the affairs which they think properly belong to men, but are glad to assist the State in aiding the helpless and unfortunate.

There are women who have done a hundredfold more service to his State than those of whom Senator Hoar speaks so kindly, but their names are never before the public. The women who see the danger of an enormous extension of the suffrage have been forced into a publicity which they do not desire, because their protest seems necessary to avert the threatened evil.

Clara Temple Leonard.

The New Treatment of Diphtheria.

THE new anti-toxine treatment of diphtheria promises to prove one of the most important developments of modern medicine, and seems to represent, in a particularly practical and valuable form, the best results of recent bacteriological investigations as to the nature of the infectious diseases. I use the word "development" advisedly in this connection, for the new treatment is not by any means the result of a single empirical observation, or a conclusion reached from a single series of experimental investigations, but is the necessary and logical deduction and practical result arrived at from many series of experimental investigations regarding the infectious diseases. These investigations have been going on for the last seven or eight years, and in order to gain any intelligent conception of the nature of the new treatment, one must know something of the work that has preceded it.

In the early days of modern bacteriology, it was thought that the germs associated with the various diseases were themselves the essential and active agents in the production of the symptoms presented. It was not until the subject had been more deeply investigated that evidence was found to show that the chemical products of bacterial life were really the cause of most of the symptoms characteristic of the different infectious diseases; and that in respect to many of these diseases the chemical poisons could be separated from cultures of the germs grown outside the body. It was further found that when the chemical poisons separated from such cultures were used for the inoculation of animals, not infrequently the same constitutional symptoms were produced as occurred when the germs themselves were introduced, or when the diseases occurred under natural conditions.

It has been long known that in many infectious diseases one attack grants a more or less complete insusceptibility or immunity to future attacks. The same individual rarely has two attacks of smallpox or of