

The White Ribbon

FOR GOD AND HOME AND HUMANITY

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WOMEN AND THE WAR.

By Rose Henderson in the Canadian Woman's Century.

Only a few short years ago the women of this Dominion asked for the ballot and were refused it flatly. A change has occurred since then; now they are entitled to the Federal and the Provincial vote, in all but three provinces, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Quebec. Out of self-protection or self-respect these three provinces will have to follow in line. This revolution has not been confined to Canada—it is practically world-wide. War is the lever which has turned woman body and soul out of the home into the industrial and political arena to scramble as best she could, unorganised, untrained, and unrepresented.

The ballot was handed to her with but little ado. A few women put up a determined fight, but the masses of women at no time and at no place were with them, so that it would be wrong to conclude that woman's political emancipation came solely through their own efforts and desire for freedom. Greater forces are at work carving the pathway out of the human jungle over which the woman of the future will travel.

It could not be expected that woman would have any great desire for freedom. She was enslaved without knowing it. She accepted her situation meekly as the will of God and man. She was born and reared in subjection. Her mother before her wore the badge of humility and servitude. She was held as a species of property along with chattels, animals and real estate, created as the Hebrews tell us, "solely for the pleasure of man," but "man was created for the glory of God."

Petruchio, in the "Taming of the Shrew," expresses the idea when he says, "I will be master of what is my own. She is my goods, my chattels, she is my house, my household stuff, my barn, and so forth." This conception of woman's status and place is also expressed in the marriage service, when some male relative must be there to answer the question, "Who gives this woman away?" Thus it will be seen for ages, Church and State were one in their laws and teachings of woman's subjection, mental and spiritual inferiority. Even to-day in most churches she cannot sit and vote in their councils or be ordained as a minister. May we wonder, then, at woman's conservatism and lack of militant force?

"Her very chains and she are friends,
So much a long communion tends,

To make us what we are."

The unfortunate and tragic part of the whole story is that while one end of the chain was fastened around her neck, the other end was securely tightened around the man's ankle, and so blinded was he by his supposed freedom and superiority, he never detected the fact of his own slavery.

The war is the great anvil on which the slave-chain is being broken. On the wheel of eternal change whether he will, or she will not, both are being hurled into the great melting-pot to be beaten, battered, bruised, and remoulded into a new humanity, nearer the desire of the new age now winging its way into the minds and souls of mankind the world over. One remarkable fact during this war is, that although women have been uprooted bodily from their ancient traditions and occupations, they do not apparently realise the vast changes taking place and how these changes are bound to affect

them. Individually here and there a woman has spoken. Collectively they have not with any degree of intelligent social perception of cause and effect. Men, too, for the most part have left this very important subject to take care of itself, yet there is no subject more important, not even war itself.

Mighty are the changes wrought through war in the world of man, but mightier by far are those taking place in the world of woman. It may not seem logical to separate the world of man and woman, but since woman bears, moulds, and nurtures the race, and must continue to do so, what affects her and the unborn generations is basic and fundamental: a thousand times more important than man's mechanical inventions and material enterprises. These, important as they are, are but a means to an end. The end is race betterment, life more beautiful and abundant.

Less than a century ago, woman had entered only seven occupations. To-day she is competing successfully against men in all industries, save six or seven such as killing animals, hanging men, driving locomotives, chimney sweeping, and climbing poles. The war has accentuated her powers and driven her by thousands into every industry. She is making herself felt, unfortunately at present, neither for her own or humanity's good. This she must realise, but men, too, must help her to see it. Now she sells her labour even when doing the same work, for less wages than men; she works longer hours, and rarely complains about abominable sanitary conditions. She does not hesitate to take man's place when they are fighting for better conditions. By reducing wages, she lowers the standard of home, driving mothers to work, young girls on to the streets, and