

## THE QUESTION OF WOMAN SUFFRAGE.

The question of woman suffrage has taken on a new phase in the State of New York. Hitherto the agitation has been all on one side, so far as the sex most directly interested was concerned. The women, many and able, who believe that the best interests, not only of their own sex but of the whole community are involved, have pushed forward the agitation with tremendous energy. Others and probably as yet a very large majority, who neither desire the ballot for themselves nor believe that its use by their sex as a whole, would be for the good either of the women or of the state, have been content to sit still and leave the battle to their ambitious and energetic sisters. Now, however, that an organized effort is being made to effect a radical change by erasing the word "male" from the constitution, large numbers of these women have aroused themselves and resolved no longer to remain passive spectators of the struggle. They decline to have the duties and responsibilities of enfranchisement thrust upon them against their wishes, without at least a struggle to prevent it. They are not, indeed, emulating the example of the opponents whose energetic campaign has aroused them to action, by holding public meetings and indulging in platform oratory. But they are scattering broadcast petitions which are being largely signed, asking that the prayer of the petition of their suffrage-seeking sisters be not granted, setting forth that the great majority of intelligent and thoughtful women do not want the ballot and praying that it be not forced upon them. They are also enlisting the influence of some powerful periodicals on their side.

The question at once suggests itself, "Why should these women trouble themselves to get up this quiet but effective counter agitation?" If they do not personally wish the ballot they need not use it. But why prevent those of their number who do desire it from obtaining it for themselves, if they can? Few persons will now attempt to deny that if women really wish the ballot they have a right to it. The reply is, in effect, that there is a broad distinction between the propositions that women as a class or moiety of the commonwealth have a right to vote in parliamentary elections if they wish to do so, and the proposition that those women who so wish, being a small minority of the whole, have a right not only to obtain it for themselves, but for all their sex. "But the question is not," says *The Outlook*, in which the subject is being vigorously discussed, "whether some women will consent that other women may vote if they wish to. Power to vote involves the duty of voting: a duty which may be enforced by a fine imposed on the recreant . . . and certainly will be en-

forced by conscience on all conscientious women." We give the argument as we find it, without pinning our political faith to its validity. Certainly nothing less than a strong faith in such validity can justify the earnest opposition now being offered to the efforts of the women suffragists by women.

It is not necessary to the purpose of this article that we should declare our adhesion to the views of one party or the other. That women as a whole have a right to the suffrage, if they wish it, is, as we have said, generally though it is by no means universally conceded. That the Woman's Rights agitation, of which the demand for the ballot is the culminating stroke, has done much for the correction of women's undoubted wrongs and the securing of their undoubted rights, will scarcely be denied, even by those who looked with strong disapprobation upon that agitation in every stage. Human nature is weak. The capacity of the average voter and legislator for putting himself in place of his unenfranchised neighbour, be that neighbour a workingman or a helpless woman, has never been very large. The recognition of the right of the married woman to hold property in her own name and at her own disposal, almost axiomatic as it now seems, was not obtained without a long struggle. The admission of the woman property-owner's right to a voice in electing the men who make the laws for the protection and governance of property was still more tardily made, yet is now pretty generally conceded. But while it must be, we fear, frankly admitted that these and similar wrongs to which women were long subjected by their natural protectors were not righted until after energetic and prolonged demand, it can scarcely be charged that those masculine legislators are now at all backward in recognizing the claims of women in every department of active life. The question may be fairly asked whether the point has not been reached in the upward development where the rest may be safely left to the milder compulsion which the mothers and wives and maidens know to well how to apply.

The arguments, *pro* and *con.*, of the women themselves, which are just now being published in the New York papers, are interesting reading. We cannot attempt to summarize them. Some of them on both sides are weak enough; some wise and weighty. One of the strongest arguments put forth by the opposers of the suffrage is by no means complimentary to their sex. It claims, in effect, that the vote of the wise and good women of the country will be far outweighed by that of the ignorant, the superstitious, the weak and the wicked. As a result, it is argued, the full effect of the addition of the women's vote will be to lower the average level of the whole vote of the country, in respect to intelligence,

patriotism and morality. Others, of course, take the opposite view. And, indeed, in view of the enormous vote of the foreign element in the electorate, and the fact that this immigration is composed much more largely of men than of women, it is hard to believe that the addition of the whole body of women as voters, provided the better classes were fairly represented at the polls would not, large as the admixture of ignorance and frivolity it might contain, tend to the elevation rather than the further deterioration of the whole mass.

## OTTAWA LETTER.

The visit of the Hon. Mr. Reid, Minister of Defence for Victoria, Australia, is one of the principal events of the past week. He is the advance guard of the Colonial Conference that is to be held on Canadian soil next month, the result of the Hon. McKenzie Bowell's visit to Australia last winter. Mr. Reid is *en route* for home after an absence of three months. He addressed an influential gathering at the Board of Trade rooms in the city hall which was also attended by the Governor-General and Lady Aberdeen with Mr. Bowell in the chair. Mr. Reid is an advocate for perfecting the mail and telegraphic communication on the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, as a preliminary step to a closer commercial interchange with the Australian continent, and pointed out that the Canadian route was a competitor with the route by the Suez Canal which had hitherto been the mail route between the United Kingdom and Australia.

Mr. Reid expressed himself pleased with what he had seen in Canada, and felt that a trade could be developed of mutual benefit to both Canada and Australia. He said he had been shown some woollens of Canadian manufacture in Montreal and he could say from an experience of 38 years in mercantile life, that they would hold their own with British goods. He could not speak with the same confidence of our cottons, but he hoped that before the decade had run its course, Canada would be able to hold her own in manufactures without any protective tariff. Coming from a Minister of a protective Government in Victoria, this might be taken as a hint that whatever views they might have held in the past, the Victorian Government would not see its way to taxing Victorian trade for the benefit of Canadian manufactures.

Public opinion in Victoria has been undergoing a change in regard to protection somewhat similar to the gradual change that has been coming over Canadians in regard to their protective policy; there it has been hastened by the advocacy of the Democratic Free Trade League of Victoria.

In Parliament the details of the tariff are still undergoing review. Scientific protection has been applied to the iron duties to the disturbance of the placidity of the rolling mills. Scrap iron, their raw material, is to be taxed to the extent of one and two dollars more per ton. How long will it take the Finance Minister and Sir Hibbert Tupper to realize that free trade will realize a higher protection to this great mining and manufacturing material so plentiful in Nova Scotia and elsewhere in Canada?

The claim that protection is essential to the development of natural industries is not borne out by the Southern States. A rapid and large development of the coal