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Goldwin Smith

WOMAN'S PLACE IN THE STATE.

THIRTY years ago or more, in company with John Bright, the writer signed Mill's petition to the British Parliament in favor of the political enfranchisement of women. Both John Bright and he were led to this by their general prepossession in favor of any extension of human rights, combined with their respect for Mill. Both of them afterward changed their minds, and Bright became the most powerful opponent of female suffrage. The writer was led to revise his opinion by finding that those women whom he had always regarded as the best representatives of their sex among his acquaintance, were by no means in favor of the change. A protest from some of the foremost women of England, which has recently appeared, confirms his impression, and at the same time relieves a male writer of the fear that he may be actuated by selfishness of sex in arguing against a female claim.

The agitation went on. Non-political franchises were granted to women. At one time they seemed on the point of grasping the political franchise, but then again the hope receded, and notwithstanding the tendency of the demagogic system, which is always to concession, because the politician fears to make an enemy of the coming vote, the balance seemed to incline against them; when the other day the leader of the Conservative Party, to the astonishment and dismay of not a few among his followers, suddenly declared in favor of female suffrage. It has been said of Lord Salisbury, with not less truth than with that he *saute pour mieux reculer*. He is very apt to rush impetuously into positions from which he afterward finds it better to retire. On the occasion when he was hurried into this particular leap he was addressing an assembly of Primrose Dames, that is, female canvassers of the Conservative Party, who are supposed, by bringing their personal influence and fascinations to bear on the lower class of voters, to have rendered great service to the party in the elections; and it may be surmised that his gallantry had