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WOMEN IN POLITICS

By MRS. J. ELLEN FOSTER.

When the theory of popular government finds its full development and perfect realization in politics.

First, what can she do, second, what does she do;
third, what will be the result of her doing?

At the basis of all influence and action is knowledge.

Woman's first duty is to know the system of government under which she lives. United States history, political as well as geographical and social, should be familiar to every intelligent woman. Like a romance reads some portions of it. Woman's conscientious nature can not fail to find warrant for present obligation and effort in the record of what was done in America's heroic years.

American biography is another fruitful source of information. Not the biography of women alone, but of men who have fought our social, industrial and political battles.

Every contest for better conditions of living bears directly upon the home and the woman in it. Ignorance of what security costs lessens appreciation and weakens effort. Every crisis in the state, and even the ordinary conduct of political affairs, is the culmination of causes always operative among men.

Man is the subject of government. Man is the factor in politics. The continuity of woman's political influence is proportioned to her knowledge of man in history and man in the world of today. The woman who is thus equipped as counselor, friend and servant in political affairs possesses unmeasured influence for good.

Not only should she know what has been, but what is. Her brain and heart should be in touch with the tide of human life which flows by her own hearth-stone. She feels for the poor, for the helpless, for the suffering; she gives of her love and her labor for their relief; she should do more, she should follow these interests to the point of society's comprehensive action in law.

It is well to visit and build hospitals; it is better to know what lack of sanitary conditions breeds disease, and by public sentiment coerce political and legislative action which shall substitute conditions of health for such as breed disease.

She should not only weep over the drunkard and his family, but should study the problem of temperance legislation, so that the state shall, up to the full measure of public conviction and consequent power, destroy the traffic in intoxicating beverages. At the point where philanthropic effort seeks the aid of political action and the defense of legislation there is the danger line in woman's political work. If her pulses are not guided by knowledge she will miss her opportunity of usefulness, lure the cause she loves, and incidentally

lose prestige as a political factor.

What does she do? Woman's present activity is usually applied to furthering her personal interests or the philanthropic and industrial schemes where her sympathies lie, and in securing the ballot for the disfranchised half of American citizens.

These aims are good. Is not a wife a real helpmate if she honorably aids her husband to get to Congress? No patriotic citizen need blush for the desire to sit in greatest council chamber of the world.

Neither need Iowa women apologize for their part in the political action which drove the saloon out of Iowa, nor for their present determined opposition to its urn. They still declare "the saloon shall never again have legal existence in Iowa." The pathos of their cry is pitiful while their hands are ballotless; but their political power to a limited degree is admitted by friend and foe.

What does woman do? I dare assert that woman's political influence has been a necessary factor in the progressive legislation which distinguishes our time; and with even more emphasis I declare that if she were more studious of political conditions, more persistent in behalf of her convictions on political questions, she might remedy many existing defects in the conduct of public affairs. The men in politics, love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil, have occasion to dread the light which women's tongues let in on their devious ways.

I repudiate the sentiment which declares that a woman need have no political convictions and need give no political service until she is enfranchised; while I can understand how any self-respecting patriotic woman can be content without the term of freedom in this republic, I still remember how much women owe to the emblem of government under the flag, and remember those to whom much is given, of them much is required; and that he who is faithful in a few things shall be made ruler over many things.

What will the result be? This enlargement of woman's activities will make her stronger and purer in her home. Stagnant waters are foul, the swiftest, deepest current is the purest.

Woman is most to her home when she contains the most in herself. She will be a defense to her home against the world, the flesh and the devil, just in proportion as she is able to meet the world on its many sided attacks.