

WOMAN SUFFRAGE AND BALLOT REFORM.

BY THE EDITOR.

WOMEN are now clamoring more than ever, especially in England, for the rights of suffrage, and there is not the slightest reason why they should be refused. Women are in public business just as much as men and no one can deny that there are women more intelligent than many men. Then, too, there is a goodly number who have practical interests at stake which are decided at the polls. It seems an outrage that a woman who has property in her own right and who is perhaps in command of a large household should not be permitted to make her opinion felt in the elections, while her butler or colored servant takes an active part in political life.

Many people feel that the alterations implied by woman suffrage would upset political life. It is still an unknown factor, and we do not yet know how it will work. Accordingly the special interests which pander to man's private comfort such as the liquor and tobacco trades, fight shy of the issue, and the manufacturers of silks, of gloves, stockings, and similar goods fear that women will have import duties cut down. At the same time the political bosses so far have not universally provided the voters with polling places fit for ladies to enter.

In comment on these difficulties we would say that they can be overcome and in many cases will force upon us some much needed reforms. It would be a blessing for men if the entire premises around the polls would be so decently arranged that no lady would have cause to feel ashamed to enter and cast her ballot. As they are at present, they are certainly a poor recommendation for the constitution of a government of the people, by the people and for the people. They are a palpable demonstration that the vulgar element is permitted to have the upper hand. I purposely do not say the poor, but the vulgar. A poor man is often enough a gentleman at heart. Whether rich or poor, a gentleman seems out of

place at the polls, while the "boss" has a good chance there to bulldoze and control. Why do we not use churches for polling stations? Church property is free of duty and here is a chance for the Church to offer a service in return. It is but right that the polls should stand in a place of sanctity, for the casting of the ballot is a sacred act in which we should be guided by conscience. The government by the people, of the people and for the people is a problem which has not yet been solved.

Universal suffrage as it now prevails, is apparently not the right thing, for here a large class of irresponsible voters have the same right as those who pay the bills. Yet it would be a mistake to take the ballot away from even those who are in the habit of recklessly disposing of public funds, of sacrificing the public weal either for a bribe of some kind or through a mistaken party loyalty or clannishness. The right cure for these evils would be to extend the ballot to those who have deeper interests in the commonwealth and in the preservation of its financial moral health. Under these conditions I would advocate that the married men should have a second vote, perhaps even a third if they have children. The man of family looks beyond the short span of the present hour and has at heart the future of the country for the sake of his children even after he himself is gone. This would be an important reform and the measure would be just. There can be no doubt that the large class of voters who have neither property nor any family ties care less for the establishment of wholesome conditions than the men who rear children and wish to leave to them the inheritance of a well-governed country.

It might be advisable to give an extra ballot to the educated men, say to every one who has graduated from High School, for this would tend to encourage education. Further it might be suggested to give an extra vote to the man who pays taxes though this might appear as if permitting the rich to exercise too great a share in the government of the country and our national traditions have always been opposed to it. In extenuation of this idea, I would say that if both the small tax payer and multimillionaire were treated alike, we would have as a result only the conservative spirit of the man who helps to pay the bill, however small his share may be, and this could not lead to any oppression of the poor by the rich. That the tax-payer who finally pays the public expenses should be heard and that his vote should have more weight than the numerous voters of the irresponsible class is but just.

The United States government started as a revolution based on

the principle of "no taxation without representation." The result is that we have representation without taxation. Bosses of those classes who do not pay the taxes of the town run the municipality and seldom dispose of the public funds in the interests of the taxpayers. This is an evil that should be remedied.

The democratic form of government has so far proved a failure, at least in municipal affairs, and reactionary thinkers, especially in Europe, point to the conditions in American cities as the best proof of this contention.

There is an inveterate error, often proclaimed, at the bottom of the common conception of a government by the people, namely, that democratic government means majority rule. This is untrue, for it would sooner or later lead to mob rule. A democratic government means a government by law. It is true that law must be made by majorities, but a safeguard against wrong laws is the principle that every law should be of universal application. There ought to be no class legislation, no law should ever apply to a special set of people, and no law should ever make exemptions. We repeat that the government by, of, and for the people has as yet only been imperfectly worked out, but we do not deem its realization for that reason impossible.

Ballot reform is not a burning question at present, but we offer these suggestions in the hope that they may be borne in mind by those who are interested in the subject, and we hope that the time will come when these seeds will bear fruit.