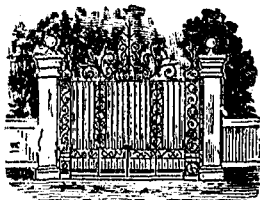


**Outside the Gates.****WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE.****MEETING AT THE ROYAL MINT.**

UPON the invitation of Professor and Mrs. Roberts-Austen, a meeting was held at the Royal Mint on the 25th inst., to consider the subject of Women's Suffrage, formulated in the following question: "Is there any reasonable objection to extending the Parliamentary Franchise to women?"

The beautiful drawing-rooms in which the meeting was held had caught the reflection of the gay Spring day—the tender green and white tones of the decorations, the deep embrasures of the wide, old-fashioned windows, delicately draped in muslin of harmonious hue, and the profusion of lovely pale yellow "daffies" made an ideal place of meeting for women, inspired, as the majority of them were, with high and beautiful ideals of what human life might be if founded on a basis of justice and freedom.

Mrs. Roberts-Austen—about whom there is always an indescribable charm of "old Greek" simplicity and grace—received her guests gowned in shimmering opaline silk, with a sweet tea-rose tucked away in the jewelled garniture; and, indeed, one of the most hopeful features of the gathering was the exhibition of fine taste in which the majority of "women who think" find time to dress, disproving the time-honoured fallacy, that it is only the plain and *passive* of our sex who interest themselves in the suffrage question.

Lady Grove presided in her own inimitable and original way, full of earnest purpose and lively interest, although, to fulfil the important duty, she had risen from a bed of sickness.

Lady Grove introduced Mrs. Carmichael Stopes (author of *British Freewomen*) who gave the first address. She said that she never had heard an argument against the Women's Suffrage in her life. One objection she might call the ghost of a dead argument, in so far as it might have once been to a certain extent true. The physical force argument is valid in savage times, when might makes right, and when the constant need of war might give an excuse for not taking time for eliciting the thoughts and opinions of women. But centuries of civilisation and Christianity have changed all that, a man is no longer denied the right to protection because he is shorter of stature than the average. He may be weaker in the chest, weak in the heart, and weak in the head too, and yet not be denied his vote. Therefore it is no longer a question of physical force. If it were so *merely*, then many weak men might be disfranchised, and strong women might take their place even on a physical force qualification. The weakness of that argument is shown at once—but like a ghost, it cannot be knocked down—it eludes reason, and it scares the imagination. All other objections may be classed under the heads of selfishness, sentimentality, and ignorance of the question. Those of selfishness one cannot attack—if a man does not wish a woman to share with him the Franchise, he does not wish it. The objection is true *for him*, only because he is

selfish, and so long as he remains so. The objections of sentimentality we do not wish to scorn. We want more sentiment instead of less in public life, but we want it to raise it to a nobler and higher level. The objections based on ignorance of the question are the most common. These we attempt to educate.

On the women's side the arguments are based on justice and generosity, on logic and reason; on commonsense, on religion, and on our English Constitution. The justice of the women's claim the speaker then illustrated in various aspects. The injustice of classifying the noblest women as legally something lower than the lowest of men, for a convict who had served his time might return to be a "free British elector," which no woman may be; this injustice does not end in social disrespect, but is the direct cause of the unequal laws that protect the *strong against the weak*—the man against the woman. The expediency of granting women the vote was illustrated. One ought to do the best possible with one's talents. The talents, or possessions of a nation are its sons and daughters; is it not wise to take counsel with the women, all the more necessary *because they are different*? We have two eyes, two ears, two hands and two feet. Those who ignore the feminine half of the nation would shut one eye, close one ear, bind up one hand, and get along somehow on one foot. Masculine government is at best, a one-eyed government, it sees clearly only on the near-side.

Mrs. Stopes then gave from history interesting proofs that the enfranchisement of women is constitutionally right; that the Britons "made no distinction of sex in places of command or government"; that among the Saxons women sat in the Witenagemot and were consulted in questions of peace and war; and that in the early Norman construction of Parliament, women were entitled to vote. They sometimes at least did so, both for the county and the borough. It was only in 1832, that for the *first time*, the word "male" was interpolated before "persons" in the new Charters. Lord Brougham's Act decided that the "word 'man' should always include women, except where otherwise expressly stated." The new Reform Bill of 1867 drew up the Charters under the designation "man." Yet the 7,000 Manchester women were refused to be admitted to the register, and the judges in 1868 affirmed that they had not now the right to vote—"because they never had it."

Thus women sit disfranchised to-day, because the judges did not seem to know certain facts in history. The last direct word of the House of Commons upon a qualification was in its decision on the Gatton Case, in 1628, in which it affirmed that the return in which a woman's name was associated was "the true and proper form."

Lady Harberton was of opinion that men put restrictions upon women's work because this was a matter which directly affected their own interests, and at present women have no voice concerning their own affairs. If there were only 200 women enfranchised the subject of more general enfranchisement would not be brought forward in the half-hearted, jocular manner with which it was treated at present, and which was an insult to women. She further remarked that the government of to-day deals largely with social, economic, and domestic questions, upon all of which the opinion of women is of great value. Further, that it is a fully recognised principle that taxation without representation is tyranny.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)