TO THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF THE AMERICAN MAGAZINE

Dear Mr. Phillips:-

You want me to explain my position on the extension of suffrage to women. You declare that it seems to you illiberal and contradictory - that it disappoints your idea of my mind and character. You have intimated that I am kept out of the present movement by vanity - that is - having several years ago allowed the use of my name in a protest against the extension of suffrage to women at that time, that I am too proud to admit I might have been wrong - which is to say that I have not the "self- corresting conscience". You also seem to be coming to the conclusion that what Helen Keller is reported to have said of me not long ago is true - that is, that I am getting too old to understand and sympathize with the aspirations of a growing world!

It is quite probable that there is at least a suspicion of truth in all you say. I have always found it difficult to explain myself, even to myself, and I do not often try. However, the fact that I am one of your staff on the American Magazine, as well as one of your regular contributors, the fact that I know how deeply you have it at heart that the magazine should in its own way encourage free experimenting with life makes me feel rather in duty bound to try to put down as honestly as I can what I do think in the matter. No doubt it will be good for me - though I feel pretty sure in advance it is not going to satisfy you. "Come across" you say and I really dont know that I can. There is in

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feminine nature a strange barrier against complete self-revelation. The woman never admits all even to herself. This is possibly a protective device of nature, intensified by social conditions. At all events the most impersonal and objective and experienced of us rarely get entirely away from it. I don't know that I can even on a subject which has come to be as purely objective to me as suffrage, but I'll try! And in trying I fear I shall be boresome for I don't think I can explain, or at least, put down what seems to me to explain with - out some retrospecting. I'll try to make it brief. You see my feeling about suffrage is different from that of a great number of people today because I was really born to the idea and considerable members of both the men and women active in the movement now seem to have heard or at least thought of it for the first time.

I grew up among people who believed in women's suffrage as much as they did in the abolition of slavery, the observance of the Sabbath, or the beneficence of the protective tariff. It was part of the creed I learned as a child - a part of the liberal program of the day. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony were grouped in my young girl's mind with William Llyod Garrison and General Grant and Abraham Lincoln and Geo. M. Curtis and Horace. Greely and Carl Schurz. I took suffrage as one of the great "rights" that women were born into the world for the express purpose of acquiring. Suffrage was but one of the "rights". A college education was another and I reasoned it out that it was the one for which I should first strike. I would go to college - and to a man's college. Co-education was still an advanced step and there were plenty of people in my environment to hint to me that it was not "respectable" although my father and mother stoutly defended me in the adventure to go to a man's college and to fit myself for a man's work - that was to be my contribution to the cause! My little revolution!

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But when you are in a co-educational college you gradually learn that there are other things in the world beside "causes" and "rights" and "reforms" and "revolutions". At least, I did. The "program" diminished rather than increased in value. Suffrage which I had taken ~~it~~ for granted I should one day fight for, seemed to fade from the horizon. I don't remember that we ever discussed it in college. It is true that there was a lull in the suffrage movement in those years for that movement like all others goes in cycles. It had reached a peak of activity in the early 70's and subsided - to rise again in the late 80's. I was out of college by that time and at editorial work. I had begun to examine even the ideas I had been born to and suffrage was one that I attacked. I had heard it discussed so much in my childhood, was so familiar with the arguments for it that I decided to approach it by a path new to me. I had become interested in biographical study. It seemed to me the character of the contributions made by women who had played big parts in the past in public affairs in different countries might throw light on the question as it was shaping itself in my mind. Did or did they not contribute something valuable which men could not give. If they did, I should feel that I ought to exercise what little influence I might have for it - if I found the opposite I should feel that they better concentrate on what they were doing for I should say that I had come, by this time, to have a very profound feeling that sound education and real cultivation depend almost solely _____ on women. I don't know where I got the notion but time has only intensified my conviction of the overwhelming importance of the civilizing work of women - quite apart from what we call public life.

I laid out a laughably ambitious scheme of study - only a fragment of which I ~~have~~ carried out. That fragment concernes itself with women in the French Revolution. Although I read rather widely on the

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subject I was never able to produce anything but a biographical study of Madam Roland. Still I felt fairly well acquainted with the activities and contributions of all of the French women prominent for a period of 50 or more years. The effect of that acquaintance was decidedly reactionary. It took from me all the enthusiasm I had ever felt for women in public life. Radical and conservative, Royalist and democrat, aristocrat and proletariat. I had the same revulsion against them all. I think it possible that I was not quite fair to any of them. I certainly was too hard on Madame Roland but I have always found it difficult to be patient and just to people who feel themselves able to play the part of Providence in human affairs.

Where I found myself at the end of my French Revolutionary studies I have been ever since - that is convinced, that woman's contribution to the public cause is not sufficiently distinct from man's to offset the complications it will bring. Moreover I am convinced they are liable to retard progress by their intensity and implacability - this applies whether they are radical or conservative in temperament. They are harder to budge than men and that means that they are more partisan than men. I had never attached much importance to the argument that women would infuse a higher moral quality into politics and this view was confirmed repeatedly in my little studies. Women take on the political morality of their times rising and falling with it as men do. [illegible]. This we see every day. I have heard queer logic used by good women who were trying to persuade me into the suffrage movement. One woman, a scholarly lady in an important position once warned me that if I stayed out I could not hope for an office when the vote was won as I otherwise might. She added - "you live by your writing, women will cease buying your books" - and when I put to to her baldly that what she had asked me to do was to follow a cause for what might be in it - she

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was insulted. This sort of argument ought not to surprise any one or drive him away from suffrage unless indded he is believing in it because of the higher moral standards it would compel. That there is I think a delusion. We are of our times, no better, no worse. The only way in which women can make politics fundamentally better is to send a lzger number of boys into public life whose principles are sound and whose courage and faith are high. This they can do as they hold the line where this work is done.

One point of some importance to those who try to count up the possible gains and losses through suffrage is constantly demonstrated in the French Revolution and that is that women's presence always complicates political situations by bringing in the inevitable sex repulsion or attraction. There is nothing gained by shying at this fact - and I have never been able to find it shocking as many women seem to . I have bever been able to see why nature's method of continuing the race was not as clean as any other of her processes. Sex does complicate all the relations of life, politics included, in proportion to the intimacy allowed. The political bearing of this fact lies in the fact that when an important public crisis arises the woman will go with her man. That is the way she is made. There will be the so called "sexless" woman who will follow only their own "views" - to be sure - but they are a negligable quantity and precious few of them are to be as fully trusted as they may themselves suppose!

But if I remain in my judgement in suffrage about where the French Revolution left me I do not mean to say I have never been swayed by the later day developements of the argument. There is claim that we must have it because only through it can the woman in industry be properly protected.

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Now I have for a number of years been seeing something of women and girls in industry and if I believed that the improvement of their hard and unsatisfactory conditions depended in any great degree on the ballot I think I should drop everything else and fight for it so important do I think it for society that their condition be raised to a point where they are really improved by their periods of work. It is not votes it is training that the girl and woman in industry need most. It is unjust and dishonest to teach her that by votes she can raise wages, shorten hours, improve conditions. These things are the results of sounder economic knowledge, of improved ~~skill~~ management, of a higher degree of co-operation. Her progress lies in ~~good~~ better health, ~~good~~ better morals, increasing skill.

I do not mean to say that good laws will do nothing for her. They ~~do~~ will, and she will have the laws votes or no votes as ~~has~~ has been proved scores of times in the years since she became conspicious in industry. Probably no body of laws in this country has advanced so rapidly as those toudhing women and children. As rapidly as the public has seen a need a law has been demanded. I know that such experienced people as Jane Addams and Florence Kelley and Mrs. Nathan contend that they could get what they need much more easily with the vote. I have no experience with which to gain say them. It is my judgment that they are wrong - that the complications of politics would make their case harder. Once pool their simple and appealing measures with the multitude of intricate, evasive and technical measures and divide their now solid phalanx on party lines and I confess I shudder for their good causes. But I realize I should be very humble in this matter and that they are more likely to be right than I.

Another argument for suffrage which I find convinces many people is that it will educate women. Now there is no doubt considerable educative value in the ballot. I don't know that it has done so much for man as yet that we can boast much and if it has not for him I don't quite see

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why we should expect more for women. There is something in it however. The most convincing statement of this argument that I have seen comes from Professor Henry R. Mussey of Columbia College:-

"The ballot for women is important fundamentally," he says "Not because of what they will accomplish with it, but because of what it will do for them and what it will do, not immediately and directly, but in the long course of generations and as an indirect result of the demands it will make on them. The indirect educational results constitute the one irrefutable argument for women suffrage, and by comparison all others are of third-rate importance. The idea that women's voting would purify politics has well-nigh disapeared into the limbo of discarded notions, where it belongs. Such an idea never had any reason behind it, but unchastened optimism. Now the industrial consequences are emphasized - the raising of wages, shortening of hours and improvements of work for women that may be expected from their obtaining the ballot. These expectations will probably in large part be disappointed. Industrial conditions are determined chiefly outside of the political shpere. High wages, short hours and good conditions of work do not hang primarily on acts of Legislature. To enfranchise women will not remove their economic handicaps, though help a little. Any class of people, given the ballot use it for their economic advantage at their full value - and there is no question that they are in general grossly exaggerated. The chief gain to come from it is its steady educational pressure on women."

Even admitting all that Prof. Mussey says, I confess that the idea that women needs the vote for education seems almost comic to me. Education comes from life. It is the essence of experience. And it is woman alone that can taste the highest earthly experience and it is upon her that the steadiest and most demanding pressure comes. Her bearing and rearing of the child are the greatest of human facts. They are the one which has aroused the world most deeply - have given its divine ideals - which oftenest stay its brutality - soften its heart. Only death compares in wonder to the coming of life - and death is without sex. Birth is a woman's work - I confess I've always pitied men a little that they could not know the death struggle for a new life and I always had a feeling of superiority over them not unlike that of Bernard Shaw's scrub-woman who when she wanted to put the English minister of war as well as men in general in their proper place, shrieked:-

"If three quarters of you was killed we could replace you with the help of the other quarter. If three quarters of us was killed how many pwople would there be in England in another generation?"

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This egument of the educational value of the vote has not really the weight with me . If the one I have heard you make. you elhimed Suffrage would help in a degree which you in no way exaggerated and in a time which you in no way over-estimated to break down the wicked barriers which separate women from women. It would be something which would give the poverty-striken helpless, cringing women a sense of being somebody - of possessing something in common with those more fortunate women she sees from afar and must but too often dimly hate for their happiness, their ease, their fullness of opportunity. Here would be one point at least where she would be as good as they - where she would count as much as they - where they would need her - seek her e respect her. She would be the more of a human being because of this value in herself. It would give her courage, self-respect, freedom. "Trade with it? of course she will as men do," you said, "as she does with her person today." But having this legitimate value which brings her nearer the more fortunate she would sometimes use this value to save herself and her sisters from baser trading.

It is not only she, the unfortunate, who would get from a ballot a new sense of her value as a human being which she so terribly needs. The fortunate who would get a new sense of the value of other human beings which she quite as much needs. Perhaps you are right. Women may discover women, in this operation. It is a discovery many of us need to make. You remember Lady ? clever remark - "The only reason I am glad that I am a woman is that I will not have to marry one." The ballot, perhaps, would help reconcile us to one another. But I dont know that it has done so much for men in this particular.

I have much more sympathy than most people who are opposed in or indifferent to the extension of suffrage with the large a number of women who feel that they are deprived of a "right" in being deprived of the vote, It is a bad thing for a community that any of the members should feel

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that they are being wronged. It is not sufficient that I don't believe myself that I or they are wronged. I never could see the vote as a right. It is a tool devised for recording public opinion. It has little or nothing to do with creating opinions which is the only essential matter. As rapidly as the public has realized that it probably would be advantageous to enlarge the number who used the tool this has been done. As soon as a considerable number of women really are convinced that they need the vote they will be asked to exercise it. The fact that I don't think there is a right involved only an expedency and that I feel sure that nothing can keep the vote from women if the need is seen pretty generally, makes me lukewarm to this situation. I do deplore however that anybody should feel wronged in the community. I prefer that everybody should at least have the chance to try what he wants. But in this case we have a troublesome dilemma. There seems to be more women who don't want the vote - who think they already have more than enough to think about than there are who think they need it and who want to join those who cast it. There seems to be no way to satisfy both sides at once.

For my part while I am not willing to work for the ballot, I am not willing to work against it. Of course I know this sounds pusillanimous and maybe it is. I am told it is a thing much despised in this up and down age called "sitting on the fence". As a matter of fact I sit on the fence a great deal. I have always understood and act of William James which amused me tremendously at the time an has often comforted me. Mr. James had never wanted the suffrage extended to women but one day some ardent suffragist called upon me with a petition - and he signed it. I haard him confess with a groan saying he was always a coward when it came to denying good people what they thought they ought to have.

This mere wanting the vote cannot be treated lightly or at least should not be. There are no doubt many cases particularly in the

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present upward swing of the movement where the advocates want it beacuse they have so recently discovered it was something they did not possess. There is a small prportion of the recent society advance on suffrage which seems to be of this kind - ladies who accustomed to having everything - wakened to the fact that they did not have suffrage - and ordered it. All over the country in inland towns there are the ladies who have "taken it up" because of New York society's interest. There are those whom espouse it as a new excitment and those who hope through it to improve their social position but they are but a handful of the real body. The far greater part wants suffrage becuase they believe it means more freedom and more life.

I have a tremendous sympathy myself with women who want the ballot because they feel that with it they will be more fully in the stream of life. With a great many women practically the whole cry is that they do not want anything going on in the world in which they are not sharing. They are willing to trust themselves in the full current of things, feeling that the rush, confusion and resitlessness of that current is more desirable thn the steadier seat they might have on the bank watching the current go by. They do not ask to be in a safe place, they want the tumult of natural life and they have the courage to attempt it. This is a expression to be expected of the tug at life which is going on everywhere in the world. There were never so many men and women convinced that it is possible that life should be for everybody a much larger affair than it has ever been for anybody outside of a few - not by any means those whom we call "favored few" either. The "favored few" are not necessarily the ones who get the big things out of life. This look into the possibilities of life for all - has been accompanied - is perhaps explained by a spreading conviction that the things which have so largely defeated life for the many are unnecessary Poverty is not necessary: war which is the chief cause of provety is unnecessary.

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privelge which is the chief cause of war is not necessary. They are the ogres which have shut off happy, full lives from the great mass of the earth and they must go. - Women like men are after them. They would legislate them out of the world - and they rush for the tools with which to make the attack. But it can't be done that way. Poverty and war and privilege are the children of greed and selfishness and unbridled natures. Nothing but the slow processes of education will put an end to them and believing this how can I fight for that which I do not feel I need - for that which I believe will hamper the direct use of the tools which will do the work.

You will gather I think from this that the chief reason I am not interested in the extension of suffrage is because I feel that it is part of what seems to me the most dangerous fallacy of our times - and that is that we can be saved morally, economically, socially by laws and systems. Suffrage is a panacea - a sword with which to cut our way to happiness, peace of mind, universal prosperity. To me it seems the least of a woman's tools. She has others so much stronger. - Of the value of these I have no doubt whatever. They have stood the test of use through centuries as human beings no other tools have tried. They may be slow in their operation but they are sure. I cannot make myself see that suffrage belongs in her kit. It seems to me like an alien tool in her hands, as an alien as a gun - and I can no more see that she has no part in public life because she does not cast her ballot than that she has no part in war because she does not carry a gun. The world bows to the brave part she plays in its present struggle and it has and always will bow the knee to her part in public life.

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When you come down to it and suspect the reason I feel as I do about suffrage is a kind of instinct - it is not logic or argument. I mistrust it - do not want it. I feel so sure of woman's place, so clear in my mind about her part in things. It is really worth being "Old", dear

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by my younger sisters

Mr. Phillips, even worth being twitted in public on that fact, to be so proud and so sure of anything as I am of the place and the value of women in the world - without the ballot.

I shall be much interested in knowing whether you think I have "come across" or not!

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