

---

# The Equality of Men and Women

by Eugene V. Debs

Published in *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*, vol. 18, no. 3 (March 1894), pp. 282-285.

The present is an age of reform, at any rate, of change. Antiquity long since ceased to command veneration — even what was esteemed good is pushed aside to make way for something deemed better and there is a great host of crusaders whose purpose is to battle for the best. If this were all of it, the world would serenely contemplate progress and dream of perfection. But with all of our boasted progress and civilization, Christianity and knowledge, the vices and superstitions of the past are often reconstructed and made more offensive and are given a conspicuousness which, in earlier times, they could not enjoy.

Prominent among these vices and superstitions of which we read and which we are permitted to see and contemplate, is the assumption of woman's inferiority to man. It does not matter that the world has experienced an age of chivalry; it does not matter that along the track of the centuries men have championed the cause of woman, called her an "angel" and applied other endearing titles to her, robed her magnificently and decked her with jewels of dazzling beauty, and paid her abject homage; it does not matter that women have been led to the altar and joined in matrimonial vows with all the pomp and ceremony the church could bestow; it does not matter that as wife she has been made mistress of the home, and as mother enshrined in the hearts of her children, and without whom there could be no home upon the earth; it does not matter that love is forever coining new words by which men are enabled to express their devotion and proclaim their vassalage to women. When the time comes to apply the test and determine the honesty of their professions of fealty, with scarcely an exception they are found ready to hurl at women the charge of inferiority to men. It is then that old and degrading wrongs

and superstitions come into view, and then, swearing by their whiskers, mustache, and fists, tobacco, and cigars, their muscle and avoirdupois, men swell to gigantic proportions of self-conceit, and proclaim themselves superior to womankind — to mother, wile, and daughter, and like the “Oregon,” hear no sound except their own boasting.<sup>1</sup>

It may not be difficult for the student to determine the whys and the wherefores of man’s savage brutality towards woman — since the masculine has the larger share of muscle and physical power, and can, therefore, subjugate the physically weaker sex. and as he finds enjoyment in the exercise of his power, the problem is easily solved. But why civilized, Christianized, educated, and sublimated men should contend that women are inferior to themselves, and continue to deprive them of the rights, privileges, and prerogatives men enjoy, constitutes one of the mysteries of this high noon of our civilization. At the first glance it would seem to have seen the mission of Christianity and the church to emancipate woman from the thralldoms of savagery and paganism, to have lifted her by divine power to ethereal elevations and to have enlarged her rights, rather than seek opportunities and excuses for abridging them. But it so happens that Saint Paul, the great apostle to the Gentiles, inoculated Christianity and the church with the virus of woman’s inferiority, and from the days of Paul to the present, neither Christianity nor the church has sought to remove the stigma. It may be well to note the language of St. Paul in this connection, that the charge of misrepresentation, if made, may be speedily crushed, let it be understood that Saint Paul claimed to be inspired, that is to say, to speak by divine authority. Let those who are capable, grasp the proposition, and the reason why Christianity has evinced a relentless opposition to woman’s equality with man is explained. St. Paul, in writing to Timothy, whom he called “my own son in the faith,”<sup>2</sup> said: “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection.”<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Allusion to “Thanatopsis” (1817) by **William Cullen Bryant** (1794-1878):

*“...Take the wings / Of morning, pierce the Barcan wilderness, / Or lose thyself in the continuous woods / Where rolls the Oregon, and hears no sound, / Save his own dashings...”*

<sup>2</sup> *1 Timothy*, chapter 1, verse 2.

<sup>3</sup> *1 Timothy*, chapter 2, verse 11.

In this the great apostle would have women emulate the oyster and the slave. The oyster is silent, and the slave is both silent and subservient.

Again says the inspired apostle: "I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence."<sup>4</sup>

Thus it happens in the year of "our Lord" 63, eighteen hundred and thirty years ago, the church began its relentless crusade against woman's rights, and as a general proposition has kept up the warfare for more than eighteen centuries. In this connection it becomes interesting to note why St. Paul was animated by such hostility to woman. True, he was a bachelor, and probably had never known the ecstasy of "love's young dream,"<sup>5</sup> had never told to woman's ears his love beneath the light of the stars or the moon's pale beams; had never taken his sweetheart to church, riding double on a Judean donkey, but such were not the reasons that prompted him to degrade woman. His hostility reached back to Eden. He says: "For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but woman being deceived was the transgressor."<sup>6</sup>

Here we have the key that unlocks the Pandora box from which have escaped more ills to women all along the track of the centuries than there are stars in the firmament. But St. Paul felt the divine command to write to the Corinthian Christians something more on the woman question. Evidently the apostle had become alarmed on account of privileges granted the Corinthian Christian women, whereupon he wrote as follows:

Let your women keep silence; for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything let them ask their husbands at home; for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.<sup>7</sup>

The point we make is this, that the position taken by St. Paul, supplemented by the affirmation that he was inspired by God himself

---

<sup>4</sup> 1 *Timothy*, chapter 2, verse 12.

<sup>5</sup> Allusion to "Love's Young Dream," from *Irish Melodies No. IV*, by **Thomas Moore** (1779-1852).

<sup>6</sup> 1 *Timothy*, chapter 2, verses 13-14.

<sup>7</sup> 1 *Corinthians*, chapter 14, verses 34-35.

to degrade women in the eyes of the Christian world, fully accounts for the centuries of enslavement more or less cruel and crushing that has fallen to the lot of women throughout Christendom. Their inferiority to men breathes in every line of St. Paul's writings upon the subject, a display of bigotry and arrogance which, in the light of reason, is sufficient to make the world blush scarlet. Is it strange that under such tutelage woman has been regarded inferior to man, or that centuries of wrong have not had the effect to impair her mental faculties, and as is seen in millions of instances, make women willingly accept the foul charge of natural, inherent inferiority? Had the same maledictions been hurled at man instead of woman, who can so much as surmise results upon the masculine branch of society throughout all lauds where Christianity is the dominating religion?

The "woman movement" in these latter days is, we do not doubt, of all social, human and civilizing movements, the one of the most far-reaching and transcendent importance. We by no means under-rate the herculean task that challenges the mind forces of the men and women who are engaged in the work of woman's enfranchisement. We do not belittle the power of bigotry and superstition, which in alliance asserts woman's inferiority to man and denies them the rights and privileges which men enjoy, and of which they boast. We know that the press and the pulpit, with here and there an exception, demand that women shall keep silent and wear their fetters submissively. But we see in spite of all opposition that women are achieving triumphs in all the walks of life that challenge intellectuality and high endeavor, which must make St. Paul, if permitted to observe human affairs, somewhat restive.

What do we behold? The institutions of learning, moss covered with antiquity, throwing wide open their doors and admitting women to lyceums as sacred as where Plato and Aristotle taught, and we see them coming forth equipped and holding as high aloft the blazing torch of learning and progress as falls to the lot of their masculine competitors.

And yet there are those who cannot refrain from resorting to science (so-called) to demonstrate woman's inferiority. They proceed to weighing brains, and find that the brain-weight of women is about five ounces less than that of men — hence this inference, that in the "higher levels" of intellectual work, women are not men's equals—though admitting that girls are superior to boys at school, when equal advantages are enjoyed. The injustice of the estimate of inferior work

in high intellectual levels is manifest, because, at the very time when boys begin such work, girls are retired upon such laurels as they may have won. But, now, as opportunities are afforded women to enter the lists of high endeavor, men are required to make the most of their endowments. In a word, inequalities are disappearing and in the race to win prizes where the feminine and the masculine minds contend for the mastery, the proof is overwhelming, that but for the centuries in which the dwarfing processes have been carried forward, women today, in creative thoughts, clear perceptions, and sound judgment, would bear off the non-desirable prizes. An eminent scientist who holds to woman's intellectual inferiority when all the facts are summed up, is forced to admit woman's intellectual superiority in numerous instances; as for instance, the following:

Reading implies enormously intricate processes of perception, both of the sensuous and intellectual order; and I have tried a series of experiments, wherein reading was chosen as a test of the rapidity of perception in different persons. Having seated a number of well-educated individuals around a table I presented to them successively the same paragraph of a book, which they were each to read as rapidly as they could, ten seconds being allowed for 20 lines. As soon as time was up I removed the paragraph, immediately after which the reader wrote down all that he or she could remember of it. Now, in these experiments, where everyone read the same paragraph as rapidly as possible, I found that the palm was usually carried off by the ladies. More over, besides being able to read quicker, they were better able to remember what they had just read — that is, to give a better account of the paragraph as a whole. One lady, for example, could read exactly four times as fast as her husband, and could then give a better account even of that portion of the paragraph which alone he had time to get through.<sup>8</sup>

Other and numerous instances could be given showing not only that women are men's equals intellectually, but often their superiors — and that any inequality should exist we hold is chargeable to the fact that women nowhere at any time have ever enjoyed opportunities equal to those conferred upon men to demonstrate to a gainsaying world that their mental endowments qualify them to participate fully in all human affairs designed to elevate human beings.

---

<sup>8</sup> George J. Romanes, "Mental Differences of Men and Women," *Popular Science Monthly*, vol. 31 (July 1887), pg. 385.

We are fully convinced that the opposition to the complete enfranchisement of women has its foundation in superstitions as degrading as any that have ever cursed the world. One by one these false theories are disappearing — and step by step women are advancing in the acquisition of knowledge. In the science of education, they challenge competition and silence criticism. In the science of law and of medicine, they are winning renown. In the pulpit, their sermons evince that they can delve as deeply into the mysteries of theology as any masculine graduate of the divinity schools can boast. In the lecture field they draw and win applause; on the stage, their admirers are a mighty host. In art and literature, they are achieving triumphs of which men might well be envious — but, their enfranchisement can be celebrated only when they are permitted to grasp the ballot. Then their fetters will drop from around them, as did the shackles from 4 million slaves when Abraham Lincoln declared their emancipation.

To this it is coming and the movement is mining momentum. Men talk about the ballot unsexing women — as well say that the crown has unsexed Victoria. The ballot, as a weapon, is mightier than the sword, and women can wield it in the interest of peace and of purity — silence and submission have had their day — henceforth, agitation and aggressive warfare. Henceforth the shibboleth — “For Truth and the Right,” and as the “eternal years of God” are pledged for the triumph of truth and right,<sup>9</sup> duty marks the way which will grow brighter until women in America stand forth emancipated by the conquering power of eternal justice.

*Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport*

1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR · June 2017 · Non-commercial reproduction permitted.  
First Edition

---

<sup>9</sup> Allusion to “The Battle-Field” (1837) by William Cullen Bryant: “*Truth, crushed to earth, shall rise again; / The eternal years of God are hers.*”