

**"COMMON SENSE" APPLIED TO
WOMAN SUFFRAGE; A STATEMENT
OF THE REASONS WHICH JUSTIFY
THE DEMAND TO EXTEND THE
SUFFRAGE TO WOMEN**

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"Common sense" applied to woman suffrage; a statement of the reasons which justify the demand to extend the suffrage to women by Mary Putnam-Jacobi

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MARY PUTNAM-JACOBI

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"COMMON SENSE" APPLIED TO WOMAN SUFFRAGE.

"Who the author of this Production is, is wholly unnecessary to the Public, as the object for attention is the Doctrine *itself*, not the man. Yet it may not be unnecessary to say,—That he is unconnected with any party, and under no sort of Influence, public or private, but the influence of reason and principle."—*Common Sense*, Addressed to the Inhabitants of America, January 10, 1776.

"Not he is great who alters matter, but he who alters my state of mind."—EMERSON, The American scholar. Phi Beta Kappa oration.

THE celebrated pamphlet from which—not without audacity—we have borrowed our title-page, is said to have been an important factor in the formation of the public opinion,* which six months later, decided to risk the Revolutionary War. To-day is also a moment for the formation of a public opinion,—opinion on a question not less momentous, upon issues even more far-reaching than those involved in the famous quarrel of our ancestors with their mother country.

* "This pamphlet, whose effect has never been equalled in literary history."—*Works of Thomas Paine*, Moncure Conway.

"The sun never shined on a cause of greater worth. 'T is not the affair of a city, a country, a province, or a kingdom, but of a continent of at least the eighth part of the habitable globe. 'T is not the concern of a day, a year, or an age ; posterity are virtually involved in the contest, and will be more or less affected even to the end of time, by the proceedings now."

"A situation similar to the present hath not happened since the days of Noah until now."*

To-day, also, a change is proposed, not as a despairing revolt against a really intolerable oppression, or physical cruelty, but against grievances only appreciable by those who have already attained a fair measure of independence. To-day, also, the demand for a share in the sovereignty of the State is the expression, on the part of those demanding, of a higher degree of development than had previously been attained, and of an imperious impulse towards still further expansion, power, and autonomy.

"Small islands not capable of protecting themselves are the proper objects for government to take under their care, but there is something absurd in supposing a continent to be perpetually governed by an island. In no instance has nature made the satellite larger than the primary planet." †

* *Common Sense*, pp. 84, 118.

† *Common Sense*, p. 92.

To-day, also, the protest, the declaration of independence, does not receive the unanimous support of the classes on whose behalf it is made. There are Tories in the midst, and plausible reasons are advanced even by women, against the demand made for them, to be allowed to "take, among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal place to which the laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them."

"Interested men who are not to be trusted, weak men who cannot see, prejudiced men who will not see, and a certain set of moderate men who think better of the European world than it deserves, are those who espouse the doctrine of reconciliation." *

And to-day, as in 1776, the demand to emerge into political individuality, from a condition of political non-existence,—the demand to become recognized factors in the political life of the State, implies, and also forebodes changes in the social status of those demanding, which is of far more consequence than any of the special reasons which may be urged in support of the demand.

"The birthday of a new world is at hand, and a race of men, perhaps as numerous as all Europe contains, are

* *Common Sense*, p. 90.

to receive their portion of freedom from the events of a few months. The reflection is awful,—and in this point of view how trifling, how ridiculous do the little paltry cavillings of a few weak and interested men appear, when weighed against the business of a world." *

The modern position of women was inaugurated by the Revolution of 1848. The Revolution of 1688 overthrew the doctrine of the divine right of kings. The Revolution of 1793 dissolved the doctrine of the necessary and lawful supremacy of social classes. The Revolution of 1848 asserted the human rights of the individual. In France the masses obtained equality before the law in 1793; they did not obtain political equality for men until 1848. In Germany, the political equality, temporarily gained, was lost in the reaction, to be reacquired later, so far as universal suffrage was concerned, with the establishment of the German Empire.

In England, the great Reform Bill of 1832, had preceded '48, and softened its shock, † which expended itself in the Chartist movement, and the monster petition to Parliament. Crossing the Atlantic, the ebbing wave of the Revolu-

* *Common Sense*, p. 115.

† Or perhaps precipitated, by the extensive disfranchisements of the poorer classes, which the Bill, though reforming "rotten" boroughs, brought about.