

Women's Progress

The Few Ask and the Many Receive; This Has Always Been the Rule.

Every theory against woman suffrage has been completely demolished in the light of practical experience, until about all that is left for the opposition is the one which is being used for all it is worth: "Women do not want the ballot." "Whenever a majority of women ask for it they will get it." Many opponents frankly admit that this is the only argument worth considering, but still claim that it is sufficient reason for withholding the ballot until such time as a majority of the women ask for it.

To the unthinking this may seem very reasonable, but when one considers the history of all past progress, together with present facts, this excuse (for it is nothing but an excuse for deferring justice) seems meagre indeed. A majority of women have never demanded a single privilege that has been granted them in the past, nor was one of them ever asked for by even a small majority.

The long discussion over "woman's rights" has by no means been confined to the franchise, but has included the right of women to speak in public, to organize, to receive higher education, to enter the professions and industrial occupations, to control their wages and to hold property, all of which have passed exactly the same gauntlet of objections and been belabored with precisely the same clubs that have been used to prevent women from receiving the right to the ballot. It would unsex women, it would destroy the domestic ties, it would thwart nature, it would set aside the intentions of the Almighty, are samples of the objections that have been raised to prevent the progress of women in the past. But these privileges have been obtained for women in spite of the stumbling blocks.

The effort for the right to speak in public and to organize was made by less than a hundred women. It was with the utmost difficulty that a few thousand women in the State of New York could be persuaded to sign a petition for the right of women to own property after marriage, and there was practically no petition for it from the women of other States. Most of them expressed themselves satisfied with the laws as they were. If the universities of the country and the founders of the great women's colleges had waited until a majority of women asked for them, not one woman in the United States to-day would be receiving the higher education.

The majority of women have never asked for anything and they never will do so. In each case a few, far in advance of the masses, made a determined and persistent effort, and secured these privileges for their sex, which, when secured, the great body of women availed themselves of without a thought as to their benefactors.

No persuasion would have induced the majority of the women in any one of the four Western States where they now have full suffrage, to petition for it. There was very little demand for it from the women of Wyoming or Idaho; only a small proportion of the Colorado women petitioned or worked for it, and by no means a majority in Utah; but when it was granted, as a large number of women, pro rata, as of men took advantage of it, and have continued to do so. Thus much can be said: A larger number of women have petitioned for the franchise than have ever asked for all the other privileges put together.

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Nor is this lack of interest in their own progress confined to women. The whole story of the evolution of liberty is but a sequence of examples where the few have asked and the many received. We should never have had the Declaration of Independence if it had been necessary to have a majority of the colonists declare for it. Why is it, then, that all precedents must be set aside in this one particular of the enfranchisement of women, and this measure of equity be withheld from the hundreds of thousands of women who are progressive enough to demand it, until that impossible time when the whole body shall be lifted up to this level?—Elnora Monroe Babcock.

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Source:

Elnora Monroe Babcock, "Women's Progress," *Westfield, N.Y. Republican*, September 25, 1901, 7.