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3307 Poppleton Ave. Omaha,

Woman Suffrage a Menace

to the Nation

—By—

MRS. HELEN ARION LEWIS



This early 20th century pamphlet was collected by suffragists Katherine Sumney and Grace Richardson of Omaha. They preserved it along with other examples of contemporary anti-suffragist literature. It is part of the Grace Richardson Collection, RG1073.AM, at History Nebraska. history.nebraska.gov

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The Nebraska Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage
536 Bee Building
OMAHA, NEBRASKA

Woman Suffrage a Menace to the Nation.

Out of the abundance of a life-long experience with the ballot, Mrs. Helen Arion Lewis, ardent apostle of social reform, has reached the conclusion that woman suffrage has been found wanting. More than that, she believes it a positive menace to the nation.

Mrs. Helen Arion Lewis is the widowed mother of S. Arion Lewis of Omaha, with whom she makes her home. She was the daughter of Colonel Arion of Madison, Indiana—later of Chicago—a pioneer editor, and grand-daughter of Hon. John Testo, one of Indiana's early judges. General Lew Wallace was a cousin.

Mrs. Lewis inherited from her mother a belief in woman's rights. She fought for suffrage in California more than fifteen years ago as a vice-president of the Votes-For-Women organization. Finally she had an actual experience with the ballot as a citizen of Utah and Colorado. Now she is actively allied with the anti-suffrage organization in Nebraska as a member of the executive committee.

"Our suffrage friends paint a pretty picture of women tripping to the polls, dropping their ballots in the box and returning home to the care of their children," said Mrs. Lewis, "but the degradation of womanhood, as I saw it, when she becomes embroiled in political intrigue, is a side of the picture they have not noticed. It filled me with horror."

While taking a keen interest in public affairs all her life, Mrs. Lewis has always held that a woman's first business is to perfect herself in housewifely arts.

HER CONVERSION TO ANTI-SUFFRAGE.

Years ago Mrs. Lewis went to Salt Lake City to live, an ardent suffragist. She began to be troubled with her first doubts as to its efficacy as a factor in social reform there.

"I found," she said, "that instead of the good women exercising their rights at the polls, an unmistakable lethargy existed among them, and that such women as voted did so under an appalling pernicious influence. In those days I found

that the law against polygamy—a law placed on the statute books for the protection of women—was virtually disregarded, and the practice went unheeded by the women who sought to uplift and guard their sex by the ballot.

“From Salt Lake City I went to Denver, where an even worse state of affairs existed. Respectable women would not vote. But the boss system, that exists in every city, obtained an overwhelming advantage by mustering the forces of such as were found in the vice sections. I witnessed revolting and disgusting sights of debauchery of women at the polls, such as are impossible of adequate description. Besides the disgusting sights I witnessed of the activity of scarlet women in elections, I found intelligent, respectable women campaigning on behalf of special interests for things directly opposed to the benefit of their sex.

“Neither of these states, after years of suffrage, has such laws for the protection of women as Nebraska possesses.

ONLY 10 PER CENT VOTE CONSCIENTIOUSLY.

“Here is the situation: 90 per cent of the women of a community either stay at home, vote as directed by their husbands, or vote under a wicked influence. The remaining 10 per cent conscientiously believe they have a duty to perform and vote accordingly.

“Economic and social reforms are secured through education first, and legislation afterwards. I am firmly convinced that woman can exercise an even greater influence along educational lines without the ballot than she can with it.

“If we were increasing the relative number of conscientious voters by woman suffrage, there might be some excuse for it, even at the expense of our womanhood. It would be a fine martyrdom. If we are merely doubling the lethargic and wicked class of voters, it is useless. But we will really be increasing the relative size of the stay-at-home vote, at least, for the proportion of women who refuse to go to the polls is much greater than that of men.

THE HOME FIRST.

"At one of the recent anti-suffrage meetings it was suggested that we ought to drop the slogan, 'The place for women is in the home.' Nay, do not say we need to suppress the talk of the home in this present-day upheaval. It has been—and, thank God, it will be—the tower of strength to all womanhood, and our Nation's bulwark in time of disaster. The suffragists ridicule it because they say the mere fact of a woman going to the polls doesn't take her away from her home any more than going down town to shop.

"As a matter of fact, it is the best argument we have, when one considers the dangerous possibilities that lurk in the dark doorways for women who flaunt themselves in politics. I maintain that the very womanhood of America is threatened, not by the simple act of placing the ballot in the box on election day, but by participation in campaign activities, and the intimate and unconventional contact that would serve to erase the tradition of women's dependency—the fundamental factor in all the world's history that has served most to nourish the love and respect of man for woman.

"How much better for the woman of today—the progressive woman, the thinking wife and mother and sister—to exercise her intellectual energy in the silent influence of a truly feminine woman.

"In sorrow or financial trouble, would you turn to the independent, political mother, or to the never-failing, quiet sympathizing adviser who mothered you in your childish griefs, and could help in your present needs? Would you hunt the feminist mother at the polls or turn to the loving friend in the God-fearing, old-fashioned, home-loving mother of old?

UNWOMANLY TACTICS HERE.

"Elements of unwomanly tactics in the scramble for recruits are already apparent in the local suffrage campaign. I have been shocked and ashamed by some of the things I have witnessed.

"An Omaha suffragist told me that for a single woman to take the initiative along the line of English militancy would

be all that is necessary to precipitate, right here in Omaha, such scenes and conduct as would shock the country. I cannot but feel from my own experience that this is true.

“What is this but militancy? A crowd of women invaded our largest candy factory in the canvass for signers to their petition. They were refused permission to make a recruiting station of the plant, and because they were turned down they threatened to boycott the product of that factory.

“Again, at a reputable grocery they asked the proprietor to give up a window to them, and threatened to boycott the place if he did not. Fearing the boycott, he yielded to them. Seeing their display, we asked for the other window, but we assured him while making the request that he need not fear reprisal on our part if he refused; that such as were his customers would continue to be so as long as he sold good groceries.

A SIMPLE TEST.

“Here is a simple test for you, if you are in doubt as to the suffrage issue. The next time your wife or lady friend sounds the battle cry for emancipation and the ballot, just ask what she wants the ballot for. I'll wager that not one in ten will be able to give a reasonable answer, and fewer still can tell what they expect to do after they get the ballot.

“My mother, who was recognized as a woman of profound intellect, was a firm advocate of the movement—then in its infancy—known as woman's rights. But as she viewed the situation existing at that time, it was her belief that the wrongs could best be righted, not by woman's vote—for with her womanly nature she would have abhorred that method—but by bringing them to the attention of men who had sheltered and protected women all these years. And I believe she would sanction my attitude today, with the insight and knowledge I now possess, which she could not have then.

“And more than that, I believe that all thinking women, when they apply the test of calm reason, will come to think likewise.”