

From Epler, Percy Harold. *The Life of Clara Barton*.

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Clara Barton – 1898

I believe I must have been born believing in the full right of women to all the privileges and positions which nature and justice accord to her in common with other human beings. Perfectly equal rights—human rights. There was never any question in my mind in regard to this. I did not purchase my freedom with a price; I was born free; and when, as a younger woman I heard the subject discussed, it seemed simply ridiculous that any sensible, sane person should question it. And when, later, the phase of woman's right to suffrage came up it was to me only a part of the whole, just as natural, just as right, and just as certain to take place.

And whenever I have been urged, as a petitioner, to ask for this privilege for woman, a kind of dazed, bewildered feeling has come over me.

Of whom should I ask this privilege? Who possessed the right to confer it? Who had greater right than woman herself? Was it man, and if so, where did he get it? Who conferred it upon him? He depended upon woman for his being, his very existence, nurture and rearing. More fitting that she should have conferred it upon him.

Was it governments? What were they but the voice of the people? What gave them that power? Was it divinely conferred? Alas! No; or they would have been better, purer, more just and stable.

Was it force of arms—war? Who furnished the warriors? Who but the mothers? Who reared their sons and taught them that liberty and their country were worth their blood? Who gave them up, wept their fall, nursed them in suffering and mourned them dead?

Was it labor? Women have always, as a rule, worked harder than men.

Was it capital? Woman has furnished her share up to the present hour. Who then, can give the right, and on what basis? Who can withhold it?

There is, once in a while a monarch who denies the right of man to place a crown upon his head. Only the great Jehovah can crown and anoint him for his work, and he reaches out, takes the crown, and placed it upon his head with his own hand. I suspect that this is in effect what woman is doing today. Virtually there is no one to give her the right to govern herself, as men govern themselves by self-made and self-approved laws of the land.

But in one way or another, sooner or later, she is coming to it. And the number of thoughtful and right-minded men who will oppose, will be much smaller than we think and when it is really an accomplished fact all will wonder, as I have done, what the objection ever was.