ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY THE

HON. ELIHU ROOT,

BEFORE

The New York State Constitutional Convention,

ON

August 15th, 1894.

ISSUED BY
The New York State Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage,
29 WEST 39TH STREET,
NEW YORK CITY.

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I AM opposed to the granting of suffrage to women, because I believe that it would be a loss to women, to all women and to every woman; and because I believe it would be an injury to the State, and to every man and every woman in the State. It would be useless to argue this if the right of suffrage were a natural right. If it were a natural right, then women should have it though the heavens fall. But if there be any one thing settled in the long discussion of this subject, it is that suffrage is not a natural right, but is simply a means of government; and the sole question to be discussed is whether government by the suffrage of men and women will be better government than by the suffrage of men alone. The question is, therefore, a question of expediency, and the question of expediency upon this subject is not a question of tyranny, as the gentleman from Cattaraugus has said, but a question of liberty, a question of the preservation of free constitutional government, of law, order, peace and prosperity. Into my judgment, sir, there enters no element of the inferiority of woman. There could not, sir, for I rejoice in the tradition and in the memory and the possession of a home where woman reigns with acknowledged superiority in all the nobler, and the higher attributes that by common, by universal, consent, determine rank among the highest of the children of God. No, sir. It is not that woman is inferior to man, but it is that woman is different from man; that in the distribution of powers, of capacities, of qualities, our Maker has created man adapted to the performance of certain functions in the economy of nature and society, and women adapted to the performance of other functions. One question to be determined in the discussion of this subject is whether the nature of woman is such that her taking upon her the performance of the functions implied in suffrage will leave her in the possession and the exercise of her highest powers or will be an abandonment of those powers and on entering upon a field in which, because of her differences from man, she is distinctly inferior. Mr. President, I have said that I thought suffrage would be a loss for women. I think so because suffrage implies not merely the casting of the ballot, the gentle and peaceful fall of the snow-flake, but suffrage, if it means anything, means entering upon the field of political life, and politics is modified war. In politics there is struggle, strife,

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contention, bitterness, heart-burning, excitement, agitation, everything which is adverse to the true character of woman. Woman rules to-day by the sweet and noble influences of her character. Put woman into the arena of conflict and she abandons these great weapons which control the world, and she takes into her hands, feeble and nerveless for strife, weapons with which she is unfamiliar and which she is unable to wield. Woman in strife becomes hard, harsh, unlovable, repulsive; as far removed from that gentle creature to whom we all owe allegiance and to whom we confess submission, as the heaven is removed from the earth. Government, Mr. President, is protection. The whole science of government is the science of protecting life and liberty and the pursuit of happiness, of protecting our person, our property, our homes, our wives and our children, against foreign aggression, against civil dissension, against mobs and riots rearing their fearful heads within this peaceful land during the very sessions of this Convention. Against crime and disorder, and all the army of evil, civil society wages its war, and government is the method of protection, protection of us all. The trouble, Mr. President, is not in the principles which underlie government. Men and women alike acknowledge them and would enforce them, honor and truth, and justice and liberty; the difficulty is to find out how to protect them. The difficulty is to frame the measure, to direct the battle, to tell where and how the blows are to be struck and when the defenses are to be erected.

Mr. President, in the divine distribution of powers, the duty and the right of protection rests with the male. It is so throughout nature. It is so with men, and I, for one, will never consent to part with the divine right of protecting my wife, my daughter, the women whom I love and the women whom I respect, exercising the birthright of man, and place that high duty in the weak and nerveless hands of those designed by God to be protected rather than to engage in the stern warfare of government. In my judgment, sir, this whole movement arises from a false conception of the duty and of the right of men and women both. We all of us, sir, see the pettiness of our lives. We all see how poor a thing is the best that we can do. We all at times long to share the fortunes of others, to leave our tiresome round of duty and to engage in their affairs. What others may do seems to us nobler, more important, more conspicuous than the little things of our own lives. It is a great mistake, sir, it is a fatal mistake that these excellent women make when they

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conceive that the functions of men are superior to theirs and seek to usurp them. The true government is in the family. The true throne is in the household. The highest exercise of power is that which forms the conscience, influences the will, controls the impulses of men, and there to-day woman is supreme and woman rules the world. Mr. President, the time will never come when this line of demarcation between the functions of the two sexes will be broken down. I believe it to be false philosophy; I believe that it is an attempt to turn backward upon the line of social development, and that if the step ever be taken, we go centuries backward on the march towards a higher, a nobler and a purer civilization, which must be found not in the confusion, but in the higher differentiation of the sexes. But, Mr. President, why do we discuss this subject? This Convention has already acted upon it. A committee, as fairly constituted as ever was committee, has acted upon it, a committee which had among its members four who were selected by the women who lead this movement, which had a much smaller number of gentlemen who were known to be opposed to it, the great body of which was composed of men whose ideas and feelings upon the subject were utterly unknown, has acted upon it, and reported to the Convention. The Convention has, by a unanimous vote, decided that it will not strike the word "male" from the Constitution. Now we are met, sir, by a proposition that instead of performing the duty which we came here to perform, instead of exercising the warrant given to us by the people to revise and amend the Constitution, we shall have recourse in a weak and shuffling evasion, and then throw back upon the people the determination which they charged us to make in this Convention. We are asked to do it. Why? to do it from good nature, to do it because my friend from New York, Mr. Lauterbach, is a good fellow; to do it because it will please this lady and that lady, who have been importuning members about this hall for months; to do it, heaven knows for how many reasons, but all reasons of good nature, of kindliness, of complaisance, opposed to the simple performance of the duty which we came here to discharge under the sanction of our oaths. Mr. President, I hope that this Convention will discharge the duty of determining who shall vote; discharge it with manliness and decision of character, which, after all, the women of America, God bless them, admire and respect more than anything else on this earth.

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