

Three Cheers for Mire and Degradation

Very likely there are some female students at Terra Nova High who've heard about the group whose goal is 20 percent women in elected offices by the year 2020. If they're naive enough, those young ladies may even wonder why the goal is so low. After all, women have half the bodies and half the brains in this society. Why not half the elected positions? Logical!

The other day I ran across a review of election laws that might explain how far we've come, even if we have a way to go. The setting is the California Constitutional Convention of 1879.

"Mr. Caples opposed woman's suffrage [the right to vote] because it was a step in demanding that woman be allowed to do everything that a man does and the inevitable result of such a policy would be to drag her down from the high, and exalted, and God-given relation she now occupies, into the very filth and mire of degradation and human infamy."

Now aren't you sorry women got the vote? Isn't all that degradation and filth women are now involved in too high a price?

Mr. Caples continued by pointing out that men should vote because men defended political rights with the sword. Mr. McFarland asked if "the gentleman ...holds that right to vote depends on skill in wielding the sword? If that be so, I know a little actress who can run the gentleman through the ribs in two minutes."

California finally allowed women to vote in 1911. Finally, in 1919 the 19th amendment was ratified by the California legislature. It's safe to say women voting and participating in politics has neither brought them down to the level predicted by Mr. Caples nor accomplished the goals forecast by highminded women. What it has done, and what it will do as women move up to occupy their fair share of political office, is allow women the opportunity to fully participate in the political process. Some of the highminded women, the kind who run the League of Women Voters, for example, will adorn and enhance the political process. Some others, no doubt, will use the political process to line their own pockets as some male politicians have done in the past and many continue to do. In other words, women are human beings. Some are good. Some aren't. And some are highminded until faced with temptation.

If you favor women being involved in the political process, why not drop a note to those women presently serving us. Let them know you're paying attention, but most of all, thank them for the hard work they're putting in. Any elected official who is doing a halfway decent job is working harder than almost anyone else you know. The