4

The Southern Temperament as Related to Woman Suffrage

Anne Dallas Dudley

An Address Delivered at the "Dixie Night" Session of the National American Woman Suffrage Convention in Atlantic City, September 8, 1916

Anne Dallas Dudley (1876–1955) of Nashville was the best known (at least outside the state) of the Tennessee suffragists. The daughter of a wealthy industrialist, she was educated at Ward's Seminary and attended Price's College, both in Nashville. In 1902 she married Guilford Dudley, a prominent insurance executive and hardware dealer.

Elected president of the Nashville Equal Suffrage League when it first organized in 1911, Dudley served until 1915. She also served as president of the Tennessee Equal Suffrage Association, Inc., from 1915 until she gave up the position in 1917 to become Third Vice President of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. In this capacity she traveled extensively, aiding the cause in other states and regions and playing an active role in the ratification campaign.[1]

Aware that participation in "war work" not only helped the war effort but aided the suffrage cause, Dudley was actively involved in the Liberty Loan drives. She was appointed by the secretary of the treasury as a member of the National Woman's Liberty Loan Commission (1917–19) and was the state president of the Tennessee Woman's Liberty Loan Commission. A Democrat, Dudley was the first woman chair of the Association of Democratic State Committees in 1920 and a delegate-at-large to the Democratic National Convention in 1920.[2]

Like many of the white southern suffragists, Dudley presented her cause as unthreatening and in tune with prevailing values of her region, and she employed the traditional "weapons" of the Southern Lady—charm, flattery, and appeals to chivalry—as she tried to persuade the men of her region to share power. According to Anne Firor Scott in *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics*, northern suffragists were sometimes astonished and somewhat appalled by this "complimentary attitude" southern suffragists employed in speaking with southern legislators. When New Englander Maud Wood Park confessed to a co-worker her fears that "the men to whom it was addressed would think we had deliberately sent a honey-tongued charmer . . . to cajole them," the co-worker replied that "southern men were so accustomed to that sort of persiflage they would think a woman unfeminine if she failed to use it!"[3] Southern suffragists, at times, expressed repugnance for such tactics, but they were also aware that the only weapon they had for achieving "direct influence" was "indirect influence"—the power of persuasion.

Southern suffragists and their sympathizers in the press also fought the radical image of the woman suffrage movement by emphasizing the beauty, femininity, and domesticity of the movement's leaders, and Dudley, said to be a "legendary beauty," was a prime candidate for such stories. Tennessee newspapers proudly reported that when she assumed the dais to make a seconding speech at the 1920 Democratic National Convention in San Francisco, the band members broke into "Oh, You Beautiful Doll." Suffragists circulated photographs of Dudley reading to her two "attractive children."[4] In 1916, Dudley and her children led a suffrage parade from downtown Nashville to Centennial Park.[5]

In the speech below, a classic example of the "honey-tongued charm," Dudley outlines the initial aversion to and eventual embrace of woman suffrage by white southerners, emphasizing that "the Southern woman" would have nothing to do with a movement that smacked of "sex antagonism." She ridicules many of her male opponents, but hails the emergence of a new Southern Man: awake, unthreatened, willing to share responsibility with women, and ready to embark upon "a new knighthood, a new chivalry, when men will not only fight for women, but for the rights of women."

The awakening of Southern women to this great world question has been slow, because in order to grip the Southern heart a cause must have its glamour. That, you see, is our trouble—too much heart. The only business a Southern girl is ever taught or is born with a knowledge of is the business of hearts—the way to win them, the way to hold them, sometimes the way to destroy them, but more often the way to cherish them through life. So what had woman's suffrage to do with us? Our laws were bad, particularly those affecting women

Anne Dallas Dudley with her two children. Courtesy of the Tennessee Historical Society.

and children, but then our men were so much better than our laws, so why worry? The much-vaunted Southern chivalry was so real that it was almost impossible to convict a woman in court, and the Southern men so imbued with the idea of protecting women that the lawmakers would not permit a married woman to make a contract in her own name until two years ago.

Now, it seems to me that with us much of the opposition to woman suffrage is founded on the supposition that men and women are ideal creatures—that men are always going to protect women, and no woman is ever going to need protection against men.

We are a race of dreamers in the South, by choice and because of climactic conditions. Doing things makes no appeal to us as long as we can sit and think about them. That is why we are still doing the rough work of the world instead of turning out the finished product; sending our lumber to Eastern markets to receive the mark of the master craftsman; sending our cotton everywhere to be turned into the finest fabrics, and that is why we haven't already got woman suffrage throughout the South to-day.

A Change Came

As long as it was a question of woman's rights; as long as the fight had any appearance of being against man; as long as there seemed to be a vestige of sex antagonism, the Southern woman stood with her back turned squarely toward the cause. She wouldn't even turn around to look at it. She would have none of it at all. But when she awoke slowly to a social consciousness, when eyes and brain were at last free after a terrible reconstruction period, to look out upon the world as a whole; when she found particularly among the more fortunate classes that her leisure had come to mean laziness, when she realized that through the changed conditions of modern life so much of her work had been taken out of the home, leaving her to choose between following it into the world or remaining idle; when with a clearer vision she saw that man needed her help in governmental affairs, particularly where they touched her own interests, she said, "Oh, that is so different!"

Right about face, she turned, and she said to the Southern man. "I don't wish to usurp your place in government, but it is time I had my own. I don't complain of the way you have conducted your part of the business of government, but my part has been either badly managed, or not managed at all. In the past you have not shown yourself averse to accepting my help in very serious matters; my courage and fortitude and wisdom you have continually praised. Now that there is a closer connection between the government and the home than ever before in the history of the world, will you not let me help you?"

And he in turn has said—various things. Sometimes: "Oh, you want to help me, do you? Not to get in the way? Well, on the whole I see no objection to that." Sometimes when surpassingly truthful, he has said: "But you know, you'll try to reform us, and we don't want to be reformed. Why you'd take all the fun out of politics. What would we do if we couldn't drink and fight at a convention?" To which she might make reply, that there are plenty of other places, possibly more appropriate, for these delectable forms of amusement.

Some Southern Men

Then there is—yes, there is, even in the South—the gentle-mannered, sweet-tempered soul, who says: "Shucks, I don't take no stock in sich foolishness. My old 'oman, she raises children, chickens and hell, and that's enough for her." And there is, even in the South, the chivalrous gentleman who, when you have asked him to vote for your amendment, in order that we may all be free, with that glorious freedom which includes responsibility, will look at you and say: "I bet you left some dirty dishes on the table at home!" But, when you have, with truly heavenly patience, carefully explained to him that no good suffragist will permit dirt of any kind around her, not even dirty politicians, if he doesn't belong to the last-named class he may relent, and admit that perhaps women are needed in public housekeeping.

And we have, even in the South, the superior psychologist, the man who understands women so well, who knows perfectly why you are a suffragist, why you will deny yourself pretty frocks and put your jewels in the melting pot, or maybe give up a hard-earned vacation for the sake of the cause. It is because "you want to get your picture in the paper." And we have even in the South the man who considers that he has given you an irrefutable answer to all you may say about the desirability of a real democracy, about the injustice of class legislation and the inferior position given women in the eyes of the law, when he tells you a pathetic story of a child clutching tearfully at its mother's skirts, begging a story, or a cookie, and being pushed aside by a stern parent on the way to a suffrage meeting. Of course this same man, with characteristic logic, would feel that an impatient mother, bending over a washtub, and delivering a resounding smack to an annoying infant, was all that was sweet and womanly.

Other Southern Men

But, thank heaven, we have also in the South the man who has pointed the way to us, who has not been afraid to lead us, who has said to us, "The world needs its women; you must go where duty calls you. There is corruption

to contend with, yes, but on you must rest the blame as well as on me. Who was it that taught me when my mind was soft and plastic? A woman. Who will teach the future citizen his duty to his country—not what he may take from it, but what he may give to it? A woman. And what do you know of citizenship? You must first learn before you can teach; and there is no education without participation. You must first act if you would know. Remember every nation stands where its women stand; and if we, as a nation, are to realize our ideals; if we are to go onward and upward, it must be together."

And so you see not only the Southern woman, but the Southern man is now awake, and present conditions strongly indicate that before another year has passed we will have some form of suffrage for the women of our state. I think our hope lies in the knowledge that Southern women have never sidestepped the fact that no matter how different the interests of men and women may seem, in the end, they are identical. I need not point you to stupid, lying statistics, to prove to you that we have fewer divorces in the South than in any other section of the country. We are not the temperament to sell our birthright for a "mess of facts"; but the feeling of oneness of aim is there, and if you think that is a poor foundation for our future achievements, you must remember that we are essentially an imaginative, romantic people and we have seen a vision—the vision of a time when a woman's home will be the whole wide world, and her children, all those whose feet are bare, and her sisters, all those who need a helping hand. A vision of a new knighthood, a new chivalry, when men will not only fight for women, but for the rights of women. You know the cynical French phrase, wherever there is trouble, "cherzez la femme." We do not accept it. We believe that wherever a man has reached the heights, there you may, indeed, look for the woman. There is in every woman's heart, for every man who has her affection, whether it is her father, her husband, or her son, the feeling Kipling understood so well, when he wrote "Mother Mine." So there is little to fear in the way of rivalry, and we look forward to the time when there will be a better, more complete understanding between men and women, when men will have more of tenderness and women more of courage; when each will lead and follow in turn; and the honor of both be increased thereby.

And you will not blame us if we keep steadily in mind the greater woman of the future, of whom Walt Whitman said: "I see her where she stands, less protected than ever, and yet more protected than ever." More protected because there will be less need of shielding her in a world that has been humanized by woman's untrammeled influence.

Notes

This speech is reprinted from a clipping from the *Nashville Banner* entitled "Suffrage in the South: Mrs. Guilford Dudley's Address Before National Convention: Southern Temperament: How It Has Affected the Point of View from Which Subject Has Been Approached: Rational Conclusions." The *Banner* printed it with the following noncommittal introduction: "The subject was treated in an original manner, and Mrs. Dudley showed that she had given it close thought and careful analysis." Clipping, n.d. Josephine A. Pearson Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives.

1. On Dudley, see A. Elizabeth Taylor, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1957); Anastatia Sims, "'Powers That Pray and Powers That Prey': Tennessee and the Fight for Woman Suffrage," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* (Winter 1991): 203–25, especially 206, 207.

2. Rose Long Gilmore, *Davidson County Women in the World War, 1914–1919* (Nashville: Foster and Parks, 1923), 354; Wilma Dykeman, *Tennessee Women: Past and Present*, ed. Carol Lynn Yellin (Memphis, Nashville: Tennessee Committee for the Humanities and Tennessee International Women's Decade Coordinating Committee, 1977), 5.

3. Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 183–84.

4. See Sims, "Powers That Pray," 206, 222n. 19; Carol Lynn Yellin, "Countdown in Tennessee, 1920," *American Heritage* 30 (Dec. 1978): 12–35, especially 18–20.

5. Taylor, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee*, 45.

5

"Telling the Country": The National Woman's Party in Tennessee, 1917

Inez Haynes Irwin

From Irwin's *The Story of the Woman's Party*, 1921

The National Woman's Party (originally the Congressional Union), was also called the "Woman's Party" or the NWP. Led by Alice Paul, it was much stronger in the North and West than in the South.[1] The group played an important role in the history of the movement by demanding that the suffrage movement focus once again on the federal rather than the state route to enfranchisement—to the dismay of the "states' rights" suffragists of the South. Most white southern suffragists, however, were quite willing to support the federal amendment after their attempts to win state suffrage amendments had failed. But the vast majority sided with the National American Woman Suffrage Association in its heated dispute with the so-called "militant" Woman's Party over strategy, partly because most of them were Democrats and knew that in their region most politicians were also.

In imitation of the methods of the British suffragettes, the "militant" suffragists insisted that the "party in power," the Democratic Party, adopt woman suffrage or face their opposition; indeed, they parted with the NAWSA over advocacy of this strategy, which conflicted with the NAWSA's long-standing policy of nonpartisanship. The NWP demanded that Democratic President Woodrow Wilson compel the Democrat-controlled Congress to approve the federal woman suffrage amendment. In 1916 they infuriated Democrats by calling upon women already enfranchised in the western states to oppose Democratic candidates—including President Wilson—then up for reelection. In 1917 they began picketing the White House.

VOTES FOR WOMEN!

The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee, the South, and the Nation

Edited by Marjorie Spruill Wheeler

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE PRESS / KNOXVILLE