

# Votes for Women



by Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens)

*Samuel Clemens, whose pen name was Mark Twain, made this speech on January 20, 1901 at the annual meeting of the members of the Hebrew Technical School for Girls. The meeting was held in the vestry room of Temple Emanu-El in New York City. Nathaniel Myers was the President of Temple Emanu-El and introduced Mr. Clemens to the audience.*

- 1 Ladies and Gentlemen—It is a small help that I can afford, but it is just such help that one can give as coming from the heart through the mouth. The report of Mr. Myers was admirable, and I was as interested in it as you have been. Why, I'm twice as old as he, and I've had so much experience that I would say to him, when he makes his appeal for help: "Don't make it for today or tomorrow, but collect the money on the spot."
- 2 We are all creatures of sudden impulse. We must be worked up by steam, as it were. Get them to write their wills now, or it may be too late by-and-by. Fifteen or twenty years ago, I had an experience I shall never forget. I got into a church which was crowded by a sweltering and panting multitude. The city missionary of our town—Hartford—made a telling appeal for help. He told of personal experiences among the poor in cellars and top lofts requiring instances of devotion and help. The poor are always good to the poor. When a person with his millions gives a hundred thousand dollars it makes a great noise in the world, but he does not miss it; it's the widow's mite that makes no noise but does the best work.
- 3 I remember on that occasion in the Hartford church the collection was being taken up. The appeal had so stirred me that I could hardly wait for the hat or plate to come my way. I had four hundred dollars in my pocket, and I was anxious to drop it in the plate and wanted to borrow more. But the plate was so long in coming my way that the fever—heat of beneficence was going down lower and lower—going down at the rate of a hundred dollars a minute. The plate was passed too late. When it finally came to me, my enthusiasm had gone down so much that I kept my four hundred dollars—and stole a dime from the plate. So, you see, time sometimes leads to crime. Oh, many a time have I thought of that and regretted it, and I adjure you all to give while the fever is on you.
- 4 Referring to woman's sphere in life, I'll say that woman is always right. For twenty-five years I've been a woman's rights man. I have always believed, long before my mother died, that, with her gray hairs and admirable intellect, perhaps she knew as much as I did. Perhaps she knew as much about voting as I.

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I should like to see the time come when women shall help to make the laws. I should like to see that whiplash, the ballot, in the hands of women. As for this city's government, I don't want to say much, except that it is a shame—a shame; but if I should live twenty-five years longer—and there is no reason why I shouldn't—I think I'll see women handle the ballot. If women had the ballot today, the state of things in this town would not exist. If all the women in this town had a vote today they would elect a mayor at the next election, and they would rise in their might and change the state of things in this town. They would rise in their might and change the awful state of things now existing here.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**QUIZ**  
*Votes for Women*

*Directions: Circle the best answer.*

1. Why does the text compare the millionaire's gift of \$100,000 to the widow's mite (small amount)?
  - a. to convince people to save their money for a rainy day
  - b. to honor the widow's generosity and raise money for her
  - c. to argue that wealthy people should give generously to charity because they can afford it
  - d. to prove that widows deserve the right to vote
2. Why does Twain call the ballot a "whiplash" in paragraph 5?
  - a. The ballot can be a powerful force for changing direction.
  - b. He fears women would use the ballot like a whiplash.
  - c. Twain is a master storyteller and likes to use vivid language.
  - d. Women are used to handling whiplashes and Twain wants to show they could handle the ballot as well as they handle a whiplash.
3. The word adjure in paragraph 3 means
  - a. expect.
  - b. hope.
  - c. urge.
  - d. deny.
4. Twain includes the story in paragraph 3 to
  - a. inform readers that he cannot be trusted to follow through on his ideas.
  - b. persuade people to give generously to the Hartford church.
  - c. entertain readers with an ironic story about himself.
  - d. convince people to act quickly on their beliefs.
5. Twain argues for women's right to vote when he says that
  - a. women exercising the vote can elect a mayor.
  - b. he likes women.
  - c. he respects women and has supported women's rights for 25 years.
  - d. he thinks women are smart.