

# Helen Kendrick Johnson

Her Desire to Stay the Same

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JOHNSON. - Jan. 3, Helen Kendrick, wife of Rossiter Johnson, at her home in this city, 2 West 95<sup>th</sup> St. Funeral private.

Mrs. Helen K. Johnson Dies.

Mrs. Helen Kendrick Johnson, author and active in anti-suffrage work, died on Wednesday at her home, 2 West Ninety-Fifth Street, in her seventy-third year. She was the wife of Rossiter Johnson, to whom she was married on May 20, 1869. Mrs. Johnson was born in Hamilton N.Y. and received her education at the Oread, Worcester, Mass. She originated the "The Meridian," a woman's club that meets at noonday, and during 1893-1894 was editor of *The American Woman's Journal*. She was the founder and President of the Guidon Club. <sup>1</sup>

Helen Kendrick Johnson was an anti-suffragist who wrote extensively against the suffrage movement because of personal life crises. Her arguments were often flawed and her career and political activity contradicted her anti-suffrage stance. It seemed that her personal life truly made the largest impact on her beliefs. During the later years of her life, she fought to keep the right for women to stay in the home, as opposed to them progressing in America whether it is in politics, or in the workplace.

Her books and editorials seem to have hidden meanings of how she really felt an ideal family should be and that a family should always be together. In the prefaces of her translations, Johnson claims the reasons behind taking the time to finish them was so families could come together and sing their favorite songs together.

Helen Kendrick Johnson was born 4 January 1844, in Hamilton, New York.<sup>2</sup> When she was seven years old, her mother died during the birth of her youngest sister. Helen's father, who was a Professor of Greek at the University of Rochester, moved the family to Rochester after his wife's death. Throughout her childhood, Helen split her time between her father in Rochester

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<sup>1</sup> "Obituary," *The New York Times*, January, 1917, (The New York Times 1917)

<sup>2</sup> Jone Lewis, "Helen Kendrick Johnson," (Lewis 2011) (accessed 02/24/11).

and an aunt, in Clinton,<sup>3</sup> where her aunt cared for Helen's three sisters. When Johnson visited her aunt (in Hamilton), she was never alone because her sisters lived there, but Helen was a very lonely child in Rochester. She would be entertained by two or three of her father's students, and attended Miss Doolittle's school.<sup>4</sup> Since her father was a professor at a well-known university, she never went without a good education. Helen's father desired for Helen and her sisters to become Greek scholars as he was, but Helen's true passion was to become a writer.<sup>5</sup>

Since Johnson was able to obtain a good education from her father, and attend a well-known school at the time, she decided to fulfill her desires to become a writer and attended the Oread Institute; one of the first all-female colleges in Worcester, Massachusetts.<sup>6</sup> It was at this college that she established a close relationship with her Professor, Dr. Robert E. Pattison, and an even closer relationship with his wife. Even though she only spent one year at this school, she found security and a nurturing environment and Mrs. Pattison served as Helen's house mother.<sup>7</sup> Johnson spoke highly of Mrs. Pattison when she wrote about the family. "Mrs. Pattison was an ideal house-mother, always cheery and cordial; and her parlor provided a welcome environment for all girls, especially the homesick."<sup>8</sup> Throughout her writings about the Pattison family, it was as if Johnson wished to be part of this family rather than her own. She felt a safety-net there

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<sup>3</sup> Kathy Warnes, "Suffragists battled Anti-Suffragists as well as Male Opponents," June 23, 2010, <http://www.suite101.com/content/suffragists-battled-anti-suffragists-as-well-as-male-op.onents-a253149> (accessed February 23, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Miss. Doolittle's school was a prestigious academy that many of the upper class sent their children to. Rossiter Johnson, *Helen Kendrick Johnson (Mrs. Rossiter Johnson) The Story of her Varied Activities*, (New York: Publishers Printing Company, 1917), pp. 5-6.

<sup>5</sup> Johnson, *Helen Kendrick Johnson (Mrs. Rossiter Johnson) The Story of her Varied Activities*, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Diane F. Palmer, *Helen Kendrick Johnson and the Anti-Suffrage Side of the Female Suffrage Debate*, (Brockport: 2006), p. 45.

<sup>7</sup> Palmer, p. 46.

<sup>8</sup> Johnson, *Helen Kendrick Johnson (Mrs. Rossiter Johnson) The Story of her Varied Activities*, p. 9.

because the family was complete and happy. After her mother's death, Johnson traveled back and forth between homes and was never able to experience what a real family was like.

After leaving Massachusetts, Helen went back to Rochester with her father where she met one of her father's students who would soon become her husband.<sup>9</sup> Rossiter Johnson was a newspaper editor who cared deeply for Helen. They spent many days on vacations and much of their time devoted to each other. The Johnson's loved writing and editing, and Rossiter even devoted a book to his beloved wife.<sup>10</sup> *Helen Kendrick Johnson (Mrs. Rossiter Johnson) The Story of her Varied Activities* was written as an exploration his wife's life from the very beginning to the very end. Throughout the book he talked very highly of Helen, and Rossiter even stated that after his wife died (in the home) in 1917, that she was "sanely optimistic" and "actively sympathetic with everything that had life."<sup>11</sup>

Helen first began writing with a series of bible studies and eventually went into short stories for young readers about the processes of nature.<sup>12</sup> She wrote many different stories for children, but one of her most famous ones was *Roddy's Romance*. This book was about a young girl who lived with her mother, father, grandmother, brother and sister. Throughout the story you can see how religion played out in this family's life. Each of the family members had a role even before Johnson had the anti-suffragists ideas in her head. In the beginning of the book she states, "Father was in his straight-backed, and mother in her rocking-chair. We slipped into the places where we always sat, and father read and talked about the third chapter of Luke."<sup>13</sup> Throughout

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<sup>9</sup> Lewis, "Helen Kendrick Johnson."

<sup>10</sup> Lewis, "Helen Kendrick Johnson."

<sup>11</sup> Johnson, *Helen Kendrick Johnson (Mrs. Rossiter Johnson) The Story of her Varied Activities*, p. 55.

<sup>12</sup> Johnson, *Helen Kendrick Johnson (Mrs. Rossiter Johnson) The Story of her Varied Activities*, p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> Helen Kendrick Johnson, *Roddy's Romance*, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1874), p. 11.

the story, it is mentioned many times how the main character's father was a smart man and traveled for his job, yet there is no talk about her mother being educated, just that she stays at home and comforts her children when need be.

Another good example of the mother's role in this book is when the main character returned home after being lost for a day. The mother cried with joy and held the girl in her arms saying how worried she was. The father was still on his business trip, but the mother was there with the girl saying how happy she was she returned. In the middle of the story, the main character's brother came home from college with a friend. The friend and the main character discuss how when two people are married, the woman takes on the man's last name which changes her whole name.<sup>14</sup> This is odd to discuss in a children's story, it seems like Helen was preparing children to recognize that men have the dominant role in the relationships.

Helen and Rossiter had four children, but only one lived past the age of two. When her first child died, Helen felt too ill to attend his funeral and later wrote a book dedicated to him.<sup>15</sup> *Laurence Kendrick Johnson: His Life and His Lullabies* is a short few pages of poems and writings that helped her get by. "He had learned to be shy of the stranger, to welcome his mothers warm kiss, To trust in the arms of his father, --- and who can be wiser than this?"<sup>16</sup> This is just one line that showed how Johnson felt about how a family should be. In addition to many of her children's books, she wrote a book for families that suffered the loss of a child.<sup>17</sup> *Tears for the Little Ones*, dedicated in 1878 to the son she lost, is a collection of poems and passages

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<sup>14</sup> Johnson, *Roddy's Romance*, pp. 53-54.

<sup>15</sup> Johnson, *Helen Kendrick Johnson (Mrs. Rossiter Johnson) The Story of her Varied Activities*, p. 17.

<sup>16</sup> Johnson, *Laurence Kendrick Johnson: his life and his lullabies; July 11, 1871 – August 15, 1872*, (Concord, New Hampshire 1972), pp. 6-7.

<sup>17</sup> Johnson, *Helen Kendrick Johnson (Mrs. Rossiter Johnson) The Story of her Varied Activities*, p. 18.

inspired by the loss of a child. In the introduction she states that “We all know, alas! too much of the anguish that belongs to the physical aspect of the departure of our little ones; while the brightness of the world they enter can be seen only by the uplifted radiance of innocent eyes like theirs, or through the vistaed gaze of our dim faith.”<sup>18</sup> She believed that children would always be able to feel the comfort of their mothers. Her belief was that a mother should always stay with her children and be their security.

When Johnson began her writing career, she mostly focused on editing and translating songs from different languages so people could sing them at home. She spent much time on translations just so families could have together time and listen to songs that really meant something.<sup>19</sup> Her song book shows that she was a devoted home-maker and believed that a woman’s place was in the home. In *Our Familiar Songs and Those Who Made Them* Johnson stated, “They are the songs we all have sung, or wished we could sing the songs our mothers crooned over our cradles, and our fathers hummed at their daily toil.”<sup>20</sup> This shows how Johnson felt family life should be. The mother was with the baby, while the father was hard at work. Johnson cared deeply about her family and the families with which she came into contact. A good example of this was when her neighbor had two severely ill infants. Helen visited every day for two months and helped prepare milk for the children. Luckily, because of Johnson’s

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<sup>18</sup> Helen Johnson, *Tears for the Little Ones*. (Boston; James R. Osgood and Company, 1878), p. iii.

<sup>19</sup> Lewis, "Helen Kendrick Johnson."

<sup>20</sup> Johnson, *Helen Kendrick Johnson (Mrs. Rossiter Johnson) The Story of her Varied Activities*, p. 19.

dedication to the babies, one survived, but the other died because she went too long without proper attention.<sup>21</sup>

In 1894, Helen Johnson was asked to be the editor for the suffragist magazine *American Woman's Journal*. The magazine was first published in 1870 by Lucy Stone and her husband Henry Blackwell.<sup>22</sup> Every week, suffragists would come together and write articles devoted to women's interests. Speeches, debates and convention notes that were related to the suffrage movement were printed in the magazine as well.<sup>23</sup> For two years Helen edited this magazine, which eventually sparked her interest in the topic.<sup>24</sup> She went into her editing job with no prior knowledge of the suffrage movement, she was only interested in women's progress. Johnson, however, went to the meetings and studied the various writings and opinions of strong suffragists such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

Many people truly believed that the beginning of the suffrage movement successfully began in 1848 when Elizabeth Cady Stanton marched with other suffragists to give their version of the "Declaration of Independence" known as "The Declaration of Sentiments."<sup>25</sup> "The Declaration of Sentiments" was written by Stanton in prior years, and contained multiple resolutions for the rights of women. Some of these included that a woman should be able to own

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<sup>21</sup> Palmer, p. 50.

<sup>22</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, "Woman's Journal," <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/646876/Womans-Journal>.

<sup>23</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, "Woman's Journal."

<sup>24</sup> Warnes, "Suffragists battled Anti-Suffragists as well as Male Opponents."

<sup>25</sup> Aileen S. Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1981), p. 1.

property without a man being able to take it, and giving women the right to vote.<sup>26</sup> At this speech, the suffragists spoke about the equal rights they believed women should have for years to come. Many different organizations were created such as the National Suffrage Association and the American Woman Suffrage Association, both founded in 1869. In 1890, these two organizations merged creating the National American Woman Suffrage Association, otherwise known as the NAWSA.<sup>27</sup> In less than 20 years, the group grew from a little over 13,000 members to 2,000,000.<sup>28</sup>

Throughout the nineteenth-century, feminism gained in popularity and these women wanted to change their lives and tried to make an impact on society by being able to change women in the workplace and gain more respect and equal rights. One of the main reasons why women fought for the suffrage movement was to gain the right to vote. “Feminists” believed that women should be a part of political decisions in the country and that they should have a say in decisions.<sup>29</sup> Woman suffragists argued that women and men were equal, and women should be able to have the same exact rights as men, instead of being relegated to the home.<sup>30</sup> New York State had the most significance to suffragists and anti-suffragists. In the late 1800s, New York was considered as the most politically active and industrialized state. Suffragists believed that if

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<sup>26</sup> Martin Kelly, "Seneca Falls Convention," Accessed February 27, 2011, <http://americanhistory.about.com/od/womenssuffrage/a/senecafalls.htm>.

<sup>27</sup> Kraditor, pp. 3-4.

<sup>28</sup> Kraditor, p. 7.

<sup>29</sup> Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 16-17.

<sup>30</sup> Cott, p. 19.



they gained support in New York, then many other states would not hesitate to follow.

Therefore, much of their protests and speeches took place in the big cities of New York.<sup>31</sup>

Of course, not everyone believed that women should have the same rights as men. Many people believed that men held the political position in the family and should be the one to decide what the family wanted. This group of people mostly consisted of men and highly religious women and went by the name of the “antis” or “remonstrants.”<sup>32</sup> Women, who did not believe in the suffrage movement believed that there had to be more research about the voting process than the suffragists claimed had been done. Before gaining the right to vote, many women thought it should be a process that was gained gradually, starting first with education and eventually working up to the political process. These women believed that the suffragists did not look at the issues carefully, and thought that theirs was a rushed process.<sup>33</sup>

Men who were anti-suffragists believed that women were “all unbalanced, the effect of mental indigestion, more or less.”<sup>34</sup> These men believed that it would be cruel to take women away from their families where they should always be at beckon call, and they needed to avoid “political passions” because they were inferior beings.<sup>35</sup> These men believed in the roles that men and women had in society. Many thought that if women were to gain equal opportunity in the workplace and political spectrum, it would be socially acceptable for men to stay at home

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<sup>31</sup> Susan Goodier, “Susan B. Anthony, The 1894 Constitutional Convention, and Anti-suffragism in New York State,” (2006): p. 1.

<sup>32</sup>The arguments of the "antis," were divided into two categories. Their arguments were based on the concept of the unique nature of women or "from their interpretation of the special role played by the family in sustaining civilization." Kraditor, p. 19.

<sup>33</sup> Goodier, p. 9.

<sup>34</sup> Goodier, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> Goodier, p. 4.

and take care of their families. The antis believed that this decision could change the way America worked, and not for the better. Many men, including Helen Kendrick Johnson's husband, felt that giving women the right to vote would not only be a waste of time, but a waste of money as well. "When the virtuous woman, the well-bred woman, the enlightened woman, goes to the polls, she will meet there no man so ignorant as not to know perfectly well that his ballot has a metallic basis and must be respected, while hers is nothing but paper, and he may respect it or not, as he pleases."<sup>36</sup>

Along with the suffragists, the anti-suffragists realized that New York was the dominant state and they needed to get their vote and support against the movement in order for success in the future. Knowing this, anti-suffrage women organized into temporary committees in Brooklyn, Albany, and Utica.<sup>37</sup> The antis protested throughout the state stating that "the duties and life of men and women are divinely ordered to be different in the State, as in the home."<sup>38</sup> These men and women believed that if women were to gain the right to vote, it would take away much of the man's role, and vice versa, if he was a "stay-at-home husband."

While protesting across the state, the antis wrote "Preamble and Protest" which had the primary purpose of gaining signatures from women to let the men of the constitutional convention know that women did not desire the vote. "Preamble and Protest" only received the signatures of twenty-one women.<sup>39</sup> The main argument was that "suffrage is to be regarded not

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<sup>36</sup> Rossiter Johnson, *The Blank- Cartridge Ballot, (The New York State Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, New York)*, p. 8.

<sup>37</sup> Goodier, p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> Goodier, p. 5.

<sup>39</sup> Goodier, p. 5.

as a privilege to be enjoyed, but as a duty to be performed.”<sup>40</sup> The women who wrote “Preamble and Protest” also claimed that the suffragists were looking to gain the vote for quantity instead of quality. If women were to vote, there was no such guarantee that the quality of the vote was to improve.<sup>41</sup> These women were basing all their arguments based on sex roles. They never once looked at what would happen if there was change. They preferred to stay entrenched in the belief that God intended their duties to be with the family.

For the most part, the suffragists and the antis stayed civil towards each other, even though both parties set up headquarters, looked for followers, and held public meetings. There were many times when one party would interrupt a protest or speech and belittle the women in the opposing party. In one particular case, an anti-suffragist named Josephine Marshall Jewell, walked into a suffrage meeting and invited all the “intelligent” women to sign her petition.<sup>42</sup> Cases like this were not out of the norm for antis, and many of them were confrontational throughout the movement. Suffragists on the other hand, always made it a point to not be disrespectful of the views of the antis. They may have argued against what the antis believed, but they did not go out of their way to interrupt an anti meeting.

For two years Helen edited *American Woman's Journal* and as she continued doing research she realized that she believed the arguments of the suffragists were “founded on demonstrable and radical errors.”<sup>43</sup> Johnson started to believe that the pro-suffrage arguments

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<sup>40</sup> Committee of Brooklyn Women, “Preamble and protest,” (New York, 1894).

<sup>41</sup> Committee of Brooklyn Women, “Preamble and protest.”

<sup>42</sup> Goodier, pp. 6-7.

<sup>43</sup> Johnson, *Helen Kendrick Johnson (Mrs. Rossiter Johnson) The Story of her Varied Activities*, p. 49.

were “illogical and unworthy” and before leaving her editing job, would write in the answers to the questions the suffragists wrote in their articles.<sup>44</sup>

Johnson believed that instead of advancing women’s political side, women should be able to advance at home and create an ideally domestic life.<sup>45</sup> Like many of the other “antis,” Johnson was a very religious woman who believed that a woman’s role was given to her by God, and that it should be in the home. These religious women believed that if God intended for women to be in places other than the home caring for their family’s needs, he would have made it that way. Antis believed that the suffragists were disobeying the way of God, and that they were not looking at the religious perspective of how life was intended for them and their role. Johnson stated, “Progress is movement forward, and civilized progress rests upon a belief in religion, in the home founded upon love expressed in the sacredness of the marriage tie, and in the State built upon such individual homes and defended by the only force that the Creator has made capable of such defense—the men reared in such homes.”<sup>46</sup> Johnson, along with many other antis, did not believe that women’s progress in America should be forced, but that it should occur naturally.

Women were making tremendous progress in America and the suffragists believed it was because of the woman suffrage movement. The antis believed the suffrage movement had nothing to do with progress.<sup>47</sup> In her article, *Woman’s Progress versus Woman’s Suffrage*,

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<sup>44</sup> Johnson, *Helen Kendrick Johnson (Mrs. Rossiter Johnson) The Story of her Varied Activities*, p. 46.

<sup>45</sup> Palmer, p. 48.

<sup>46</sup> Helen Kendrick Johnson, “The Suffrage Menace,” *The New York Times*, May 1915, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F10D14FE3E5D1A728DDAA0A94DD405B858DF1D3>.

<sup>47</sup> Helen Kendrick Johnson, *Woman’s Progress Versus Woman Suffrage*, (*The New York State Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage*; New York), p. 1.

Johnson stated that if the suffragists decided to give up and let go of their protest, nothing would suffer. Johnson believed that women would still make progress and the suffrage movement was doing nothing but causing great arguments among Americans.<sup>48</sup> Johnson concluded this article by saying, “sex antagonism is the corner stone of the suffrage movement, while sex harmony is the foundation of woman’s progress as seen in the light of science and Christian civilization.”<sup>49</sup> Johnson believed that the only reason why women were making progress was because it was what God wanted and intended that it should happen slowly. The suffrage movement she believed was unnecessarily trying to make the process of progress go faster, and not letting it fall into place as God intended.

As Johnson developed strong opinions about the suffrage movement, she wrote her most famous book, dedicated to her views and beliefs on the suffrage movement, *Woman and the Republic*. Before finishing *Woman and the Republic*, Johnson did months of research on the suffragists’ arguments to validate her arguments and to prove that the suffragists looked past moral, legal and social matters. Johnson believed that suffragists completely ignored everything a woman should be. She stated her belief at the onset that “progress” and “movement” belonged together.<sup>50</sup> In 1913, Johnson finished this book that basically countered every suffragist argument. *Woman and the Republic* was Johnson’s expanded argument that continued from her ideas on men’s and women’s social roles, and that they should not be tampered with. Johnson used examples from ancient Greece and modern England, where women were in the home and it did not seem to bother them. Also, she argued that women during this time let progress happen.

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<sup>48</sup> Johnson, *Woman’s Progress Versus Woman Suffrage*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>49</sup> Johnson, *Woman’s Progress Versus Woman Suffrage*, p. 3.

<sup>50</sup> Helen Johnson, *Woman and the Republic*, (*The Guidon Club*: New York, New York), p. 1.

For example, she stated that “during the ages of feudalism, women who were land-owners had the same rights as other nobles. They could raise soldiery, coin money, and administer justice in both civil and criminal proceedings.”<sup>51</sup> Johnson believed that these women gained the respect they deserved because they let progress evolve as God intended. These women did not push to “gain” respect, but they simply earned it naturally over time.

Another argument that Johnson had against the suffragists was that men and women were very different in their ways of thinking. Many antis believed that there are mental and emotional differences between the two sexes that could make negotiating political issues impossible. Johnson and other antis even believed that before a baby was born, the physical conditions determined the baby’s sex. For example, in *Woman and the Republic* Johnson states, “we find that in rude times and hard conditions more boys are born. Gentle conditions and abundance are favorable to the birth of girls. Here is the same story we have learned so often. Man the protector, woman he protected. Woman the inspiring force, man the organizing and physical power.”<sup>52</sup> Johnson uses many different theories and “scientific facts” throughout the book to support her arguments. In one part she states, “Science has told us of the active, as well as the passive, part that the mother plays in the growth of the embryo, and at the same time has told us that the sex of that embryo is determined by the nourishing power of the mother.”<sup>53</sup>

When Johnson dealt with women in the workforce in her book, she stated how women working could negatively affect wages for all the workers. If women started getting equal pay in their jobs, then it would result in men’s wages decreasing and also the poorer workers’ wages

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<sup>51</sup> Johnson, *Woman and the Republic*, p. 19.

<sup>52</sup> Johnson, *Woman and the Republic*, p. 298.

<sup>53</sup> Johnson, *Woman and the Republic*, p. 298.

decreasing.<sup>54</sup> Johnson did not believe that women belonged in the work place, and that they were entering the workforce for the wrong reasons. When women worked in the 1860s it was only because of their intention to support their husbands. Basically, women should do anything to help their husbands.<sup>55</sup> During a census, people found that there were 17,000 women in the work place. Of these women, 15,887 were single, 1,038 were widows and 745 were married.<sup>56</sup> In another census, Johnson found that “8,040 persons who registered for employment in New York city, 6,458 were men, and 1,582 were women. Of these, the foreign-born numbered 4,804 of whom 3,664 were men and 1,140 were women. The native-born numbered 3,234, of whom 2,796 were men, and 442 were women.”<sup>57</sup> This census showed that even though the suffragists claimed that women wanted equality, still many native-born, married women did not even work. The small number of women, who actually worked, was the women who were either foreign-born, or single.

There were many different reviews of this book which favored Johnson, but many suffragists who read the book found significant errors in dates, places, and circumstances.<sup>58</sup> If Johnson took two years to prepare her arguments against the suffragists, there should have been few or no errors in her work. One error suffragists found was the claim that the first legislation decided by the suffragists was to be able to divorce for several causes. Divorce was considered immoral to many people and Johnson knew that if she could convince the public that women such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton believed that divorce was acceptable, she

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<sup>54</sup> Johnson, *Woman and the Republic*, p. 187.

<sup>55</sup> Johnson, *Woman and the Republic*, p. 189.

<sup>56</sup> Johnson, *Woman and the Republic*, p. 198.

<sup>57</sup> Johnson, *Woman and the Republic*, p. 198.

<sup>58</sup> Ethel C. Avery, “Mrs. Johnson’s Fallacies,” (*The Woman’s Journal*: Boston, Massachusetts), p. 1.

would gain much support. If people wanted to research her claim, however they would find that nowhere in the “Declaration of Sentiments” was there any talk about divorce.<sup>59</sup>

Johnson’s book received many favorable reviews. A newspaper in Brooklyn said, “If the women’s suffrage movement is to ever to be finally defeated, it will be by women themselves, and by arguments and considerations like those so ably stated in this remarkable book.”<sup>60</sup> As she continued her research, Johnson became very involved with the anti-suffrage movement. She was the founder of the Guidon Club in 1912,<sup>61</sup> which would meet and discuss political questions and would study information the suffragists proposed to use against the antis. Since Johnson did not believe in women getting involved with political discussions, she stated that the club met for “study of political questions and for active but dignified and effective work against suffrage.”<sup>62</sup>

Johnson addressed legislative committees and wrote the *Address to the Judiciary Committees of the Senate and Assembly of the State of New York*,<sup>63</sup> in which she stated, that with her fellow antis she did not believe that women needed the right to vote, own property, or be taxed in order to have a voice in the country.<sup>64</sup> She wrote pamphlets and several letters to the editor of the *New York Times* describing her feelings about the subject, and why she believed it was unnecessary for women to get involved in politics and other things that belonged in the

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<sup>59</sup> Avery, p. 3.

<sup>60</sup> Johnson, *Helen Kendrick Johnson (Mrs. Rossiter Johnson) The Story of her Varied Activities*, p. 51.

<sup>61</sup> The Guidon Club was a small club established with the claim to support historic study of government and for discussion. The actual purpose of the club was to provide a forum where women could develop a stronger position against suffrage. See: Johnson, *Woman and the Republic*, p. 353.

<sup>62</sup> Johnson, *Helen Kendrick Johnson (Mrs. Rossiter Johnson) The Story of her Varied Activities*, p. 52.

<sup>63</sup> Johnson, *Helen Kendrick Johnson (Mrs. Rossiter Johnson) The Story of her Varied Activities*, p. 52.

<sup>64</sup> Helen Kendrick Johnson, *Address to the Judiciary Committees of the Senate and Assembly of the State of New York, (The Association Opposed to the Extension of the Suffrage to Women, 1899)*, p. 6.



husband's realm.<sup>65</sup> In many of these letters to the editor, Johnson stated that she did not believe that suffrage was progress for women. She stated in 1911 that "the assumption that suffrage is coming, and that suffrage is progressive, is too often repeated to pass undisputed."<sup>66</sup> In other words, Johnson argued that the suffrage movement had nothing to do with progress, and that women would make progress without the suffragist's efforts. She did not like the fact that the suffragists were taking the credit for women's progress in America.

Rossiter also agreed with Helen's ideas and used his position as a well-known writer to aid her cause. He wrote the pamphlet, *Why Women do not want the Ballot* and an article called, *The Blank-Cartridge Ballot*, in which he stated, "A ballot put into the box by a woman would be simply a blank cartridge; and already we have more than a million blank-cartridge ballots, all of which are solemnly warranted by law, but all of which count for nothing, and will continue to count for nothing until each is backed by a pellet of lead and a pinch of powder, ready to enforce its decree."<sup>67</sup> Rossiter did not believe that a woman's vote counted toward anything and it would be a waste to even consider letting them vote. According to Rossiter Johnson, there were more than enough useless votes already, and to include women in the constituency would simply increase their numbers. Throughout Johnson's article, he argues that *not* giving women the right

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<sup>65</sup> Johnson, *Helen Kendrick Johnson (Mrs. Rossiter Johnson) The Story of her Varied Activities*, 52.

<sup>66</sup>Helen Kendrick Johnson, "Calls it the Offspring of Mormonism, Populism, and Socialism," *The New York Times*. March, 1911,

<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archivefree/pdf?res=F40D17F6385517738DDDAB0994DB405B818DF1D3>.

<sup>67</sup> Rossiter Johnson, "The Blank- Cartridge Ballot," (*The New York State Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage*, New York), p. 4.

to vote would keep them pure. Women were looked upon as the gentler sex, and that letting them own property, would lead to taxation, and tainting women's innocent name.<sup>68</sup>

It seems that every aspect of Helen Johnson's life intertwined somehow with her desire not to have women advance in society. Her writings are what led to her anti-suffrage views, and her character is what kept her there. She was strong willed, and obviously too stubborn to think of the greater good this change could do for women. Even though it was noted that Helen Johnson spent two years researching and analyzing the suffragists' position, it was known that she had many flaws in her arguments.

One other area suffragists tried to improve for women, was education. Many women were unable to go to school and men were undoubtedly favored in the classroom. Johnson believed that women should be educated, since she herself was well-educated and was able to go to college for one year, but she claimed that the suffragists arguments were overlooked or did not look deeply enough into women's education. One of Johnson's points about education was her claim that the suffragists believed only in coeducational colleges as opposed to separate colleges for women. During this time, many parents of young women said that they would rather not educate their daughters than send them to coeducational colleges.<sup>69</sup> Helen Johnson also argued that the suffragists looked over public education. She claimed that there were "no writings concerning the needs or condition of the public schools."<sup>70</sup> This however, was entirely untrue. To find out what the suffragists had to say on the topic of public schools all that was needed was

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<sup>68</sup> Johnson, "The Blank- Cartridge Ballot," p. 7.

<sup>69</sup> Avery, p. 1.

<sup>70</sup> Avery, p. 2.

to mail a letter to the Woman Suffrage Association in Massachusetts which maintained significant literature on the topic.<sup>71</sup> The suffragists were deeply concerned with public schools issues, and that much was not being done for the children. “ Many school-houses are ill-ventilated and wholly in an unsanitary condition. The children die of diphtheria and scarlet fever. If the mothers, who cannot help caring for their children, could add their votes to those of the fathers who care, the school-houses would be made wholesome.”<sup>72</sup> This was an argument many of the suffragists had with the antis. There were many public conditions that needed to be fixed that men overlooked, but women could see perfectly. Many societies needed a woman’s opinion on these different issues. Many suffragists did not believe there should have been controversy over these types of issues and could not understand why the antis were making it much harder to accomplish social reform.

Many suffragists had little problem in finding fallacies in the antis’ arguments. Not only did they find holes in things the antis said, they also asked them “questions” about what they believed. For example, suffragists noted how a husband could “borrow” his wife’s hard earned money, or money she received from her family, and could have promises of returning the money, but if he never returned the money there would be no crime.<sup>73</sup> Women lacked many rights with their families as well. If the antis believed that a woman belonged in the home, then why wasn’t she able to have legal rights to her children? The husband always had the upper-hand on who got custody over their children, and the woman did not want to lose her children, which is why many people did not get divorce.

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<sup>71</sup> Avery, p. 2.

<sup>72</sup> Avery, p. 2.

<sup>73</sup> Lucy Stone, “Questions for Remonstrants,” (*American Woman Suffrage Association*: Boston, Massachusetts), p. 1.

Helen Kendrick Johnson not only contradicted herself and had many flaws in her books and arguments, she belittled the suffragists. Lacking a solid evidentiary base, Johnson felt so strongly about her beliefs that a women's place was in the home with her family that she resorted to ad hominem attacks against suffragists. Johnson attacked the suffragists on several occasions saying that they were nothing but "narrow minded, immoral, and useless persons, who are 'allied' with everything that is bad and against everything that is good."<sup>74</sup> In a letter to the editor of the *New York Times* in 1913 she stated that "suffrage delegates *pushed* their way into a public meeting in Delegate Hall, and *demand*ed permission to read their document."<sup>75</sup> It was as if Johnson wanted to portray Anthony not as a lady, but as someone who had no desire to negotiate and by using the words "pushed" and "demand"ed," painted a negative picture of Anthony for the readers. She in fact became spiteful or even hateful in her criticisms. Johnson took Susan B. Anthony's and Elizabeth Cady Stanton's protests quite personally. After the two women died, there was talk about decorating former suffragist's graves on Memorial Day. Johnson refused to participate and believed that their graves should not be decorated. She argued that the holiday was for men who died in war, the Stanton and Anthony were not deserving of recognition, and that "little suffrage banners which [were] proposed to use [as decorations] are a profane travesty of the National flag."<sup>76</sup> Her protest outraged many people for they felt she was not honoring the dead, and was completely out of line. Johnson also stated, "It is said that the principal graves to be decorate will be those of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. What deeds of their patriotism and self-sacrifice will it commemorate? While the countrywomen were working with

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<sup>74</sup> Avery, p.2.

<sup>75</sup> Helen Kendrick Johnson, "Washington Suffrage Parade," *The New York Times*, March, 1913, p. 10.

<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F10610FE345E13738DDDAE0894DB405B838DF1D3>

<sup>76</sup> Alice Stone Blackwell, "Suffragists' Memorial: The Plan to Observe Decoration Day for Departed Leaders," *The New York Times*, May, 1910 <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F50C14F83E5417738DDDAC0A94DD405B808DF1D3>.

favor and loyalty raising money, preparing stores, sending their nearest and dearest, nursing in hospital and field, these two suffragists did nothing of the kind. In 1863 they formed a petty organization which issued a few resolutions.”<sup>77</sup> Many Americans were outraged because these two women risked their lives for women in America. During many protests, while many of the men ran, Stanton and Anthony stayed until the bitter end of the dispute while facing knives and bullets.<sup>78</sup>

Helen Kendrick Johnson was a woman whose childhood losses (her mother and lack of idyllic family life) and later losses of children, shaped her political position as an anti. The irony is that while she fought to keep women in the home, she was a political activist who had a successful career as a writer. It seems that what she had endured throughout her life solidified her beliefs. After analyzing her early writings, it was as if she used her books to create the ideal life she always wanted, but never had. Johnson’s intention through writing was to portray the family as she thought it should be. Her early translations were intended to bring families together to read. Helen Kendrick Johnson did not believe in drastic change whatsoever. She ideally believed that progress would happen through divine intention.

Johnson’s attacks on the suffrage movement and the suffragists’ position were based on her ideas and religious conviction. They were often inaccurate and tangential to the suffragists’ purpose. An article entitled “Mrs. Johnson’s Fallacies” published in *The Woman’s Journal*, author Ethel Avery supports this point: “Helen Kendrick Johnson’s booklet against equal suffrage is a perfect illustration of the old lawyer’s advice to the young one: ‘When you have no

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<sup>77</sup> Harper, “Suffragists' Memorial: why the Propose to Honor Dead Leaders on Decoration Day.”

<sup>78</sup> Harper, “Suffragists' Memorial: why the Propose to Honor Dead Leaders on Decoration Day.”

case, abuse the plaintiff's attorney."<sup>79</sup> Avery noticed that Johnson went out of her way to attack the suffragists themselves, instead of finding relevant arguments against them. Johnson used her moral and religious beliefs to try to make a valid argument against the suffragists.

Inspired by the Suffragist's writings in *American Woman's Journal*, Johnson devoted her life to leading the anti-suffrage cause, hoping to ensure that the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment would not pass and thus, in her mind, that domestic tranquility would be preserved with women at the center of the home. Helen Kendrick Johnson did not believe in change, and believed the ideal woman should stay in the home. She truly desired, for things to stay the same until they "naturally" happened by God.

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<sup>79</sup> Avery, p. 1.

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