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LETTER

FROM

MRS. ELIZABETH C. STANTON,

TO THE

WOMAN'S RIGHTS CONVENTION,

HELD AT WORCESTER, OCT., 1850.

SENECA FALLS, Sunday, Oct. 20, 1850.

My Dear Friend:—As you have handed over to me the case of those women, who have fears in regard to the propriety of woman's exercising her political rights, I would gladly embrace this opportunity to address them through your Convention.

No one denies our right to the elective franchise, unless we except those who go against all human governments, and the non-resistant, who condemns a government of force; though I think the latter might consistently contend for the right, even if she might not herself choose to exercise it. But to those who believe in having a government—to those who believe that no just government can be formed without the consent of the governed—to them would I appeal, and of them do I demand some good reason, why one half of the citizens of this Republic have no voice in the laws which govern them.

The *right* is one question, and the *propriety* of exercising it, quite another. The former is undeniable; and against the latter I have never heard one solid objection, that would not apply equally to man and woman.

Some tell us that if woman should interest herself in political affairs, it would destroy all domestic harmony. What, say they, would be the consequence, if husband and wife should not agree in their views of political economy? Because, forsooth, husband and wife may chance to differ in their theological sentiments, shall woman have no religion? Because she may not choose to worship at the same altar with her liege lord, must she of necessity do up all her worshipping in private, in her own closet? Because she might choose

to deposit her vote for righteous rulers — such as love justice, mercy, truth, and oppose a husband, father, or brother, who would, by their votes, place political power in the hands of unprincipled men, swearing, fighting, leaders of armies, rumsellers and drunkards, slaveholders and prating northern hypocrites, who would surrender the poor, panting fugitive from bondage into the hands of his blood-thirsty pursuers—shall she not vote at all? It is high time that men learned to tolerate independence of thought and opinion in the women of their household.

It would not make much difference in man's every day life, in his social enjoyments, whether his wife differed with him as to the locality of hell, the personality of the devil, or the comparative altitude of the saintships of Peter and Paul; as to one's right to as much air, water, light, and land as he might need for his necessities; as to the justice of free trade, free schools, the inviolable homestead, and personal freedom—provided the husband had a great head and heart, and did not insist upon doing up all the thinking and talking in the establishment himself, or the wife was not a miserable formalist, like Mrs. Swisshelm's Deborah Elmsley. Much of this talk about domestic harmony is the sheerest humbug. Look around among your whole circle of friends, and tell me, you who know what transpires behind the curtain, how many truly harmonious households have we now. Quiet households we may have, but submission and harmony produce very different states of quietness. There is no true happiness where there is subjection — no harmony without freedom.

But, say some, would you have women vote? What, refined, delicate women at the polls, mingling in such scenes of violence and vulgarity! By all means, where there is so much to be feared for the pure, the innocent, the noble, the mother surely should be there to watch and guard her sons who are to encounter such stormy, dangerous scenes at the tender age of twenty-one. Much is said of woman's influence: might not her presence do much toward softening down this violence, refining this vulgarity? Depend upon it, that places which, by their impure atmosphere, are rendered unfit for woman, cannot but be dangerous to her sires and sons. But if woman claims all the rights of a citizen, will she buckle on her armor, and fight in defence of her country? Has not woman already often shown herself as courageous in the field, as wise and patriotic in counsel, as man? Have you not had the brave Jagello in your midst, and vied

with each other to touch but the hem of her garment? But for myself, I believe all war sinful; I believe in Christ; I believe that the command, "Resist not evil," is divine; I would not have man go to war; I can see no glory in fighting with such weapons as guns and swords, while man has in his possession the infinitely superior and more effective ones of righteousness and truth.

But if woman votes, would you have her hold office? Most certainly would we have woman hold office. We would have man and woman what God intended they should be, companions for each other, always together, in counsel, government, and every department of industry. If they have homes and children, we would have them stay there, educate their children, provide well for their physical wants, and share in each other's daily trials and cares. Children need the watchful care and wise teachings of fathers as well as of mothers. No man should give up a profitable business, leave his wife and children month after month, and year after year, and make his home desolate for any false ideas of patriotism, for any vain love of display or ambition, for fame and distinction. The highest, holiest duty of both father and mother is to their children and each other; and when they can show to the world a well-developed, wisely-governed family, then let the State profit by their experience. Having done their duty at home, let them together sit in our national councils. The violence, rowdyism, and vulgarity which now characterize our Congressional Halls, show us clearly that "it is not good for man to be alone." The purifying, elevating, softening influence of woman is a most healthful restraint on him at all times and in all places. We have many noble women in our land, free from all domestic incumbrances, who might grace a Senate chamber, and for whose services the country might gladly forego all the noise, bluster, and folly of one-half the male dolts, who now flourish there and pocket their eight dollars a day. The most casual observer can see that there is some essential element wanting in the political organization of our Republic. The voice of woman has been silenced, but man cannot fulfil his destiny alone—he cannot redeem his race unaided. There must be a great national heart, as well as head; and there are deep and tender chords of sympathy and love, that woman can touch more skillfully than man. The earth has never yet seen a truly great and virtuous nation, for woman has never yet stood the equal with man. As with nations, so with families. It is the wise mother who has the wise

son, and it requires but little thought to decide, that as long as the women of this nation remain but half developed in mind and body, so long shall we have a succession of men dwarfed in body and soul. So long as your women are mere slaves, you may throw your colleges to the wind — there is no material to work upon. It is in vain to look for silver and gold from mines of copper and brass. How seldom now is the father's pride gratified in the budding genius of his son? The wife is degraded, made the mere creature of his tyranny and caprice, and now the foolish son is heaviness to his heart. Truly are the sins of the father visited upon the children. God, in his wisdom, has so linked together the whole human family, that any violence done at one end of the chain, is felt throughout its length. Adieu.

Yours truly,

E. C. STANTON.

PAULINA W. DAVIS.

LETTER

FROM

MRS. ELIZABETH C. STANTON,

TO THE WOMAN'S RIGHTS CONVENTION

Held at Syracuse, Sept. 1852.

SENECA FALLS, Sept. 6th.

My Dear Friends:—As I cannot be present with you, I wish to suggest three points, for your serious and earnest consideration.

1st. Should not all women, living in States where woman has a right to hold property, refuse to pay taxes, so long as she is unrepresented in the government of that State?

Such a movement, if simultaneous, would no doubt produce a great deal of confusion, litigation and suffering, on the part of woman; but shall we fear to suffer for the maintenance of the same glorious principles, for which our fore-fathers fought, and bled, and died? Shall we deny the faith of the old revolutionary heroes, and purchase for ourselves a false peace, and ignoble ease, by declaring in action, that taxation without representation is just? Ah! no; like the English Dissenters, and high-souled Quakers, of our own land, let us suffer our property to be seized and sold—but let us never pay another tax, until our existence as citizens, our civil and political rights, be fully recognized. * * *

The poor, crushed slave, but yesterday toiling on the rice plantation in Georgia; a beast, a chattel, a thing, is to-day, in the Empire State, (if he own a bit of land, and a shed to cover him,) a person, and may enjoy the proud honor of paying into the hand of the complaisant tax-gatherer the sum of seventy-five cents. Even so with the white woman—the satellite of the dinner-pot—the presiding genius of the wash-tub—the seamstress—the teacher—the gay butterfly of fashion—the femme covert of the law. Man takes no note of her

through all these changing scenes. But lo! to-day, by the fruits of her industry, she becomes the owner of a house and lot, and now her existence is remembered and recognized, and she too may have the privilege of contributing to the support of this mighty Republic—for the “white male citizen” claims of her one dollar and seventy-five cents a year—because, under the glorious institutions of this free and happy land, she has been able, at the age of fifty years, to possess herself of a property worth the enormous sum of three hundred dollars. It is natural to suppose, she will answer this demand on her, joyously and promptly; for she must, in view of all her rights and privileges, so long enjoyed, consider it a great favor, to be permitted to contribute thus largely to the governmental treasury.

One thing is certain, this course will necessarily involve a good deal of litigation, and we shall need lawyers of our own sex, whose intellects, sharpened by their interests, shall be quick to discover the loop-holes of retreat. Laws are capable of many and various constructions; we find among men, that as they have new wants, as they develop into more enlarged views of justice, the laws are susceptible of more generous interpretation, or are changed altogether; that is, all laws touching their own interests: for while man has abolished hanging for theft, imprisonment for debt, and secured universal suffrage for himself, a married woman, in most of the States of the Union, remains a non-entity in law—can own nothing; can be whipped and locked up by her lord; can be worked without wages; be robbed of her inheritance, stripped of her children, and left alone, and penniless—and all this, they say, according to law. Now, it is quite time that we have these laws revised, by our own sex—for man does not yet feel, that what is unjust for himself, is also unjust for woman. Yes, we must have our own lawyers, as well as our physicians and priests. Some of our women should go at once into this profession, and see if there is no way by which we may shuffle off our shackles, and assume our civil and political rights. We cannot accept man's interpretation of the law. * * * *

2d. Do not sound philosophy, and long experience teach us, that man and woman should be educated together?

This isolation of the sexes, in all departments, in the business and pleasure of life, is an evil greatly to be deplored. We see its bad effects on all sides. Look at our National Councils. Would man, as a statesman, ever have enacted such scenes, as the capitol of our country has witnessed, had the feminine element been fairly represented in their midst? Are all the duties of husband and father to be made subservient to those of statesman and politician? How many of these husbands return to their homes as happy and contented—as pure and loving, as when they left? Not one in ten. *

* * * Experience has taught us, that man has discovered the most profitable branches of industry, and we demand a place by his side. Inasmuch, therefore, as we have the same objects in life, namely, the full development of all our powers, and should, to some ex-

tent, have the same employments, we need precisely the same education; and we therefore claim that the best colleges of our country be open to us. * * * This point, the education of boys and girls together, is a question of the day; it was prominent at the late Educational Convention, in Newark; and it is fitting that in our Convention it should be fully discussed. My ground is, that the boy and the girl, the man and the woman, should be always together, in the business and pleasures of life: sharing alike its joys and sorrows, its distinction and fame; nor will they ever be harmoniously developed, until they are educated together, physically, intellectually, and morally.

I hope, therefore, that in the proposed People's College, some place will be provided, where women can be educated side by side with men.

There is no better test of the spirituality of a man, than is found in his idea of the true woman. Men, having separated themselves from woman, in the business of life, and thus made their natures coarse, by contact with their own sex exclusively, now demand separate pleasures too; and, in lieu of the cheerful family circle, its books, games, music, and pleasant conversation, they congregate in clubs, to discuss politics, to gamble, drink, etc., in those costly, splendid establishments, got up for such as cannot find sufficient excitement, in their own parlors or studios. It seems never to enter the heads of these fashionable husbands, that the hours drag as heavily with their fashionable wives, as they sit alone, night after night, in their solitary elegance, wholly given over to their own cheerless reflections: for what subjects of thought have they? Gossip and fashion will do for talk, but not for thought. Their Theology is too gloomy and shadowy, to afford them much pleasure in contemplation; their Religion is a thing of form, and not of life, so it brings them no joy or satisfaction. As to the Reforms of the day, they are too genteel to feel much interest in them. There is no class more pitiable, than the unoccupied woman of fashion, thrown wholly upon herself.

* * * Does not the present abuse of the religious element in woman demand our earnest attention and investigation?

Priestcraft did not end with the beginning of the reign of Protestantism. Woman has always been the greatest dupe, because the sentiments act blindly, and they alone have been educated in her.

Her veneration, not guided by an enlightened intellect, leads her as readily to the worship of saints, pictures, holy days, and inspired men and books, as of the living God, and the everlasting principles of Justice, Mercy, and Truth. * * *

There is the Education Society, in which women who can barely read and write, and speak their own language correctly, form sewing societies, and beg funds to educate a class of lazy, inefficient young men for the ministry, who, starting in life on the false principle that it is a blessing to escape physical labor, begin at once to live on their

piety. What is the result? Why, after going through College, Theological Seminaries, and a brief struggle at fitting up skeleton sermons, got up by older heads, for the benefit of beginners, and after preaching them for a season to those who hunger and thirst for light and truth, they sink down into utter insignificance, too inefficient to keep a place, and too lazy to earn the salt to their porridge—whilst the women work on, to educate more, for the same noble destiny. Look at the long line of benevolent societies, all filled with these male agents, living, like so many leeches, on the religious element in our natures. Most of them, from the ranks of the clergy, who, unable to build up, or keep a church, have taken refuge in some of these theological asylums for the intellectually maimed, halt, and blind, of this profession.

Woman really thinks she is doing God service, when she casts her mite into their treasury, when in fact, not one tenth of all the funds raised, ever reach the ultimate object.

Among the clergy, we find our most violent enemies—those most opposed to any change in woman's position; yet no sooner does one of these find himself out of place and pocket, than, if all the places in the various benevolent societies chance to be occupied, he takes a kind of philanthropic survey of the whole habitable globe, and forthwith forms a Female Benevolent Society, for the conversion of the Jews, perchance, or for sending the gospel to the Feejee Islands—and he is, in himself, the law for the one, and the gospel for the other. Now, the question is not whether the Jews are converted, or whether the gospel ever reaches the Islands; but does the agent flourish? Is his post profitable? And does woman beg and stitch faithfully for his support, and for the promotion of his *glorious mission*?

Now, I ask woman, with all seriousness, considering that we have little to give, had we not better bestow our own charities with our own hands? And, instead of sending our benevolent outgushings, in steamers, to parts unknown, had we not better let them flow in streams whose length and breadth we can survey at pleasure, knowing their source, and where they empty themselves?

* * * Thus woman, in her present ignorance, is made to rest in the most distorted view of God and the Bible, and the laws of her being; and, like the poor slave, "Uncle Tom," her religion, instead of making her noble and free, and impelling her to flee from all gross surroundings, by the false lessons of her spiritual teachers—by the wrong application of great principles of right and justice, has made her bondage but more certain and lasting—her degradation more hopeless and complete.

ELIZABETH C. STANTON.



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