Elizabeth Cady Stanton

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THE LATE MRS. ELIZABETH CADY STANTON

THE death of no woman in the United States, — save one, perhaps — would call forth such widespread and eulogistic notice as that of Mrs. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, which occurred on October 26, at her home in New York City. The long and thoughtful editorial comments indicated not only the ability of the woman, but also the vitality of the cause of which she was a chief exponent. Mrs. Stanton herself, thinking, speaking, and writing with clearness and vigor on the living questions of the day to the age of eighty−seven, refuted conclusively the tenacious opinion that women are not physically capable of sustained mental effort. The fact that in all the present discussion of her long−continued work that for woman suffrage takes the most prominent place, shows the mistaken estimate of those who assert that this is a dead or dying issue. There was no time in her life when she would not have been willing to die to prove these two points.

The father of Mrs. Stanton was Daniel Cady, an eminent lawyer, judge and member of Congress; her mother was Margaret Livingston, granddaughter of Col. James Livingston, of General Washington's staff. She was born in Johnstown, N. Y., November 12, 1815. If she had been a boy, the fine, legal mind and strong reasoning faculties which distinguished her above all other women would have been regarded approvingly as a direct inheritance from her paternal ancestor. If she had been a boy, her powerful fighting proclivities would have been hailed with delight as worthy of the maternal progenitor who, in the absence of his superior officer, took the responsibility of firing into a British vessel, which led to the capture of Andre the spy. But for a girl to have either legal or military genius was an unfortunate anomaly which must be counteracted by the most rigorous measures. These were faithfully applied at home during her childhood, and continued through her early womanhood by the world at large with all the ingenuity which the most bitter opposition could devise, but never for one hour was that dauntless spirit subdued.

A REFORMER FROM GIRLHOOD.

The inspiration of Mrs. Stanton's life can be expressed in one word — liberty. She came into the world only twenty−eight years after the Constitution had been adopted which established the independent government of the United States, and when the true significance of liberty was but imperfectly understood. The people had thrown off the tyranny of a king, but they had not yet learned tolerance toward their fellow men. Freedom of religious observance was grudgingly conceded; but freedom of religious thought outside the recognized orthodox forms, was practically denied. Liberty of personal action was exceedingly circumscribed, and any deviation from conventional forms was visited with severe criticism if made by a man, and with fatal consequences if made by a woman. The individuality of the child was sternly suppressed, and the word continually dinned into its ears was "Don't." Mrs. Stanton tells in her "Reminiscences" that, when she was in deep thought one day, and the nurse asked if she were planning some new mischief, she answered passionately, "No, but I am wondering why everything we like to do is a sin, and everything we dislike is commanded by God or some one on earth. I am so tired of that everlasting no! no! no! At school, at home, everywhere, it is no! Even at church all the commandments begin 'Thou shalt not.' I suppose God will say 'no' to all we want in the next world."

She was born a rebel and a reformer. At school she rebelled against the narrow limits of the education permitted to a girl, and determined to fight for her admission to the colleges. Before she was eighteen she was in the throes of a rebellion against the gloom and despair of Calvinism, which had taken such a hold upon her vivid imagination as almost to shatter her reason. By the time she had reached her early twenties, however, all other wrongs began to recede into the background as she realized the terrible injustice of the laws and customs regarding woman. Fortunately, she married a man in full sympathy with her ideas, — the well−known

Abolitionist, Henry B. Stanton, — who fanned the smouldering flames in her heart of another rebellion, that against negro slavery. They went on their wedding tour, in 1840, to the World's Anti−Slavery Convention in London. Her first meeting here with that gentle but resolute Quaker, Lucretia Mott, and the outrageous treatment accorded the women delegates, sent her home with a renewed determination to do something to raise the status of her sex.

FIRST WOMAN'S RIGHTS CONVENTION.

The children came rapidly, she was overburdened by the cares of a large house with such inefficient help as alone was possible in a small place like Seneca Falls, N. Y., and she witnessed all about her the sufferings of women from cruel laws, intemperance, poverty, and unwelcome motherhood. She said of that time:

"My experience at the World's Convention, all I had learned of the legal status of woman, and the oppression I saw everywhere, together swept across my soul, intensified now by many personal experiences. It seemed as if all the elements had conspired to impel me to some onward step. I could not see what to do or where to begin, — my only thought was a public meeting for protest and discussion. In this tempest−tossed condition of mind I received an invitation to spend the day with Lucretia Mott, who was attending Yearly Meeting in Waterloo. There I met a number of Friends, — earnest, thoughtful women, — and I poured out the torrent of my long accumulating discontent with such vehemence and indignation that I stirred myself, as well as the rest of the party, to do and dare anything, and we decided then and there to call a Woman's Rights Convention."

The story of this convention, — which met in Seneca Falls, July 19−20, 1848, — is familiar,

MISS SUSAN B. ANTHONY AND MRS. ELIZABETH CADY STANTON (From a photo taken in 1892 on the porch of Miss Anthony's house in Rochester, N. Y.)

with its remarkable declaration of sentiments and set of resolutions, demanding for woman every legal and civil right which has since been granted, and the additional right of the franchise, which is still largely withheld. Mrs. Stanton often said afterward that, with all her courage, if she could have had the slightest premonition of the storm of ridicule and denunciation which followed, she never would have dared risk it.

ASSOCIATION WITH MISS ANTHONY.

In 1851 occurred what may well be termed the most important event in Mrs. Stanton's life, her meeting with Susan B. Anthony. The latter was thirty−one years old, electric with the spirit of reform, filled with as holy zeal as ever inspired crusader, fearless, persistent, perfect in physical health, and free to come and go at will. There was an instantaneous, mutual attraction, and before a year had passed a working partnership was formed which was to revolutionize the position of one−half the race during the next forty years, and a friendship was established which was to remain unbroken for half a century. How much of Mrs. Stanton's world−wide fame is due to Miss Anthony cannot possibly be computed. Never two persons more thoroughly complemented each other. Each was strong where the other was lacking, and the two made a perfectly rounded and most effective whole.

It would not be amiss to say that Mrs. Stanton furnished the base of supplies to which Miss Anthony went for the ammunition to rout the enemy. Or that she represented the loom and the warp, Miss Anthony the shuttle and the woof, and by the two was woven the enduring fabric of woman's present position. Mrs. Stanton had no intellectual superior among women, few among men, but she reared seven children to maturity; she was a devoted mother, an unsurpassed housekeeper. It would have been inevitable, during the twenty−five or thirty years of her life while these children were growing up around her, that she would have laid aside in a large degree both writing and speechmaking, had it not been for the relentless mentor who averted this calamity. The reader will find more delicious in history than the accounts in Mrs. Stanton's "Reminiscences" and Miss Anthony's "Life and Work" of the conditions under which were prepared those great state papers and addresses that will go down to posterity. Miss Anthony was not a writer; but as a worker, a planner, a general, a campaigner, she never has been equalled by any woman. She would have a bill prepared for the Legislature, organize her forces, start them out with petitions, and when everything was under headway, betake herself to Mrs. Stanton for a speech. The latter would protest, rebel, but Miss Anthony was inexorable. She would send the writer off to a quiet spot, take upon herself the care of the children and the house, and hold the fort till the speech was finished. Then she would arrange a day for its delivery, and produce the speaker if she had to go and fetch her bodily. Afterward she would appeal to

friends for money, have the speech published and circulate thousands of copies.

This programme was repeated hundreds of times. When the International Council of Women met in Washington, in 1888, Miss Anthony literally compassed sea and land to get Mrs. Stanton over from England, only to find that she had come without any papers suitable for the occasion. Miss Anthony locked her in a room in the hotel and stood guard at the door till she had prepared the brilliant opening and closing addresses which were the leading features of that notable meeting. She really enjoyed writing, however, and when in the spirit of it would spend hours in perfecting the literary style of a single paragraph. She loved best to argue and philosophize, and depended wholly on Miss Anthony for necessary dates and statistics; but between the two were produced innumerable papers which deserve to rank with any in the Government archives. — appeals to the President, Congress, and legislatures, resolutions, addresses for conventions and committees, and in addition numerous articles for magazines and newspapers. For the fifteen years beginning about 1870, when the lecture season was at its zenith, both women were almost continuously on the platform, but during vacations they found time to write the three large volumes of the "History of Woman Suffrage," comprising about 3,000 pages.

Mrs. Stanton had no interest in organization, and hated conventions. She disliked the restrictions of organized work and the responsibility involved in official position, — she wished to be accountable to no one for her utterances. When a convention was imminent, she would write to Miss Anthony: "All I ask is that you will leave me alone in my chimney corner with my goose quill." The latter would go straight forward with the arrangements, advertise Mrs. Stanton as the principal speaker, journey to her home a few days before the date of meeting, pack up her belongings, carry her to the convention, and see that she was re‘lected president. The happiest moments of her life were when, at the close of a great speech, she saw her beloved friend greeted with cheers and waving handkerchiefs, and felt that the cause of woman had been moved forward a notch. At the age of eighty, Mrs. Stanton gave her "Reminiscences" to the world, and she dedicated them to "Susan B. Anthony, my steadfast friend for half a century."

IMPROVEMENT IN WOMAN'S STATUS.

The powerful influence of Mrs. Stanton and Miss Anthony on the revolution which has taken place in the status of women during the past fifty years is sometimes denied, and the assertion is made that this has been merely a part of the natural evolution of the race. The battle of Lexington did not secure the independence of the colonies, but here was fired the shot that echoed round the world. That First Woman's Rights Convention, and those which followed in the early '50's, did not obtain emancipation for woman, but they attracted the attention of the whole country to the injustice under which she struggled, and set people to thinking. If these two leaders had waged their preliminary fight in any other State, it probably would not have made so widespread an impression; but a half century ago, as now, New York set the pace for other parts of the Union. Although it made the innovation, in 1848, of empowering a married woman to hold property, it was not until 1860, and after Miss Anthony and Mrs. Stanton had been circulating petitions and besieging the Legislature for ten years, that the sweeping laws were enacted which enabled her to carry on business in her own name, possess her earnings, bring action and defend suits, make a contract and a will, and be joint guardian of her children.

From that time there has been a gradual concession of these privileges in various States, until now, in about three−fourths of them, a wife may own and control her separate property; and in all of them she may dispose of it by will. In about two−thirds she has a right to her earnings. In a great majority of them she may make contracts, bring and defend suits, act as administrator, and testify in the courts. Although the New York legislature gave mothers equal guardianship of children in 1860, it took this away in [illustration ecs4 omitted] 1862, and did not restore it till 1893. This concession has been slowly made, and now it obtains in only nine States; but as it has been secured in most of these within the past seven years, there is reason to believe the precedent is fully established, and others will speedily follow.

Mrs. Stanton was the first to demand that habitual drunkenness should be held as cause for divorce — in that first State Temperance Convention of Women, called by Miss Anthony in Rochester, N. Y., in 1852 — but she was not sustained by more than half a dozen of even the most radical reformers, though always by Miss Anthony. In 1860 she presented her views on this question at a Woman's Rights Convention in New York City, and even so broad−minded a man as Wendell Phillips demanded that her resolutions be expunged from the minutes. To−day habitual drunkenness is named as a cause for divorce in all but eight of the States, although, strange to say, not in

New York.

One of the grievances set forth at the convention of 1848 was that "man has denied to woman the facilities for a thorough education, all colleges being closed against her." At that time not even a high school was open to girls. To−day they are admitted to every one in the United States and to every State university except three — those of Virginia, Georgia, and Louisiana.

Another grievance was that "man had monopolized the remunerative employments." The present industrial position of women, with three and a quarter millions engaged in employments outside of domestic service, needs no comment.

Still another grievance was the denial to women of the right to speak in public, and here, again, there is no necessity for specifying as to the tremendous revolution of the past fifty years, of which the concrete facts must ever stamp Elizabeth Cady Stanton as a leader.

AN UNIQUE LEADERSHIP.

Mrs. Stanton was able to disarm every criticism made of the early advocates of woman's rights. She was a wife, a mother, far from angular, beautiful in person, and exquisite in dress. Her voice was rich and musical, and the powerful philosophy and logic of her arguments, with the keen sarcasm of which she was master, were relieved by a fine humor and graceful wit that conquered prejudice and captivated an audience. But it seemed as if no woman ever so deeply felt the disgrace, the humiliation, of her legal and political condition, — certainly none ever so strongly expressed it by voice or pen. In lofty eloquence and noble patriotism many of her speeches may be justly classified as masterpieces, among them "The Degradation of Disfranchisement," "Self−Government the Best Means of Self−Development," and that beautiful classic, "The Solitude of Self." The world may indeed echo the words of Miss Anthony as she gazed on the face of Mrs. Stanton in the grandeur of death: "Oh, this awful hush! It seems impossible that voice is stilled which I have loved to hear for fifty years."