

"taxation without representation," by such worthies as John Hancock and Samuel Adams, has been declared "intolerable "tyranny." Having glanced at the magnanimity of the law in its dealings with the widow, let us see how the individual man, under the influence of such laws, doles out justice to his helpmate. The husband has the absolute right to will away his property as he may see fit. If he has children, he can divide his property among them, leaving his wife her third only of the landed estate, thus making her a dependent on the bounty of her own children. A man thirty thousand dollars in personal property, may leave his wife but a few hundred a year, as long as she remains his widow.

The cases are without number where women, who have lived in ease and elegance, at the death of their husbands have, by will, been reduced to the bare necessities of life. The man who leaves his wife the sole guardian of his property and children is an exception to the general rule. Man has ever manifested a wish the world should indeed be a blank to the companion whom he leaves behind him. The Hindoo makes that wish a law, and burns the widow on the funeral pile of her husband; but the civilized man, impressed with a different view of the sacredness of life, takes a less summary mode of drawing his beloved partner after him; he does it by the deprivation and starvation of the flesh, and the humiliation and mortification of the spirit. In bequeathing to the wife just enough to keep soul and body together, man seems to lose sight of the fact that woman, like himself, takes great pleasure in acts of benevolence and charity. It is but just, therefore, that she should have it in her power to give during her life, and to will away at her death, as her benevolence or obligations might prompt her to do.

4th. Look at the position of woman as *mother*. There is no human love so generous, strong and steadfast as that of the mother for her child; yet behold how cruel and ruthless are your laws touching this most sacred relation.

Nature has clearly made the mother the guardian of the child; but man, in his inordinate love of power, does continually set nature and nature's laws at open defiance. The father may apprentice his child, bind him out to a trade or labor, without the mother's consent--yea, in direct opposition to her most earnest entreaties, her prayers and tears.

He may apprentice his son to a gamester or rumseller, and thus cancel his debts of *honor*. By the abuse of this absolute power, he may bind his daughter to the owner of a brothel, and, by the degradation of his child, supply his daily wants; and such things, gentlemen, have been done in our very midst. Moreover, the father, about to die, may bind out all his children wherever and to whomsoever he may see fit, and thus, in fact, will away the guardianship of all his children from the mother. The Revised Statutes of New-York provide that "every father, whether of full age or a minor, of a child to be born, or of any

living child under the age of twenty-one years, and unmarried, may be his *deed or last will*, duly executed, dispose of the custody and tuition of such child during its minority, or for any less time, to any person or persons, in possession or remainder."2 R. S., page 150, sec. 1.

Thus, by your laws, the child is the absolute property of the father, wholly at his disposal in life or at death.

In case of separation, the law gives the children to the father; no matter what his character or condition. At this very time we can point you to noble, virtuous, well educated mothers in this state, who have abandoned their husbands for their profligacy and confirmed drunkenness. All these have been robbed of their children, who are in the custody of the husband, under the care of his relatives, whilst the mothers are permitted to see them but at stated intervals. But, said one of these mothers, with a grandeur of attitude and manner worthy the noble Roman matron in the palmiest days of that republic, I would rather never see my child again, than be the medium to hand down the low, animal nature of it father, to stamp degradation on the brow of another innocent being. It is enough that one child of his shall call me mother. If you are far sighted statesmen, and do wisely judge of the interests of this commonwealth, you will so shape your future laws as to encourage woman to take the high moral ground that the father of her children must be great and good.

Instead of your present laws, which make the mother and her children the victims of vice and license, you might rather pass-laws prohibiting to all drunkards, libertines and fools, the rights of husbands and fathers. Do not the hundreds of laughing idiot that are crowding into our asylums, appeal to the wisdom of our statesmen for some new laws on marriage--to the mothers of this day for a higher, purer morality?

Again, as the condition of the child always follows that of the mother, and as by the abuse of your laws the father may best the mother, so may he the child. What mother cannot bear me witness to untold sufferings. Which cruel, vindictive fathers have visited upon their helpless children? Who ever saw a human being that would not abuse unlimited power? Base and ignoble must that man be, who, let the provocation be what it may, would strike a woman; but he who would lacerate a trembling child is unworthy the name of man. A mother's love can be no protection to a child; she cannot appeal to you to save it from a father's cruelty, for the laws take no cognizance of the mother's most grievous wrongs. Neither at home or abroad can a mother protect her son. Look at the temptations that surround the paths of our youth at every step; look at the gambling and drinking saloons, the club rooms, the dens of infamy and abomination that infest all our villages and cities--slowly but surely sapping the very foundations of all virtue and strength.

By your laws, all these abominable resorts are permitted. It is folly to talk of a mother moulding the character of her son, when all mankind, backed up by law and public sentiment, conspire to destroy her influence. But when woman's moral power shall speak through the ballot-box, then shall her influence be seen and felt; then, in our legislative debates, such questions as the canal tools on salt, the improvement of rivers and harbors, and the claims, of Mr. Smith for damages against the states, would be secondary to the consideration of the legal existence of all these public resorts, which lure our youth on to excessive indulgence and destruction.

Many times and oft it has been asked us, with unaffected seriousness, "what do you women want? What are you aiming at?" Many have manifested a laudable curiosity to know what the wives and daughters could complain of in republican America, where their sires and sons have so bravely fought for freedom and gloriously secured their independence, trampling all tyranny, bigotry and caste in the dust, and declaring to a waiting world the divine truth that all men are created equal. What can *woman* want under such a government? Admit a radical differences in sex and you demand different spheres--water for fish, and air for birds.

It is impossible to make the southern planter believe that his slave feels and reasons just as he does--that injustice and subjection are as galling as to him--that the degradation of living by the will of another, the mere dependent on his caprice, at the mercy of his passions, is as keenly felt by him as his master. If you can force on his unwilling vision a vivid picture of the negro's wrongs, and for a moment touch his soul, his logic brings him instant consolation. He says, the slave does not feel this as I would. Here, gentlemen, is our difficulty: When we plead our cause before the law makers and *savans* of the republic, they cannot take in the idea that men and women are alike; and so long as the mass rest in this delusion, the public mind will not be so much startled by the revelation made of the injustice and degradation of woman's position as by the fact that she should at length wake up to a sense of it.

If you, too, are thus deluded, what avails it that we show by your statute books that your laws are unjust--that woman is the victim of avarice and power? What avails it that we point out the wrongs of woman in social life; the victim of passion and lust? You scorn the thought that she has any natural love of freedom burning in her breast, any clear perception of justice urging her on to demand her rights.

Would to God you could know the burning indignation that fills woman's soul when she turns over the pages of your statute books, and sees there how like feudal barons you freemen hold your women. Would that you could know the humiliations she feels for her sex, when she thinks of all the beardless boys in

your law offices, learning these ideas of one-sided justice--taking their first lessons in contempt for all womankind--being indoctrinated into the incapacities of their mothers, and the lordly, absolute rights of man over all women, children and property, and to know that these are to be our future Presidents, Judges, Husbands and Fathers; in sorrow we exclaim, alas! for that nation whose sons bow not in loyalty to woman. The mother is the first object of the child's veneration and love, and they who root out this holy sentiment, dream not of the blighting effect, it has on the boy and the man. The impression left on law students, fresh from your statute books, is most unfavorable to woman's influence; hence you see but few lawyers chivalrous and high-toned in their sentiments towards woman. They cannot escape the legal view which, by constant reading, has become familiarized to their minds: "*Femme covert*," "downer," "widow's claims," "protection," "incapacities," "incumbrance," is written on the brow of every woman they meet.

But if, gentlemen, you take the ground that the sexes are alike, and, therefore, you are our faithful representative--then why all these special laws for woman? Would not one code answer for all of like needs and wants? Christ's golden rule is better than all the special legislation that the ingenuity of man can devise: "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you." This, men and brethren, is all we ask at your hands. We *ask* no better laws than those you have made for yourselves. We need no other protection than that which yourself present law secure to you.

In conclusion, then, let us say, in behalf of the women of this state, we ask for all that you have asked for yourselves in the progress of your development, since the *May Flower* cast anchor side Plymouth rock; and simply on the ground that the rights of every human being are the same and identical. You may say that the mass of the women of this state do not make the demand; it comes from a few sour, disappointed old maids and childless women.

You are mistaken; the mass speak through us. A very large majority of the women of this state support themselves and their children, and many their husbands too. Go into any village you please, of three or four thousand inhabitants, and you will find as many as fifty men or more, whose only business is to discuss religion and politics, as they watch the trains come and go at the depot, or the passage of a canal boat through a lock; to laugh at the vagaries of some drunken brother, or the capers of a monkey, dancing to the music of his master's organ. All these are supported by their mothers, wives or sisters.

Now, do you *candidly* think these wives do not wish to control the wages they earn--to own the land they buy--the houses they build? to have at their disposal their own children, without being subject to the constant interference and tyranny of an idle, worthless profligate? Do you suppose that any woman is such

a pattern of devotion and submission that she willingly stitches all day for a small sum of fifty cents, that she may enjoy the unspeakable privilege, in obedience to your laws, of paying for her husband's tobacco and rum? Think you the wife of the confirmed, beastly drunkard would consent to share with him her home and bed, if law and public sentiment would release her from such gross companionship? Verily, no! Think you the wife, with whom endurance has ceased to be a virtue, who through much suffering has lost all faith in the justice of both Heaven and earth, takes the law in her own hand, severs the unholy bond and turns her back forever upon him whom she once called husband, consents to the law that in such an hour tears her child from her--all that she has left on earth to love and cherish? The drunkards' wives speak through us, and they number 50,000. Think you that the woman who has worked hard all her days, in helping her husband to accumulate a large property, consents to the law that places this wholly at his disposal? Would not the mother, whose only child is bound out for a term of years, against her expressed wishes, deprive the father of this absolute power if she could?

For all these, then, we speak. If to this long list you add all the laboring women, who are loudly demanding remuneration for their unending toil--those women who teach in our seminaries, academies and common schools for a miserable pittance; the widows, who are taxed without mercy; the unfortunate ones in our work houses, poor houses and prisons; who are they that we do not now represent? But a small class of fashionable butterflies, who, through the short summer days, seek the sunshine and the flowers; but the cool breezes of autumn and the hoary frosts of winter will soon chase all these away; then, they too will need and seek protection, and through other lips demand, in their turn, justice and equity at your hands.

APPENDIX.

This Address was laid upon the member's desks, Monday morning, Feb. 20, 1854.

When the order of petitions was reached, Mr. D. P. Wood, of Onondaga, presented in the Assembly a petition signed by 5931 men and women, praying for the just and equal rights of women, which, after a spicy debate, was referred to the following select committee:

- James L. Angle, of Monroe Co.,
- George W. Thorn, of Washington Co.,
- Derrick L. Boardman, of Oneida Co.,
- George H. Richards, of New-York,
- James M. Munro, of Onondaga,
- Wesley Gleason, of Fulton,

- Alexander P. Sharpe, of New-York.

In the Senate on the same day, Mr. Richards, of Warren county, presented a petition signed by 4164 men and women, praying for the extension of the right of suffrage to women, and on his motion it was referred to following select committee:

- George Yost, of Montgomery Co.,
- Ben Field, of Orleans Co.,
- W.H. Robertson, of Westchester Co.

The following are the forms of the petitions as agreed upon the Convention held at Rochester, November 30 and December 1, 1853. The signatures were obtained in some thirty counties, by a few individuals, during this short period:

Petition for the Just and Equal Rights of Women.

The Legislature of the State of New-York have, by the Acts of 1848 and 1849, testified the purpose of the People of this State to place Married Women on an equality with Married Men in regard to the holding conveying and devising of real and personal property.

We, therefore, the undersigned Petitioners, inhabitants of the State of New-York, male and female, having attained to the age of legal majority, believing that Women, alike married and single, do still suffer under *many and grievous* LEGAL DISABILITIES, do earnestly request the Senate and Assembly of the State of New-York to appoint a joint committee of both Houses to revise the Statutes of New-York, and to propose such amendments as will fully establish the LEGAL EQUALITY of Women with Men; and do hereby ask a hearing before such committee by our accredited Representatives.

Petition for Woman's Right to Suffrage.

Whereas, according to the Declaration of our National Independence Governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, we earnestly request the Legislature of New-York to propose to the People of the State such amendments of the Constitution of the State as will secure to females an equal right to the Elective Franchise with Males; and we do hereby request a hearing before the Legislature by our accredited Representatives.

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