

Created Equal

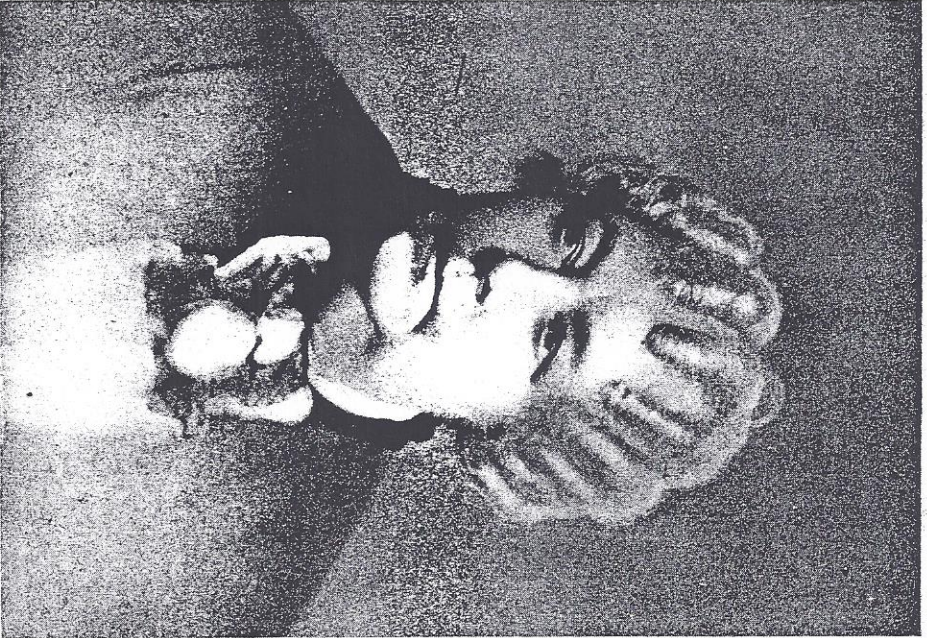
A BIOGRAPHY OF

ELIZABETH CADY STANTON

1815-1902

BY

ALMA LUTZ



ELIZABETH CADY STANTON

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TO A. MARGUERITE SMITH
WHOSE HELP AND ENCOURAGEMENT
HAVE BEEN INVALUABLE

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Van Nostrand Reinhold New York

Handwritten signature

was the most effective means of improving working conditions and wage standards for women, but the question of woman suffrage was not a popular one and at first they took it up rather gingerly. Susan attended the National Labor Union Congress as a delegate of this Association and presented strong resolutions including a demand for woman suffrage which was turned down.

A few months later they championed a cause which brought upon them a great deal of censure—that of Hester Vaughn, a young servant girl who, accused of murdering her child, born out of wedlock, was sentenced to hang. Hester Vaughn's tragic story aroused Elizabeth's sympathy at once. In impassioned editorials in the *Revolution* she pleaded for Hester Vaughn, calling attention to the injustice of the sentence.

At a meeting of the Working Woman's Association, Anna Dickinson, the popular orator, vividly and sympathetically told the story of this unfortunate girl. Twenty-year-old Hester Vaughn had come from England to Philadelphia with her husband who shortly deserted her. She found it difficult to earn her living, worked as a servant girl in several families, and was seduced by one of her employers who, as soon as he learned she was pregnant, discharged her. She wandered about the streets sick and desperate, working when she could. She found refuge in an unheated garret and there in midwinter her child was born. For twenty-four hours she lay on the floor in a stupor, occasionally rousing herself to call for help. When found at last, she was in a critical condition and the baby was dead. She was imprisoned at once for infanticide. Ill and ignorant of her legal rights, she was tried without proper defense, and convicted. There was no proof that she had deliberately killed her child.

The Association sent the well-known author, Eleanor Kirk, and a woman physician, Dr. Clemence Lozier, to Philadelphia to investigate the case. They were convinced of Hester Vaughn's innocence and worthiness. Then the Working Woman's Association called a large meeting in Cooper Institute on her behalf, and Eleanor Kirk and Dr. Lozier made their reports. Resolutions were enthusiastically adopted demanding a new trial or unconditional

pardon for Hester Vaughn, that women be tried by a jury of peers, have a voice in the making of laws, and that capital punishment be abolished. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Elizabeth Smith Miller personally presented these resolutions to the Governor of Pennsylvania. They visited Hester in prison, had a long talk with her, and were completely won over by her gentleness and pitifulness. And after many months of continuous effort by her friends, she was pardoned and sent back to her home in England.

This case stirred Elizabeth so deeply and seemed so much a part of woman's fight for equality that she wrote a great deal in the *Revolution* about the issues it raised. She pointed out fearlessly that Hester Vaughn's seducer was as guilty as Hester. She demanded equal moral standards for men and women and jury service for women. She wrote:

If we look over the history of jury trial, we find in all ages, and nations, the greatest stress laid on every man being judged by his equals.... If nobles cannot judge peasants, or peasants nobles, how can man judge woman? But, cannot woman trust her own father, husband, brother for wise laws and just judgments? The Hester Vaughns—the very class that most need protection—are often bound to earth by no ties like these. Their betrayers may be their judges and their jurors.

There was a great deal of criticism because the *Revolution* championed Hester Vaughn so unreservedly. The press was none too friendly, casting aspersions upon those who were attempting to interfere with the administration of justice. Conservatives felt it not only unwise but unbecoming to be involved in and besmirched by such a criminal case. Others, who sympathized with Hester Vaughn, thought it unnecessary to connect her case with the cause of woman's rights.

So many letters came in to the *Revolution*, asking whether the paper was opposed to marriage, that Elizabeth answered them in the editorial, "The Man Marriage," in which she listed her objections to the present marriage system:

First, I object to the teachings of the Church on this question. Its interpretation of the Bible, making man the head of the woman, and its forms of marriage, by which she is given away as an article of

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2,000,000 men, he used bold words to denounce the tyrants and declare his action. He called the United States Constitution "a covenant with death, and an agreement with hell." His *Liberator* was a firebrand among tyrants. With the Bible in one hand and the Republican theory in the other, he defied the whole nation, the State, the Church, and the social institutions of the South.... He told black men to take the law into their own hands, to strike for freedom at all hazards, and rush to the Canadas, at the risk of their lives. Gerrit Smith told them to steal anything they needed in their flight—horses, boats, bread, fire arms—they had a right to anything that would help them to the land of freedom.

Wendell Phillips, in a speech in Boston on the Anthony Burns case, fired with the cruelty and wickedness of sending that man back to slavery, exclaimed "God damn the Commonwealth of Massachusetts," and Lydia Maria Child is said to have clapped with such vehemence as to break her wedding ring.

And what, I ask, are the battles of the fathers, or the Abolitionists, compared with the one we are fighting today? It was a grand thing for a handful of men to lay the foundations of a Republican government in this Western world. It was a grand thing to strike the last blow at an aristocracy of race on Southern plantations. But it is a greater work to roll off the public mind the mountains of ignorance and superstition that, for Ages, have made the mother of the race the bond slave of her own sons, held by the triple cord of a political, religious and social serfdom—that have made her a pliant, patient victim by the utter perversion of the highest and holiest sentiments of her nature.

When we can get all our women up to the white heat of a "belligerent attitude," we may have some hope of our speedy enfranchisement....

Another militant movement was also sweeping the country. Bands of earnest women, roused by the drink evil, gathered in front of saloons, singing hymns and kneeling in the dust, prayed fervently for the abolition of these breeders of iniquity. Often they walked boldly through the saloon doors, sang their hymns and prayed, until the jeers of the patrons ceased and one by one they slipped away. Sometimes they were able to work the saloon keeper up to such a pitch that he would empty his liquor in the street and pray with them to be saved. This crusade, started in a small Ohio town, eventually developed into that powerful organization, the Women's Christian Temperance Union.

Both Elizabeth and Susan believed heartily in temperance, both

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believed in militancy, but both realized that women could not be a power for reform until they had the ballot. Therefore, first enfranchisement, then afterward temperance and other reforms. To a friend in the West, Elizabeth wrote:

These praying bands are not exactly to my taste. Lifting humanity up to a higher plane, is to be done by the slow process of education, which can be accomplished not by praying, but *working*.... This temperance revival, I am glad to see for some reasons, though I do not approve the mode of warfare.

Susan, addressing a group of women crusaders in Rochester, gave them this good advice:

Now my good women, the best thing this organization will do for you will be to show you how utterly powerless you are to put down the liquor traffic. You can never talk down or sing down or pray down an institution which is voted into existence. You will never be able to lessen this evil until you have votes.

The conservative women of the country also felt the need of gathering together in the year 1873 and called a Congress of Women in New York "to meet a pressing demand for interchange of thought and harmony of action among women interested in the advancement of their sex." Elizabeth at their request signed the call. Susan did not.

It was a learned, impressive gathering, discussing all such safe subjects as the household, enlightened motherhood, woman's dress, education, literature, art, science, women in the professions and industry, in reform, in the church. Mary E. Livermore presided. Julia Ward Howe and Maria Mitchell were among the prominent speakers. Elizabeth addressed the congress on one of her favorite subjects, "Coeducation." This was done with propriety, but as she also took part in the discussion of other subjects, she managed to inject a little too much liberalism into this conservative convention.

At one session she asked what would be thought of an artist who filled his studio with distorted forms, and declared, "That is what American mothers are doing, filling the world with cripples and monsters. Men have taught that it is woman's greatest glory to bear children, but as John Stuart Mill said, 'It is greater to give the

world one lion than ten jackasses." She insisted that women teach the rising generation of girls that quality is important and there is no glory in numbers.

Then she made the heretical statement that it is not the duty of all men and women to be parents and that because this had been regarded as their duty, infanticide was common and would continue to be until there was a changed attitude in regard to child-bearing. "If a woman is diseased," she continued, "if she has a husband who is intemperate and licentious, the fewer children she has the better."

This recommendation of birth control was bad enough, but the mention of infanticide was far worse. Julia Ward Howe, distressed that such subjects had been introduced, announced that she would be mortified if any sanction of infanticide went forth from that meeting.

Instantly Elizabeth replied: "I hope I have not been understood by the majority as speaking in favor of infanticide. I mentioned it only as a fact. There is as much of it as ever, and it will continue until woman is the sovereign of her own person."

This was embarrassing. Such subjects were not publicly discussed among "ladies."

Nevertheless, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, undaunted, here and elsewhere, continued her role of advance guard, injecting new and startling ideas, which, although they roused antagonism, eventually were accepted as a matter of course.

When the hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Republic was celebrated in 1876 by a large centennial exposition in Philadelphia, conservative as well as radical suffragists felt that the only suitable commemoration of the founding of the Republic was conferring equal rights on its unfranchised citizens—women.

Although women had contributed generously to the Exposition fund, no special building was at first assigned to them to record their achievements and progress. As an afterthought, a special fund was raised to erect a woman's pavilion, but its exhibit was unsatisfactory as it showed only a small portion of woman's accomplishment in business, invention, and manufacture, and in no way

noticed woman's long struggle for civil and political rights. The suffragists of Massachusetts sent for exhibit the taxation protests of Harriot K. Hunt, Lucy Stone, Abby Kelly Foster, Sarah E. Wall, and Julia and Abby Smith, but the authorities declared that anything that savored of protest was not suited to the time and place. Although they finally relented and placed the tax protests, they hung them so high that they could not be read.

The National Woman Suffrage Association, alert to every opportunity to spread its message, established headquarters at 1431 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia. Here suffragists gathered, made plans, and distributed literature. After the close of her lecture tour in June, Elizabeth joined Susan and Matilda Joslyn Gage there. Lucretia Mott came in frequently from her country home, bringing eggs, cold chicken, and tea for their lunch. With these irreconcilables conferring together, something important was bound to happen. They decided that a Woman's Declaration of Rights should be presented after the reading of the Declaration of Independence at the public celebration of the Fourth of July in Independence Hall. Elizabeth, Mrs. Gage, and Susan set to work at once to prepare a Declaration of Rights, and it was a masterful document with Mrs. Stanton's ringing phrases and the pertinent points thought out by all three. They applied to the authorities for a place on the program, for seats for at least one representative woman from each state, and for permission to read their Declaration of Rights immediately after the reading of the Declaration of Independence. They were sent six tickets and told that the program had already been arranged and could not be changed.

After this rebuff Elizabeth and Lucretia Mott determined to have nothing to do with the public Fourth of July celebration and to attend only their own mass convention which had been called for the same day at the First Unitarian Church. Not so Susan. She, carrying the Woman's Declaration of Rights and supported by Matilda Joslyn Gage, Sara Andrews Spencer, Lillie Devereaux Blake, and Phoebe Couzins, entered Independence Hall on that historic Fourth of July, and there, in an audience composed almost entirely of men, listened respectfully to the reading of the Declaration of

Union. "As women," she continued, "are taking an active part in pressing on the consideration of Congress, many narrow sectarian measures, such as more rigid Sunday laws to stop travel and the distribution of mail on that day and to introduce the name of God in the Constitution—as this action on the part of some women is used as an argument for the disfranchisement of all, I hope this convention will declare that the Woman Suffrage Association is opposed to all union of Church and State and pledges itself so far as possible to maintain the secular nature of our Government."

She concluded with this appeal for free speech: "I think we should keep our platform as broad as Mrs. Gage and myself desire. It has always been broad. We have discussed upon it everything, and I suppose we always shall. At least I shall, and I suppose Miss Anthony will. My idea of that platform is that every woman shall have a perfect right there; that she and her wrongs shall be represented in our conventions. We do not want to limit our platform to bare suffrage and nothing more. We must demand equality everywhere in Church and State. Wherever a woman is wronged, her voice should be heard on our platform. We want all types and classes to come. We want all races as well as all creeds and no creeds, including the Mormon, Indian and black women...."

When she had finished, she proudly introduced her daughter, Harriot Stanton Blatch. Lucy Stone and Elizabeth Cady Stanton had each brought a capable daughter into the suffrage fold. Alice Stone Blackwell like Harriot Stanton Blatch gave every evidence of carrying on this beloved cause with the devotion and ability of the pioneers.

The retiring president of the American Association, William Dudley Foulke, then made a scholarly address, but it was theoretical and cold compared to Mrs. Stanton's vigorous speech, which so courageously brought out concrete facts that needed to be handled. After his address, she and Harriot were obliged to leave immediately for New York to catch their steamer for England, and as they left the platform the entire audience rose, and waving their handkerchiefs, gave their beloved president three farewell cheers.

ELIZABETH left for England with three very happy memories. Her election as president of the united suffrage organization was an honor and a satisfaction, an expression of confidence and gratitude from the majority of American suffragists. The Congressional hearings at which she had spoken were a great success in that they resulted in a majority report favoring an amendment to the Constitution granting woman suffrage. This was the first time such a victory had been won. She had also been the principal speaker at a dinner at the Riggs House to celebrate Susan's seventieth birthday. To the two hundred men and women assembled to pay tribute to Susan she had said: "If there is one part of my life that gives me more intense satisfaction than another, it is my friendship of forty years standing with Susan B. Anthony. Her heroism, her faithfulness and conscientious devotion to what she thinks is her duty, has been a constant stimulation to me to thought and action." Deeply moved, Miss Anthony had responded, "If I have ever had any inspiration, she has given it to me. I want you to understand that I never could have done the work I have if I had not had this woman at my right hand."

This last visit which Elizabeth had with Harriot in England in 1890 was a very happy one, watching Nora grow up. Theodore's daughter, Lizette, came from France, and the two children found a perfect companion in their Queen Mother, as they called her. She loved to tell them stories with little girls as heroines and they listened spellbound. No one else could tell such stories and no one understood little girls so well.

She spent a great deal of time writing provocative articles for the *Westminster Review*, the *Arena*, the *Forum*, and the *North American Review*. Almost every week she sent an installment of her "Reminiscences" to Mrs. Colby to be published in the *Woman's*

Tribune, which had now moved its office to Washington. Occasionally she made speeches for the English suffragists, visited in their homes, and met their interesting friends. A few days in London and an evening at the theater were a real treat. She wrote in her diary:

How I do enjoy going to the theatre! But I am probably in my dotage, for I see few people on the shady side of seventy drinking in these worldly joys at the midnight hour especially in rainy, foggy London.

There were many visitors at the Blatch home in Basingstoke who came especially to see Elizabeth, among them Emmeline Pankhurst, Priscilla McLaren, Mrs. Jacob Bright, and Annie Besant.

Annie Besant was associated with Bradlaugh, fighting for free thought and Malthusianism, when Elizabeth first met her, and was being persecuted for advocating birth control as a solution for poverty and misery among the masses. Elizabeth had admired her courage and regarded her as the greatest woman in England. Now Annie Besant was deep in Theosophy—a disciple of Madame Blavatsky.

Always irresistibly attracted by a fellow explorer, Elizabeth listened at first with interest to Annie Besant's presentation of Theosophy.

Harriot remonstrated with her mother, questioning in this instance as in others, whether she, as an accepted leader among women, was justified in marching up to a precipice to look into its depths when she herself never grew dizzy. A light-headed admirer, she warned, following her example might plunge over the edge to destruction. But Elizabeth with a laugh answered her troubled daughter, "How can I warn of the dangers of a seething caldron if I do not take even a peep in myself?"

Annie Besant and Elizabeth Cady Stanton stood out in sharp contrast. Elizabeth clung with every fiber to feminism and free thought. Annie Besant had deserted old loyalties and served just one master, Theosophy. Her emotions revolved around a philosophy; Elizabeth's were centered on human beings. Elizabeth argued that Fabianism could do more for humanity than Theosophy;

Annie Besant could see nothing but Theosophy as the solution of every problem.

But in spite of her disappointment in this interesting woman, Elizabeth still regarded her as the greatest woman in England. At this time the O'Shea divorce suit, involving Charles Stewart Parnell, was causing a great stir in English society. Such a determined drive was made to force Parnell to retire and such intolerance was manifested that Elizabeth could not keep silent. She sent off an article to the *Westminster Review* called "Patriotism and Chastity" in which she spoke her mind freely. It too caused a stir not only in England but among the suffragists in America. Of her English critics, she wrote:

The little set of Social Purity people who are down on my *Westminster* article, do not choose to understand it. I simply state facts when I say that men are not educated to consider chastity an imperative virtue for them, and that they are educated to practice patriotism, hence they may fulfill the duties of one virtue without fulfilling those of the other. There have been statesmen, soldiers, poets, scientists, philosophers, and even clergymen who were not chaste according to the standard of the nineteenth century. I do not apologize for Parnell, I only show how our civil and canon law, Blackstone and the Bible, educate men. The sole remedy for our present chaos is the mental development and the political emancipation of the great factor in social life, namely, woman. The papers that represent me as an apologist for immorality, do so willfully; no such conclusion can be fairly drawn from my words.

Frances Willard took up the cudgels for morality in the National American Woman Suffrage Convention. Regarding this, Elizabeth wrote to Mrs. Colby, whom she now felt was one of her most understanding friends:

How is it that not one word of the convention reaches this side, except sixteen lines of Miss Willard's opening speech condemning Parnell? Is it Miss Willard's policy to make people think this side of the ocean that that great convention of women endorsed her silly view of that case? Is the Irish cause nearer her heart than it was to Parnell's? By the way, you remember she presented a resolution at the International Council to make us all endorse her temperance policy. But I defeated it on the spot. Miss Anthony did not see the drift of the resolution and let it pass. Frances Willard needs watching. She is a politician.