

CHAPTER XIII. REFORMS AND MOBS.

“THERE was one bright woman among the many in our Seneca Falls literary circle to whom I would give more than a passing notice - **Mrs. Amelia Bloomer**, who represented three novel phases of woman’s life. She was assistant postmistress; an editor of a reform paper advocating temperance and woman’s rights; and an advocate of the new costume which bore her name!

In 1849 her husband was appointed postmaster, and she became his deputy, was duly sworn in, and, during the administration of **Taylor** and **Fillmore**, served in that capacity. When she assumed her duties the improvement in the appearance and conduct of the office was generally acknowledged. A neat little room adjoining the public office became a kind of ladies’ exchange, where those coming from different parts of the town could meet to talk over the news of the day and read the papers and magazines that came to **Mrs. Bloomer** as editor of the *Lily*. Those who enjoyed the brief reign of a woman in the post office can readily testify to the void felt by the ladies of the village when **Mrs. Bloomer’s** term expired and a man once more reigned in her stead. However, she still edited the *Lily*, and her office remained a fashionable center for several years. Although she wore the bloomer dress, its originator was **Elizabeth Smith Miller**, the only daughter of **Gerrit Smith**. In the winter of 1852 **Mrs. Miller** came to visit me in Seneca Falls, dressed somewhat in the Turkish style—short skirt, full trousers of fine black broadcloth; a Spanish cloak, of the same material, reaching to the knee; beaver hat and feathers and dark furs; altogether a most becoming costume and exceedingly convenient for walking in all kinds of weather. To see my cousin, with a lamp in one hand and a baby in the other, walk upstairs with ease and grace, while, with flowing robes, I pulled myself up with difficulty, lamp and baby out of the question, readily convinced me that there was sore need of reform in woman’s dress, and I promptly donned a similar attire. What incredible freedom I enjoyed for two years! Like a captive set free from his ball and chain, I was always ready for a brisk walk through sleet and snow and rain, to climb a mountain, jump over a fence, work in the garden, and, in fact, for any necessary locomotion.

Bloomer is now a recognized word in the English language. **Mrs. Bloomer**, having the *Lily* in which to discuss the merits of the new dress, the press generally took up the question, and

much valuable information was elicited on the physiological results of woman's fashionable attire; the crippling effect of tight waists and long skirts, the heavy weight on the hips, and high heels, all combined to throw the spine out of plumb and lay the foundation for all manner of nervous diseases. But, while all agreed that some change was absolutely necessary for the health of women, the press stoutly ridiculed those who were ready to make the experiment.

A few sensible women, in different parts of the country, adopted the costume, and farmers' wives especially proved its convenience. It was also worn by skaters, gymnasts, tourists, and in sanitariums. But, while the few realized its advantages, the many laughed it to scorn, and heaped such ridicule on its wearers that they soon found that the physical freedom enjoyed did not compensate for the persistent persecution and petty annoyances suffered at every turn. To be rudely gazed at in public and private, to be the conscious subjects of criticism, and to be followed by crowds of boys in the streets, were all, to the very last degree, exasperating. A favorite doggerel that our tormentors chanted, when we appeared in public places, ran thus:

“Heigh! ho! in rain and snow,
The bloomer now is all the go.
Twenty tailors take the stitches,
Twenty women wear the breeches.
Heigh! ho! in rain or snow,
The bloomer now is all the go.”

The singers were generally invisible behind some fence or attic window. Those who wore the dress can recall countless amusing and annoying experiences. The patience of most of us was exhausted in about two years; but our leader, **Mrs. Miller**, bravely adhered to the costume for nearly seven years, under the most trying circumstances. While her father was in Congress, she wore it at many fashionable dinners and receptions in Washington. She was bravely sustained, however, by her husband, **Colonel Miller**, who never flinched in escorting his wife and her coadjutors, however inartistic their costumes might be. To tall, gaunt women with large feet and to those who were short and stout, it was equally trying.

Mrs. Miller was also encouraged by the intense feeling of her father on the question of woman's dress. To him the whole revolution in woman's position turned on her dress. The long skirt was the symbol of her degradation.

The names of those who wore the bloomer costume, besides those already mentioned, were **Paulina Wright Davis, Lucy Stone, Susan B. Anthony, Sarah and Angelina Grimke, Mrs. William Burleigh, Celia Burleigh, Charlotte Beebe Wilbour, Helen Jarvis, Lydia Jenkins, Amelia Willard, Dr. Harriet N. Austin**, and many patients in sanitariums, whose names I cannot recall. Looking back to this experiment, I am not surprised at the hostility of men in general to the dress, as it made it very uncomfortable for them to go anywhere with those who wore it. People would stare, many men and women make rude remarks, boys followed in crowds, with jeers and laughter, so that gentlemen in attendance would feel it their duty to show fight, unless they had sufficient self-control to pursue the even tenor of their way, as the ladies themselves did, without taking the least notice of the commotion they created. But **Colonel Miller** went through the ordeal with coolness and dogged determination, to the vexation of his acquaintances, who thought one of his duties as a husband was to prescribe his wife's costume.

Though we did not realize the success we hoped for by making the dress popular, yet the effect was not lost. We were well aware that the dress was not artistic, and though we made many changes, our own good taste was never satisfied until we threw aside the loose trousers and adopted buttoned leggins. After giving up the experiment, we found that the costume in which **Diana the Huntress** is represented, and that worn on the stage by **Ellen Tree** in the play of "Ion," would have been more artistic and convenient. But we, who had made the experiment, were too happy to move about unnoticed and unknown, to risk, again, the happiness of ourselves and our friends by any further experiments. I have never wondered since that the Chinese women allow their daughters' feet to be encased in iron shoes, nor that the Hindoo widows walk calmly to the funeral pyre; for great are the penalties of those who dare resist the behests of the tyrant Custom.

Nevertheless the agitation has been kept up, in a mild form, both in England and America. **Lady Harberton**, in 1885, was at the head of an organized movement in London to

introduce the bifurcated skirt; **Mrs. Jenness Miller**, in this country, is making an entire revolution in every garment that belongs to a woman's toilet; and common-sense shoemakers have vouchsafed to us, at last, a low, square heel to our boots and a broad sole in which the five toes can spread themselves at pleasure. Evidently a new day of physical freedom is at last dawning for the most cribbed and crippled of **Eve's** unhappy daughters.

It was while living in Seneca Falls, and at one of the most despairing periods of my young life, that one of the best gifts of the gods came to me in the form of a good, faithful housekeeper. She was indeed a treasure, a friend and comforter, a second mother to my children, and understood all life's duties and gladly bore its burdens. She could fill any department in domestic life, and for thirty years was the joy of our household. But for this noble, self-sacrificing woman, much of my public work would have been quite impossible. If by word or deed I have made the journey of life easier for any struggling soul, I must in justice share the meed of praise accorded me with my little Quaker friend **Amelia Willard**.

There are two classes of housekeepers—one that will get what they want, if in the range of human possibilities, and then accept the inevitable inconveniences with cheerfulness and heroism; the other, from a kind of chronic inertia and fear of taking responsibility, accept everything as they find it, though with gentle, continuous complainings. The latter are called amiable women. Such a woman was our congressman's wife in 1854, and, as I was the reservoir of all her sorrows, great and small, I became very weary of her amiable non-resistance. Among other domestic trials, she had a kitchen stove that smoked and leaked, which could neither bake nor broil,—a worthless thing,—and too small for any purpose. Consequently half their viands were spoiled in the cooking, and the cooks left in disgust, one after another.

In telling me, one day, of these kitchen misadventures, she actually shed tears, which so roused my sympathies that, with surprise, I exclaimed: "Why do you not buy a new stove?" To my unassisted common sense that seemed the practical thing to do. "Why," she replied, "I have never purchased a darning needle, to put the case strongly, without consulting **Mr. S.**, and he does not think a new stove necessary." "What, pray," said I, "does he know about stoves, sitting in his easy-chair in Washington? If he had a dull old knife with broken blades,

he would soon get a new one with which to sharpen his pens and pencils, and, if he attempted to cook a meal—granting he knew how—on your old stove, he would set it out of doors the next hour. Now my advice to you is to buy a new one this very day!”

“Bless me!” she said, “that would make him furious; he would blow me sky-high.” “Well,” I replied, “suppose he did go into a regular tantrum and use all the most startling expletives in the vocabulary for fifteen minutes! What is that compared with a good stove 365 days in the year? Just put all he could say on one side, and all the advantages you would enjoy on the other, and you must readily see that his wrath would kick the beam.” As my logic was irresistible, she said, “Well, if you will go with me, and help select a stove, I think I will take the responsibility.”

Accordingly we went to the hardware store and selected the most approved, largest-sized stove, with all the best cooking utensils, best Russian pipe, etc. “Now,” said she, “I am in equal need of a good stove in my sitting room, and I would like the pipes of both stoves to lead into dumb stoves above, and thus heat two or three rooms upstairs for my children to play in, as they have no place except the sitting room, where they must always be with me; but I suppose it is not best to do too much at one time.” “On the contrary,” I replied, “as your husband is wealthy, you had better get all you really need now. **Mr. S.** will probably be no more surprised with two stoves than with one, and, as you expect a hot scene over the matter, the more you get out of it the better.”

So the stoves and pipes were ordered, holes cut through the ceiling, and all were in working order next day. The cook was delighted over her splendid stove and shining tins, copper-bottomed tea kettle and boiler, and warm sleeping room upstairs; the children were delighted with their large playrooms, and madam jubilant with her added comforts and that newborn feeling of independence one has in assuming responsibility.

She was expecting **Mr. S.** home in the holidays, and occasionally weakened at the prospect of what she feared might be a disagreeable encounter. At such times she came to consult with me, as to what she would say and do when the crisis arrived. Having studied the *genus*

homo alike on the divine heights of exaltation and in the valleys of humiliation, I was able to make some valuable suggestions.

“Now,” said I, “when your husband explodes, as you think he will, neither say nor do anything; sit and gaze out of the window with that far-away, sad look women know so well how to affect. If you can summon tears at pleasure, a few would not be amiss; a gentle shower, not enough to make the nose and eyes red or to detract from your beauty. Men cannot resist beauty and tears. Never mar their effect with anything bordering on sobs and hysteria; such violent manifestations being neither refined nor artistic. A scene in which one person does all the talking must be limited in time. No ordinary man can keep at white heat fifteen minutes; if his victim says nothing, he will soon exhaust himself. Remember every time you speak in the way of defense, you give him a new text on which to branch out again. If silence is ever golden, it is when a husband is in a tantrum.”

In due time **Mr. S.** arrived, laden with Christmas presents, and **Charlotte** came over to tell me that she had passed through the ordeal. I will give the scene in her own words as nearly as possible. “My husband came yesterday, just before dinner, and, as I expected him, I had all things in order. He seemed very happy to see me and the children, and we had a gay time looking at our presents and chatting about Washington and all that had happened since we parted. It made me sad, in the midst of our happiness, to think how soon the current of his feelings would change, and I wished in my soul that I had not bought the stoves. But, at last, dinner was announced, and I knew that the hour had come. He ran upstairs to give a few touches to his toilet, when lo! the shining stoves and pipes caught his eyes. He explored the upper apartments and came down the back stairs, glanced at the kitchen stove, then into the dining room, and stood confounded, for a moment, before the nickel-plated ‘Morning Glory.’ Then he exclaimed, ‘Heavens and earth! **Charlotte**, what have you been doing?’ I remembered what you told me and said nothing, but looked steadily out of the window. I summoned no tears, however, for I felt more like laughing than crying; he looked so ridiculous flying round spasmodically, like popcorn on a hot griddle, and talking as if making a stump speech on the corruptions of the Democrats. The first time he paused to take breath I said, in my softest tones: ‘**William**, dinner is waiting; I fear the soup will be cold.’ Fortunately he was hungry, and that great central organ of life and happiness asserted its

claims on his attention, and he took his seat at the table. I broke what might have been an awkward silence, chatting with the older children about their school lessons. Fortunately they were late, and did not know what had happened, so they talked to their father and gradually restored his equilibrium. We had a very good dinner, and I have not heard a word about the stoves since. I suppose we shall have another scene when the bill is presented.”

A few years later, **Horace Greeley** came to Seneca Falls to lecture on temperance. As he stayed with us, we invited **Mr. S.**, among others, to dinner. The chief topic at the table was the idiosyncrasies of women. **Mr. Greeley** told many amusing things about his wife, of her erratic movements and sudden decisions to do and dare what seemed most impracticable. Perhaps, on rising some morning, she would say: “I think I’ll go to Europe by the next streamer, **Horace**. Will you get tickets to-day for me, the nurse, and children?” “Well,” said **Mr. S.**, “she must be something like our hostess. Every time her husband goes away she cuts a door or window. They have only ten doors to lock every night, now.”

“Yes,” I said, “and your own wife, too, **Mrs. S.**, has the credit of some high-handed measures when you are in Washington.” Then I told the whole story, amid peals of laughter, just as related above. The dinner table scene fairly convulsed the Congressman. The thought that he had made such a fool of himself in the eyes of **Charlotte** that she could not even summon a tear in her defense, particularly pleased him. When sufficiently recovered to speak, he said: “Well, I never could understand how it was that **Charlotte** suddenly emerged from her thralldom and manifested such rare executive ability. Now I see to whom I am indebted for the most comfortable part of my married life. I am a thousand times obliged to you; you did just right and so did she, and she has been a happier woman ever since. She now gets what she needs, and frets no more, to me, about ten thousand little things. How can a man know what implements are necessary for the work he never does? Of all agencies for upsetting the equanimity of family life, none can surpass an old, broken-down kitchen stove!”

In the winter of 1861, just after the election of **Lincoln**, the abolitionists decided to hold a series of conventions in the chief cities of the North. All their available speakers were pledged for active service. The Republican party, having absorbed the political abolitionists

within its ranks by its declared hostility to the extension of slavery, had come into power with overwhelming majorities. Hence the **Garrisonian** abolitionists, opposed to all compromises, felt that this was the opportune moment to rouse the people to the necessity of holding that party to its declared principles, and pushing it, if possible, a step or two forward.

I was invited to accompany **Miss Anthony** and **Beriah Green** to a few points in Central New York. But we soon found, by the concerted action of Republicans all over the country, that anti-slavery conventions would not be tolerated. Thus Republicans and Democrats made common cause against the abolitionists. The **John Brown** raid, the year before, had intimidated Northern politicians as much as Southern slaveholders, and the general feeling was that the discussion of the question at the North should be altogether suppressed.

From Buffalo to Albany our experience was the same, varied only by the fertile resources of the actors and their surroundings. Thirty years of education had somewhat changed the character of Northern mobs. They no longer dragged men through the streets with ropes around their necks, nor broke up women's prayer meetings; they no longer threw eggs and brickbats at the apostles of reform, nor dipped them in barrels of tar and feathers, they simply crowded the halls, and, with laughing, groaning, clapping, and cheering, effectually interrupted the proceedings. Such was our experience during the two days we attempted to hold a convention in St. James' Hall, Buffalo. As we paid for the hall, the mob enjoyed themselves, at our expense, in more ways than one. Every session, at the appointed time, we took our places on the platform, making, at various intervals of silence, renewed efforts to speak. Not succeeding, we sat and conversed with each other and the many friends who crowded the platform and anterooms. Thus, among ourselves, we had a pleasant reception and a discussion of many phases of the question that brought us together. The mob not only vouchsafed to us the privilege of talking to our friends without interruption, but delegations of their own came behind the scenes, from time to time, to discuss with us the right of free speech and the constitutionality of slavery.

These Buffalo rowdies were headed by ex-**Justice Hinson**, aided by younger members of the **Fillmore** and **Seymour** families, and the chief of police and fifty subordinates, who were

admitted to the hall free, for the express purpose of protecting our right of free speech, but who, in defiance of the mayor's orders, made not the slightest effort in our defense. At Lockport there was a feeble attempt in the same direction. At Albion neither hall, church, nor schoolhouse could be obtained, so we held small meetings in the dining room of the hotel. At Rochester, Corinthian Hall was packed long before the hour advertised. This was a delicately appreciative, jocose mob. At this point **Aaron Powell** joined us. As he had just risen from a bed of sickness, looking pale and emaciated, he slowly mounted the platform. The mob at once took in his look of exhaustion, and, as he seated himself, they gave an audible simultaneous sigh, as if to say, what a relief it is to be seated! So completely did the tender manifestation reflect **Mr. Powell's** apparent condition that the whole audience burst into a roar of laughter. Here, too, all attempts to speak were futile. At Port Byron a generous sprinkling of cayenne pepper on the stove soon cut short all constitutional arguments and paeans to liberty.

And so it was all the way to Albany. The whole State was aflame with the mob spirit, and from Boston and various points in other States the same news reached us. As the legislature was in session, and we were advertised in Albany, a radical member sarcastically moved "That as **Mrs. Stanton** and **Miss Anthony** were about to move on Albany, the militia be ordered out for the protection of the city." Happily, Albany could then boast of a Democratic mayor, a man of courage and conscience, who said the right of free speech should never be trodden under foot where he had the right to prevent it. And grandly did that one determined man maintain order in his jurisdiction. Through all the sessions of the convention **Mayor Thatcher** sat on the platform, his police stationed in different parts of the hall and outside the building, to disperse the crowd as fast as it collected. If a man or boy hissed or made the slightest interruption, he was immediately ejected. And not only did the mayor preserve order in the meetings, but, with a company of armed police, he escorted us, every time, to and from the Delevan House. The last night **Gerrit Smith** addressed the mob from the steps of the hotel, after which they gave him three cheers and dispersed in good order.

When proposing for the Mayor a vote of thanks, at the close of the convention, **Mr. Smith** expressed his fears that it had been a severe ordeal for him to listen to these prolonged anti-

slavery discussions. He smiled, and said: “I have really been deeply interested and instructed. I rather congratulate myself that a convention of this character has, at last, come in the line of my business; otherwise I should have probably remained in ignorance of many important facts and opinions I now understand and appreciate.”

While all this was going on publicly, an equally trying experience was progressing, day by day, behind the scenes. **Miss Anthony** had been instrumental in helping a much abused mother, with her child, to escape from a husband who had immured her in an insane asylum. The wife belonged to one of the first families of New York, her brother being a United States senator, and the husband, also, a man of position; a large circle of friends and acquaintances was interested in the result. Though she was incarcerated in an insane asylum for eighteen months, yet members of her own family again and again testified that she was not insane. **Miss Anthony**, knowing that she was not, and believing fully that the unhappy mother was the victim of a conspiracy, would not reveal her hiding place.

Knowing the confidence **Miss Anthony** felt in the wisdom of **Mr. Garrison** and **Mr. Phillips**, they were implored to use their influence with her to give up the fugitives. Letters and telegrams, persuasions, arguments, and warnings from **Mr. Garrison**, **Mr. Phillips**, and the Senator on the one side, and from **Lydia Mott**, **Mrs. Elizabeth F. Ellet**, and **Abby Hopper Gibbons**, on the other, poured in upon her, day after day; but **Miss Anthony** remained immovable, although she knew that she was defying and violating the law and might be arrested any moment on the platform. We had known so many aggravated cases of this kind that, in daily counsel, we resolved that this woman should not be recaptured if it were possible to prevent it.

To us it looked as imperative a duty to shield a sane mother, who had been torn from a family of little children and doomed to the companionship of lunatics, and to aid her in fleeing to a place of safety, as to help a fugitive from slavery to Canada. In both cases an unjust law was violated; in both cases the supposed owners of the victims were defied; hence, in point of law and morals, the act was the same in both cases. The result proved the wisdom of **Miss Anthony's** decision, as all with whom **Mrs. P.** came in contact for years afterward, expressed the opinion that she was, and always had been, perfectly sane. Could

the dark secrets of insane asylums be brought to light we should be shocked to know the great number of rebellious wives, sisters, and daughters who are thus sacrificed to false customs and barbarous laws made by men for women.”

(SOURCE: *Eighty Years And More: Reminiscences 1815-1897* by Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902) New York: T. Fisher Unwin, 1898, Chapter XIII. Reforms and Mobs.)

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CHAPTER XI. SUSAN B. ANTHONY continued.

“Much curiosity has been expressed as to the love-life of **Miss Anthony**; but, if she has enjoyed or suffered any of the usual triumphs or disappointments of her sex, she has not yet vouchsafed this information to her biographers. While few women have had more sincere and lasting friendships, or a more extensive correspondence with a large circle of noble men, yet I doubt if one of them can boast of having received from her any exceptional attention. She has often playfully said, when questioned on this point, that she could not consent that the man she loved, described in the Constitution as a white male, native born, American citizen, possessed of the right of self-government, eligible to the office of President of the Great Republic, should unite his destinies in marriage with a political slave and pariah. “No, no; when I am crowned with all the rights, privileges, and immunities of a citizen, I may give some consideration to this social institution; but until then I must concentrate all my energies on the enfranchisement of my own sex.” **Miss Anthony’s** love-life, like her religion, has manifested itself in steadfast, earnest labors for men in general. She has been a watchful and affectionate daughter, sister, friend, and those who have felt the pulsations of her great heart know how warmly it beats for all.”

(SOURCE: *Eighty Years And More: Reminiscences 1815-1897* by Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902) New York: T. Fisher Unwin, 1898, Chapter XI. Susan B. Anthony.)

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