

# How Susan B. Anthony Would Deal with Bad Husbands

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**A**T FIRST thought it seems a waste of time to devote an entire article to a question which easily might be answered in a sentence that it will not be difficult for the reader to supply. But on second thought I remember that the tense of the verb puts the matter far back into the past, refers it to the last century in fact—"What I would have done."

If I had married in the early 40s, along about the time when I was getting my first proposals, and had drawn a bad husband in the lottery, doubtless I would have done as other women did in those days—accepted my cruel fate as a means of grace to fit me for a better life hereafter. At that time there were no means of escape from an unfortunate marriage as are freely offered in this more humane and enlightened age. In my own state of New York, as in most others, the law recognized but one cause of divorce—infidelity—but the innocent wife who obtained a separation for this cause forfeited all right to the property the two had acquired together, while the husband, who had sinned, remained in sole possession. But this injustice sank into insignificance compared with that which allowed him also to retain the entire custody of their children. Many women would willingly have gone forth portionless, but there was scarcely one who would not have borne every indignity which could be heaped upon her rather than give up her children. In even the few cases where there were no ties of motherhood women hardly dared to take the risk of separation because there was almost no way open to them in which they could earn a living. But a still greater deterrent was the fact that a divorced woman, no matter how guiltless of wrongdoing, was a social pariah not far removed from that one who bore the Scarlet Letter on her breast. There was no place in the world for her. So, possibly, if I had had a bad husband in those days—those "good old days" that we hear so much about—I might have endured him, as other women did theirs, but it seems to me that I would have gathered my children in my arms like Eliza in "Uncle Tom's Cabin" and braved the icy waters in my dash for freedom.

## Mrs. Stanton's Sensation.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton was almost the first woman to demand that habitual drunkenness or brutal treatment should be made a cause for divorce and that women should be encouraged to seek relief from such a wrong. After myself and several other women delegates had been denied the right to speak at a mass meeting of the Sons of Temperance in Albany, N. Y., I arranged for the first state temperance convention of women ever called and it was held in Rochester, in April, 1852, with delegates present from a number of women's societies, which were then beginning to be formed. I was encouraged in this movement by Horace Greeley, Rev. William Henry Channing and others of influence, and Mrs. Stanton, who was just coming into notice for her eloquence and ability, agreed to preside. I had put in weeks of hard work getting up this meeting, a large crowd was in attendance and everything looked favorable, but Mrs. Stanton's presidential address proved to be a veritable bombshell and almost broke up the convention. The incendiary paragraph was as follows:

"Let no woman remain in the relation of wife with a confirmed drunkard. Let no drunkard be the father of her children. . . . Let us petition our state government so to modify the laws affecting marriage and the custody of children that

the drunkard shall have no claims on wife or child."

I was almost the only woman present who sustained Mrs. Stanton in this declaration; she declined to retract and eventually both of us felt compelled to withdraw from the temperance association.

## Her First Suffrage Convention.

In September of that year I attended my first suffrage convention, in Syracuse, N. Y., which was, indeed, among the first ever held. Lucretia Mott presided, and among the speakers were Hon. Gerrit Smith, Lucy Stone, Rev. Antoinette Brown (Blackwell), Matilda Joslyn Gage, Paulina Wright Davis, Clara Howard Nichols and the eloquent Polish exile, Ernestine L. Rose. Mrs. Stanton could not be present, but she sent a letter, which I read, and which, among other radical utterances, repeated the demands that habitual drunkenness and cruel treatment should be recognized as causes for divorce. The press heralded these statements abroad with the most scathing criticism, while pulpit, platform and the public in general joined in a chorus of denunciation of this most pernicious doctrine. Women themselves were loudest and longest in their condemnation of a law which would enable them to divorce a drunken or brutal husband and retain their children and a part of the property.

This discussion was renewed at all our annual meetings and found its culmination in the last suffrage convention before the breaking out of the civil war put all other questions in the background. It was held at Cooper Institute, New York City, in May, 1860, and, as usual, the firebrand was applied by Mrs. Stanton, who not only had the courage of her convictions, but recognized no such word as expediency. She presented a set of resolutions declaring that, under certain conditions, divorce was justifiable, and supported them by a speech which was a masterpiece of logic, beauty and pathos. This convention, although composed of the most liberal and advanced thinkers in the country, had not yet reached Mrs. Stanton's position on this point. Even the broad-minded Wendell Phillips moved to lay the resolutions on the table and expunge them from the minutes, declaring that this body had nothing to do with any laws except those which rest unequally upon women, and those of divorce did not! I spoke in reply and showed how marriage always had been a one-sided contract, resting most unequally upon the sexes; how in nearly all of the states a woman could not even sue for divorce in her own name, or claim enough of the community property to pay the costs, and how her success in such a case was purchased at the price of reputation, home and children.

## Between Garrison and Greeley.

William Lloyd Garrison sustained this position with all his eloquence. The discussion spread far and wide and produced the first schism in the ranks of the little band of suffragists who had stood shoulder to shoulder in so many battles. Horace Greeley used the tremendous weight of the Tribune's editorial columns against divorce under any circumstances. Thus was the contest waged for several decades against a slowly yielding public sentiment, and the closing years of the century have witnessed no greater social revolution than upon this very question. Almost every state now grants divorce for habitual drunkenness and cruel treatment and these are recognized as just causes by all the churches except the Catholic, although fifty years ago this demand was far more bitterly condemned than that for woman suffrage. But the changed attitude of church and state is by no means so remarkable as that which

has taken place in public opinion. The divorced woman, who is herself innocent, is no longer put under a ban, but may retain her usual position in society, and may go and come and be and do as she chooses, with even greater freedom than the married woman. The court provides that she shall not be penniless if her husband be possessed of means, and above all she is allowed, if innocent, to retain her children.

What I would have done with a bad husband, and what I would do if I belonged to the present generation and had made an unfortunate marriage, cannot be answered with the same statement. In this dawn of a blessed century for women I most assuredly would have recourse to the law to rectify my mistake and would sever the bond which held me captive. The term "bad husband" is, however, subject to many constructions. I have seen women apparently well satisfied with men whom I should unhesitatingly class under this head, and others greatly discontented with those who, making due allowance for the imperfections of human nature, averaged very fairly in the scale of matrimony. But there are certain sins in marriage which are unpardonable, and chief among these is infidelity. The man who has transgressed in this regard can never again be fully trusted. He may repent and endeavor to atone for his sin, but confidence has been destroyed, the sacredness of the mutual vow has been violated, and the thorough respect, which is absolutely essential to the highest form of married life, never can be entirely restored. The husband may regret, the wife may condone, but the solid foundation of marriage has been irrevocably undermined.

## Limit to Wife's Endeavors.

How far a wife should go, how many years she should spend, how great an effort she should make to "reform" an habitual drunkard, possibly each woman must determine for herself. The general statement may be made that in the vast majority of cases it will be a useless sacrifice of time and vitality. One never can feel sure of a reformed inebriate until the daisies are growing above his head. Even when a woman's love, or sense of duty, is so strong that she is willing to devote her life to this "reforming" process, she should settle with her conscience whether she has a right to bring children into the world under these unfavorable conditions, endowed with an inheritance which may prove a curse for many generations.

And then again the wife must decide for herself how much is gained by submitting to continuous ill-treatment. If there are no children and yet she patiently endures, many will consider that she passes beyond the pale of sympathy. If there are children, then the mother is confronted with a series of perplexing problems. If they are young there is the question of bringing them up, of educating them, of keeping them together of maintaining the home, of giving them the personal attention which is wholly impossible if the mother must be the breadwinner and assume the duties which by proper arrangement devolve upon the father. Most women will suffer long and deeply before they will deprive their children of these valuable rights. When the children are grown, then the mother must face other vital questions as she contemplates severing the ties which she has found so galling. She has passed the age for earning money; she is tired with long years of labor and needs the shelter and security of the home; her children have made their place in the world and she hesitates to cast even the shadow of reproach upon it; sons and daughters-in-law have come into the family, still further to complicate matters, and thus even then the

woman hardly dares consider herself a free agent. But in all such cases, if she decides that a legal separation is not advisable, she owes it to her own dignity and self-respect to live her individual life entirely apart from that of the unfaithful, dissolute or abusive husband, even though maintaining to the world the appearance of marriage.

## Obligations Not Lessened.

While greater freedom of divorce has come as an inestimable privilege to wives, it by no means lessens their obligations to endeavor by every method consistent with safety, honor and duty to adjust themselves to the relations of marriage which they have assumed. An abuse of the opportunity to sever these relations is demoralizing to society and detracts from the sacredness of the contract. Poverty, illness, infirmities of temper, uncongeniality are a part of the grievous trials which manifest themselves in many marriages. They must be met bravely and philosophically and every effort made to mitigate them rather than to run away from them. The ante-nuptial dream of paradise often has a rude awakening, but it must be remembered that even when Adam and Eve were driven from the garden of Eden they found a very good world on the outside. An imperfect husband who falls short of the wife's ideal is not necessarily a bad one, and by patient, tactful and sympathetic management sometimes may be transformed into a reasonably good one; so she should exhaust every resource of diplomacy before she declares war and calls for outside assistance.

SUSAN B. ANTHONY.

## Pointed Paragraphs

Chicago News: The eavesdropper is always on the list.

Some people are more skinned against than skinning.

Perpetual motion seems to be a failure from the word go.

Duty is something the majority of men like to neglect.

The opinion of a man who blows his own horn is apt to be sound.

There's more squeak than poetry in the soles of most versemakers.

Guide books enable the traveler to view his money from a distance.

The insidious banana peel causes the downfall of many a good man.

Youth and beauty cut a wide swath when backed by wealth and influence.

The man who keeps others waiting has no conception of time as a flyer.

An application of money will sometimes remove stains from a man's character.

Long hair may indicate genius, but you can't convince a barber that it does.

It takes a good deal of grief to kill a

woman after she has got a diamond necklace.

The man who goes to a money shark to raise the wind pays dearly for his whistle.

## A Fortune Waiting

A fortune awaits the man who will invent a good substitute for leather, says Success. Nobody has yet succeeded in approaching it, unless it be an inventor who has just patented a fabric which he proposes to use, in particular, as a material for the inner soles of shoes and boots, though it may be employed for other purposes. It strongly resembles what is known as "split" sole-leather, but is much cheaper and claims to be superior, being waterproof, as well as stronger.

The manufacturer of this imitation leather uses the fine sole-rolls used upon sole-leather. Hitherto this dust has been a waste product, but the new invention combines it with gum and employs it in this shape to form a coating on one or both sides of canvas or other similar fabric. As it dries, a sprinkling of dry leather-dust is added, and the fabric thus treated is passed between rollers, so as to cause the leather-dust to be firmly imbedded in the fabric and combined with it.

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