

SELECTED QUOTES FROM MATILDA JOSLYN GAGE
Sally Roesch Wagner

WOMEN'S RIGHTS:

And now, at the close of a hundred years... We ask of our rulers, at this hour, no special favors, no special privileges, no special legislation. We ask justice, we ask equality, we ask that all the civil and political rights that belong to citizens of the United States be guaranteed to us and our daughters forever.

Declaration of Rights of Women, 1876

The women of the United States, denied for one hundred years the only means of self-government - the ballot - are political slaves, with greater cause for discontent, rebellion and revolution, than the men of 1776.

For all the shame of those years they would leave one bright remembrance for the women of the next Centennial, in taking a grander step towards freedom than ever before.

Ah, women, I wish I could fill your hearts with a desire for liberty like that which boils in my heart.

Protest at the unveiling of the Statue of Liberty, 1886

“Woman desires freedom in order to become what she has the innate power of becoming.”
-Matilda Joslyn Gage

“Women as human beings have inherent rights to share in all the duties of the world, in all methods of the world's progress, because in these duties, in these methods, lie developing powers.”

While so much is said of the inferior intellect of woman, it is by a strange absurdity conceded that very many eminent men owe their station in life to their mothers.

Let all government cease from off the face of the earth, if we cannot build up a government of equality. A rebel! How glorious the name sounds when applied to woman. Oh, rebellious woman, to you the world looks in hope. Upon you has fallen the glorious task of bringing liberty to the earth and all the inhabitants thereof.

“Women Rebels” May 1880

THE VOTE:

A proper self-respect cannot inhere in any person under governmental control of others.

Thus society is based on this fourfold bondage of woman, [State, church, Capitalist, Home] making liberty and equality for her antagonistic to every organized institution. Where, then, can we rest the level with which to lift one-half of humanity from these depths of degradation but on

“that columbiad of our political life – the ballot – which makes every citizen who holds it a full-armed monitor”?

Twentieth Century, 25 December 1890.

No more momentous hour has arisen in the interest of freedom, for the underlying principles of the republic, its warp and woof alike, is the exact and permanent political equality of every citizen of the nation, whether that citizen is native born or naturalized, white or black, man or woman.

Speech upon the arrest of Susan B. Anthony for voting.

TACTICS:

To those who fancy we are near the end of the battle or that the reformer's path is strewn with roses, we may say them nay. The thick of the fight has just begun; the hottest part of the warfare is yet to come, and those who enter it must be willing to give up father, mother and comforts for its sake. Neither shall we who carry on the fight, reap the great reward. We are battling for the good of those who shall come after us. They, not ourselves, shall enter into the harvest.

Final Editorial, National Citizen and Ballot Box, 1881.

We are not discouraged; we are not disheartened; we shall not stop work; . . . all the committees of both houses, the whole Congress of the United States against us, would not lessen our faith, nor our efforts. We know we are right; we know we shall be successful, we know the day is not far distant, when this government and the world will acknowledge the exact and permanent political equality of man and woman, and we know that until that hour comes, woman will be oppressed, degraded, a slave, without a single right that man feels himself bound to respect.

Work then, women, for your own freedom. Let the early morning see you busy, and the late night find you planning how you may become FREE.

"Wadleigh's Report," The National Citizen and Ballot Box, July 1878.

Protest, petition, write, speak, use all your powers and free yourselves and your daughters from the slavery you are under, for women are neither more nor less than SLAVES. If you do not thus work, you are criminals in the sight of your Maker.

If you do not thus protest, you are unfit for freedom; and you and your daughters must suffer until, from the depths of your degradation, you are made to feel you have souls within you which are your own - until you grow to learn that your accountability is to your Creator and not to man.

We need not expect the concessions demanded by women will be peaceably granted; there will be a long moral warfare before the citadel yields. In the meantime, let us take possession of the outposts.

But as to "aggressiveness," bless your soul, that is the way to carry on a warfare. The party only on the defensive is always liable to leave some open point for the enemy's attack.

When men begin to fear the power of women, their voice and their influence, then we shall secure justice, but not before. When we demonstrate our ability to kill off, or seriously injure a candidate, or hurt a party, then we shall receive "respectful consideration."...We must be recognized as aggressive.

In order to accomplish any reform or work in life the way is to be "up and at 'em," and that is what we intend to do and still to preserve love and respect for our father, our husband, our son and all good men.

"What the Press Say of Us" NCBB, July 1878

All great reforms are gradual. Fear not any attempt to frown down the revolution already commenced; nothing is more fertile aid of reform, than any attempt to check it. Work on!

As the first process toward becoming well is to know you are ill, one of the principle aims of the National Citizen will be to make those women discontented who are now content, to waken them to self-respect and a desire to use the talents they possess, to educate their consciences aright, to quicken their sense of duty, to destroy morbid beliefs and make them worthy of the life with which their Creator has endowed them.

We...must not forget that this country owes its birth to disobedience to law.

I should like to secure my freedom through man's sense of right and justice; through his living up to the fundamental principles of our government; but if I cannot get it that way, I shall work some other way.

"Buying Votes" May 1880

The small pin which holds in place the hands of the clock, is as important to the perfection of the time-piece, as are the wheels, the weights, the pendulum. In fact, without this pin, the other portions of the clock are valueless. The twelve hours upon its face tell us nothing if this simple little pin is missing. So let no woman dare to say of herself or of another, "her work is valueless." We, all of us, are but parts of a grand whole; and the work of each one is needed in her place.

"A World of Work" May 1880

The deepest depth of degradation is reached, when a person who is wronged is insensible of the wrong done him. The most degraded slave of olden time was the one content in his slavery. Whoever would be free, himself must strike the blow. No blow is ever struck until discontent is felt.

There are defeats which mean more than victories in their remote results, and the decisions against woman in all these trials are of that character.

A delegation of Indians called at the White House on New Year's Day. As a sarcasm of justice, on their "Happy New Year" cards were inscribed extracts from various treaties made with them, and disregarded rights guaranteed them in treaty by the Government.

The women of the nation might take hint from the Indians and on July 4th, send to the legislative, judicial and executive bodies, cards inscribed with such sentiments as: Governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed; Taxation without representation is tyranny, and others of like character.

FINANCING THE MOVEMENT:

From those women to whom much has been given, much is expected; from those women to whom little has been given a little is expected; from all we look for something.

HAUDENOSAUNEE:

The division of power between the sexes in this Indian republic was nearly equal...In matters of government...its women exercised controlling power in peace and war...no sale of lands was valid without consent of the women, while the family relation among the Iroquois demonstrated woman's superiority in power...in the home, the wife was absolute...if the Iroquois husband and wife separated, the wife took with her all the property she had brought...the children also accompanied the mother, whose right to them was recognized as supreme...never was justice more perfect, never civilization higher.

That the Indians have been oppressed - are now - is true, but the United States has treaties with them, recognizing them as distinct political communities, and duty towards them demands not an enforced citizenship but a faithful living up to its obligations on the part of the Government.

Our Indians are in reality foreign powers, though living among us. With them our country not only has treaty obligations, but pays them, or professes to, annual sums in consideration of such treaties ...Compelling them to become citizens would be like the forcible annexation of Cuba, Mexico, or Canada to our government, and as unjust.

This council of Indians at Onondaga Castle, in the center of the great Empire State, and the convention of the women of the country at Washington in January - the one protesting against citizenship about to be forced upon them, because with it would come further deprivation of their rights, the other demanding citizenship denied them in order to protect their rights - are two forcible commentaries upon our so-called republican form of government.

RELIGION

With regard to Eve and the authority for her being bound to consult her husband in the relation established by the creation of the first pair, some persons might think the order of creation would imply just the contrary; for as we trace the progress of creation step by step, we perceive that the inferior were first made and each successive thing created, exceeded in rank the preceding one.

Every woman suffragist from the commencement has been bombarded with Paul, knocked on the head by somebody else's interpretation of the Scriptures, and branded as heretical. We are tired of this. We know our rights, and knowing them, we shall dare maintain them. What is still more, we know the facts of history, and we know the present degraded condition of woman

today is due to that interpretation of Scripture, which holds - always has held - that she had no right to live for herself, and to think for herself.

In the old anti-slavery times men did not hesitate to call the American Church the bulwark of American slavery. In like manner to-day we shall proclaim the Church--American, English, Greek, Protestant, Catholic--to be the bulwark of woman's slavery. Man trained by the church from infancy that woman is secondary and inferior to him, made for him, to be obedient to him...it is no subject of astonishment... that woman's political enfranchisement is so long delayed.

It is the church which stamps with religious authority the political and domestic degradation of woman. It is the church which has placed itself in opposition to all efforts looking towards her enfranchisement and it has done this under professed divine authority, and wherever we find laws of the state bearing with greater hardship upon woman than upon man, we shall ever find them due to the teachings of the church.

...The Protestant pulpit is only less dangerous than the Catholic to the liberties of the people in that its organized strength is less. ¹

The Church has opposed every demand of woman for higher opportunities, on the ground of feminine inferiority and secondary creation.

“The Church, Science, and Woman,” 1886.

The church has ever obstructed the progress of humanity, delaying civilization and condemning the world to a moral barbarism from which there is no escape except through repudiation of its teachings.

WCS, 69.

Civilization means a recognition of the rights of others at every point of contact. The church doctrine of woman's created inferiority to man caused the darkness of an age which has not yet realized this.

WCS, 201

The Christian Church is based upon...the theory that woman brought sin and death into the world, and that therefore she was punished by being placed in a condition of inferiority to man - a condition of subjection, of subordination. This is the foundation today of the Christian Church.

I am as much as ever, a believer in the invisible church - but not in this rotten thing known to the world as “the Christian Church.”

It is not religion that has opposed woman suffrage, because true religion believes in un-doing the heavy burdens and letting the oppressed go free. But from the church and from theology this reform has met opposition at every step.

¹ Speech of Matilda Joslyn Gage at the Woman's National Liberal Convention, "Dangers of the Hour", February 24th, 1890.

If religion has a lesson to teach mankind, it is...the absolute equality of each human being with every other human being.

WCS, 111.

The great underlying creative principle is solely and distinctively feminine.

“The Church, Science, and Woman,” 1886.

In all ancient nations we find goddesses seated everywhere with gods, in many instances regarded as superior to them, and of greater influence in the affairs of the universe.

Before it became thus possible to ignore the feminine in creation, God had been robbed of their feminine principle recognized everywhere in Pagandom.

“The Church, Science, and Woman,” 1886.

The Church, having robbed the creative power of its feminine principle, next declared it created in its own image only males.

“The Church, Science, and Woman,” 1886.

As Miss Grew has truly said, it is not religion that has opposed woman suffrage, because true religion believes in undoing the heavy burdens and letting the oppressed go free. But from the church and from theology this reform has met opposition at every step.²

The world is in the midst of a tremendous religious revolution...Man has lost his power over woman, against whose moral and material rights the interpretations of the Bible and the whole force of the church have been directed for nearly 2,000 years.

During the ages, no rebellion has been of like importance with that of Woman against the tyranny of Church and State; none has had its far reaching effects. We note its beginning; its progress will overthrow every existing form of these institutions; its end will be a regenerated world.³

A brighter day is to come for the world, a day when the intuitions of woman's soul shall be accepted as part of humanity's spiritual wealth; when force shall step backward, and love, in reality, rule the teachings of religion.

Creation:

So God, Father-Mother, created man, male and female created He-She.

². *Report of the International Council of Women, assembled by the National Woman Suffrage Association, Washington, D.C., March 25 to April 1, 1888.* Washington, D. C.: National Woman Suffrage Association, 1888, p. 347.

³. WCS, 245-246.

No one has fuller belief in the Great Infinite--or in the invisible church. It is only the hideous deceptive irreligious form that I attack--based as it is--on the belief in woman fall, woman first transgression--woman original sin, which rendered the sacrifice of a Savior necessary. I most fully believe in a good life--,& that is what many Christians do not--and in the law of compensation. I do not believe in a blind belief, or faith without sight. My reason was given me to decide with--I was created a revelation to myself more authoritative to me than any book revelation which must be accepted on faith and upon whose authenticity... there are doubts. ⁴

From Augustine down, theologians have tried to compel people to accept their special interpretation of the Scripture, and the tortures of the inquisition, the rack, the thumb-screw, the stake, the persecutions of witchcraft, the whipping of naked women through the streets of Boston, banishment, trials of heresy, the halter about Garrison's neck, Lovejoy's death, the branding of Captain Walker, shouts of infidel and atheist, have all been for this purpose.

The State, agent and slave of the Church, has so long united with it in suppression of woman's intelligence, has so long preached of power to man alone, that it has created an inherited tendency, an inborn line of thought toward repression. WCS, 53

DEATH

There is one thing I want you to remember first of all: what is called 'death' by people is not death. You are more alive than ever you were after what is called death. Death is only a journey, like going to another country. You are alive when you travel to Aberdeen just as much as when you stay in Edgeley and it is the same with what is called death.

After people have been gone for awhile they come back and live in another body, in another family and have another name. Sometimes they live in another country and nation.

To her grandson, Harry Carpenter, 1897

SLAVERY

"Until liberty is attained--the broadest, the deepest, the highest liberty for all--not one set alone, one clique alone, but for men and women, black and white, Irish, Germans, Americans, and Negroes, there can be no permanent peace."

Civil War Flag Presentation Speech, 1862

ECONOMICS

And with prosperity there may come some temporary abatement of the stress of labor agitation. But it will not wholly cease, because the principal cause of it is a great deal deeper than the immediate depression and collapse. It is the immense and steadily increasing disproportion that exists between the condition of the rich and poor.

"The Church, Science, and Woman," 1886.

⁴ MJG to Harriet Robinson, Robinson Collection, Schlesinger Library, 14 March 1890

If it is not true, as frequently insisted, that the rich are growing richer and the poor are growing poorer all the time, it is true that the rich are growing relatively richer and the poor are growing relatively poorer.

“The Church, Science, and Woman,” 1886.

Where there is so much restlessness and fever, there is surely something wrong. A million men out of employment in the United States for the year 1855! A loss of wages equal to \$300,000,000! Is this the "unexampled prosperity" for which protection is to be praised?

“The Church, Science, and Woman,” 1886.

MARRIAGE:

It is an infringement of individual rights, that either state or church should possess absolute control over this important relation, --one that enters the inmost life of the individual persons contracting it. The parties themselves as chiefly interested, should hold power over its forms.

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS:

My blood always boils at advice from a man in regard to a family. That, at least, should be the province of woman alone. To say when and how often she chooses to go down into the valley of the shadow of death, to give the world another child, should be hers alone to say.⁵

The law of motherhood should be entirely under woman's control, but in order to be that, woman must first of all be held as having a right to herself.

NCBB, Nov. 1878

[The subject] which lies deeper down into woman's wrongs than any other. This is the denial of the right to herself...down through the Christian centuries to this nineteenth, nowhere has the marital union of the sexes been one in which the women has had control over her own body. Enforced motherhood is a crime against the body of the mother and the soul of the child.

The law of motherhood should be entirely under woman's control, but in order to be that, woman must first of all be held as having a right to herself. When society, and especially the church, becomes permeated with the belief that woman was created for herself, and not for man, that she and not man should be the law of the family, when the old Pauline doctrine that neither husband nor wife has control of their own bodies, is done away, when his most diabolical doctrine that woman was made for man, is utterly overthrown, as it must and will be; when each girl born into the world is taught from birth that she, and no other, has a right to her own body; when each boy from birth is taught self-control, self-restraint, and that man has no right to enforce maternity, then "science" will not be asked to step into the domain of justice and inherent right, to settle questions of this nature. Each woman will be a law unto herself and the world. There is no more

⁵ "Persons and Things" by Matilda Joslyn Gage
The National Citizen and Ballot Box, January 1881, p. 2

pernicious doctrine—none more degrading to womanhood, than that now permeating society, as to the necessities of man's nature, "necessities" which call for the sacrifice of woman. We do not believe it—beginning nor end. We do believe—most fully—in the right of woman to herself, and in her right to the control of all such questions.⁶

PEACE:

Among the Iroquois the women had the veto power in war, and Sir Wm. Johnson reports an instance where the Mohawk women forbade the young braves going to battle. But then they were savages and knew no better than to give those who suffer most from the devastations of war a voice in the matter. But an American woman can say nothing. When the men are in humor for a right they exact from her the husband of her youth, or the son who comforts her age, alike. Her consent is not asked, she has no part nor lot in the matter but to suffer. Some men say that women if they held the ballot, would drive the country into war at their will, whereas the fact is we shall never have a peace government until woman has a recognized voice upon the question.

"What the Government Exacts," NCBB, Oct. 1881

THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE:

And who is the God they desire to recognize? Not the united masculine and feminine principle, which at the beginning said, "let us make man in our image, after our likeness." So, in "the image of God created he him, male and female created he them, and called their name Adam."

The National Reform Association wishes to introduce an unknown God into the Constitution, a mere masculine figment of masculine brains,—a divided God, such as men long have worshipped and preached. For ourselves, we believe in the feminine principle in humanity and the feminine principle in the God-head; and that the truest recognition of God, is to do justice to every creature. The great creative, vivifying principle of the God-head, that subtle, most venerated portion of the Trinity, through whose life-giving power Christ was generated,—the Holy Spirit,—is feminine, and the great, unforgiven sin of the ages, is the non-recognition of this feminine principle in the God-head.

"God in the Constitution" Oct. 1881

AGE:

The beautiful women of my acquaintance over fifty years of age, all belong to the suffrage ranks and they number among them women who would grace the court of any monarch in Europe. They have grown old gracefully—they have accepted the compensation that time brings with him. Youth they know to be a season of immaturity—an age when the character is forming, a period when there are few settled convictions. It is a season of the future when one possesses little, but hopes for much. Age brings fruition—age has witnessed the growth of the soul, age has formed character, age has brought out the good in them and they have developed the same as

⁶ "Our Book Table." by Matilda Joslyn Gage
The National Citizen and Ballot Box, November, 1878, p. 2

the fruit develops out of the bud and the blossom. As much as we admire the bud and the blossom, we love the fruit better.

-- Matilda Joslyn Gage, 27 August 1871, San Francisco Pioneer.

MISC:

I am indebted to my father for something better than a collegiate education. He taught me to think for myself, and not to accept the word of any man, or society, or human being, but to fully examine for myself.

True civilization is a recognition of the rights of others at every point of contact, and when this takes place the world will step out of the darkness of heathendom into a full light of a religious and political civilization grander than any of which it has yet dreamed.

"The Foundation of Sovereignty," *The Woman's Tribune*. April 1887.

I am like a river dammed at its source but boiling and raging all the more because of this confinement. Should the dam some day burst, I warn all to stand from under.⁷

Let me hope that I have done a little to rescue her memory from the oblivion to which the historian had consigned her. It is very well to give men their due, but is equally a matter of justice to preserve the names of women pioneers.⁸

The women of to-day are the thoughts of their mothers and grandmothers embodied and made alive. They are active, capable, determined and bound to win. They have a thousand generations back of them. The pressure lies not alone in their own veins and arteries, but the hereditary transmission of qualities is making itself felt. Millions of women dead and gone are speaking through us to-day. If we are false to woman's demands, we are false to the mothers who bore us. The revenges of time lie in our hands.

One may well tremble for the future of America if justice is not speedily done woman. The history of the world teaches us that oppression as certainly destroys the oppressor as it does his victim; our country has more than once had occasion to learn this truth within the period of its existence, but it does not profit by the lessons. Discussion and debate, protests and declarations, have roused the country to a knowledge of woman's wrongs; it now remains for it, in the interest of its own life, to do them away. No outward foe so dangerous to the existence of our nation as that injustice within itself which secretly saps the very principles of liberty; which outwardly proclaiming a republic, is within imbued with the spirit of monarchy. Freedom has not been gained as long as one woman within the boundaries of the United States is deprived of her natural, inherent, inviolable right to self-government.

"The Political Outlook," July 1881

Nothing is so sacred as FREEDOM. If to gain it, the family must be dissevered, the Church laid in the dust, the State torn to fragments, better all this, than slavery—slavery, that sum of all

⁷ MJG to TCG, 17 November 1891, MGC.

⁸ Matilda Joslyn Gage, "Letter from Mrs. Gage," [Onondaga] *Daily Standard*, 18 November 1871.

villainies, within whose vampire grasp, no true family can exist, no true religion have place, no true republic can be built.

“Old Times and New” May 1880

“To judge how much our acts will influence the future, we must look back and see what influence the past had had upon us.”

“Woman is a living growing organism as much as is a tree, and like that tree, she needs room and freedom.”

Woman is a glorious possibility, the youngest-born of God's creatures, the Benjamin of life; the future of the world is hers.

Autograph Book, 21 February 1882

Woman... sees life as never before: - as never before she dares to be herself.

"The Foundation of Sovereignty," The Woman's Tribune. April 1887.

Aside from general historical facts we are thus learning the evolution of morality, finding to our amazement that no absolute standard exists, but morality is relative, depending upon the general condition of society, and what is looked upon as right in one age of the world is regarded as wrong in a preceding or succeeding one.