**Appeal for the Maine Law**

**Mrs. E. C. Stanton**

January 21, 1853

Read by Miss Anthony in the Assembly Chamber:

This is, I believe, the first time in the history of our State, that Woman has come before this Honorable Body to state the legal disabilities under which, as women, we have thus far lived and labored. Though our grievances are many, and our causes of complaint, if set forth, would be as numerous as those made by our forefathers against their King; yet, in behalf of the women of this State, I appeal to you at this time, for the redress of those only, growing out of the legalized traffic in ardent spirits.... [W]e come to propose to you to do for us one of two things--either so remodel your State constitution, that woman may vote on this great political and social evil, and thus relieve herself of the terrible injustice that now oppresses her, or, be in fact what, as men, you now claim to be, her faithful representatives, her legal protectors, her chivalrous knights.

If you wisely choose the first proposition, and thus relieve yourself of the burthen of all special legislation for one million and a half of disenfranchised subjects, giving us equal rights, as citizens, with all "white male citizens," then we have nothing to ask. Our course, under such circumstances, would be clear and simple. We should not long stand gaping into the heavens as our temperance saints now do, voting rum into high places, and then praying it to walk out. But if you still hug the delusion that you can legislate for us far better than we could for ourself, and still insist on looking after our best interests, and protecting us in our sacred rights, at least permit us from time to time, to tell you of our wants and needs....

1st. Then, as our "faithful representatives," we ask you to give us the Maine Law which has been so glorious in those States where it has been fairly tried. Now that we see a door of escape open, from the long line of calamities that intemperance has brought upon the head of woman, we would fain enter in and be at peace. We have long and impatiently waited for you to take some effective action on this abominable traffic, and now, feeling that the time has fully come, we pray you to act promptly and wisely.... But if you are not prepared to give us the Maine Law, and thus suppress this traffic altogether, then, as you love justice, remove from it all protection. Do not legalize it in any way. Let the trade be free and then let all contracts in which rum is involved be null and void. A man cannot come into court with his gambling debts, neither let him with his rum debts for what better is rumselling than gambling, or the rumseller than the gamester? Then, do away with all license laws, and take no cognizance of the monster evil; for what a government licenses, it does not condemn. Now this traffic is either right or wrong. If right, let it be subject to the same laws as all other articles of commerce; if wrong, let those who carry it on be treated as criminals by the government, throwing on them the responsibility of all the pauperism and crime they directly or indirectly produce. . . . . .

But above all we conjure you not to let this session pass, without giving us a law making drunkenness a just cause of divorce. Such a law would be far greater in its permanent results than the Maine Law, even. Suppose we have the Maine Law to day- you have then disposed of all intoxicating drinks; but you have still the animal natures,- the morbid appetite for stimulants and excitement entailed on generation after generation which will work themselves out in some direction. But back up the Maine Law by the more important one on Divorce and you make a permanent reform in so regulating your laws on marriage that the pure and noble of our sex may be sustained by the power of Government in dissolving all union with gross and vicious natures. It would create a strong public sentiment against drunkenness for you to declare, that, in your opinion, it is a crime so enormous, as to furnish just cause for the separation of man and wife....

2d. As our legal protectors, we ask you to release us from taxation. Under the present system, the drunkard's wife is doubly taxed. As she has no right to what she has helped to earn, the rumseller can take all she has for her husband's debts, and leave her to-day, houseless, homeless, and penniless.... Verily, "no just government can be formed but by the consent of the governed." ... You have in your hands the means of self-protection. Not so with us. The law gives to man the right to all he can get, and to what we get too. The new property law protects what we inherit but not what we jointly earn; hence you see how l hopeless is the condition of the drunkards wife.... Seeing that you would consider women voters a terrible scourge on the body politic,- if you would not have us press our claims to the exercise of our right to the elective franchise, see that we have justice at your hands. The women of this State are not satisfied with such representation and protection, as we have had thus far,- and unless our interests can be better looked after, unless you can give us more equable laws- we demand the right to legislate for ourselves.

3d. As our chivalrous knight, ... we only ask, that in your leisure hours, you will duly consider the unjust laws that now disgrace your statute books,- that you will unite with us against our national foe, lntemperance,- that you will lend us your influence to create a healthful public sentiment, that shall deny to drunkards the rights of husbands and fathers, - that shall give the drunkard's wife her property, without taxation, and her children, without fear of molestation. You would fain have women in the retirement of private life;- than protect her in her home. You love to look upon her as a sacred being;- then make her so in her holiest relations.... We, the women of the nineteenth century- your mothers, wives and sisters - ask you to throw around us a shield of defence against social tyranny and civil injustice - against a code of laws unworthy [of] Nero himself, so grievous are they in their bearing upon the poor and helpless of our sex. Alas! that such laws should now bear the sanction of our husbands, sires and sons. Alas! for this proud Republic, if its women, the repository of all that is noble and virtuous in national character, can command no higher honors no purer homage, no juster laws at your hands. '

Elizabeth C. Stanton

Source: THE ELIZABETH CADY STANTON­ SUSAN B. ANTHONY READER Correspondence, Writings, Speeches REVISED EDITION pp 40-43