The mortality of nations

THE MORTALITY OF NATIONS: AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BEFORE THE AMERICAN EQUAL RIGHTS ASSOCIATION, IN NEW YORK, THURSDAY EVENING, MAY 9, 1867. BY PARKER PILLSBURY. NEW YORK: ROBERT J. JOHNSTON, PRINTER, 33 BEEKMAN STREET. 1867.

THE MORTALITY OF NATIONS.

Among nations, have arisen Franklins and Washingtons, Humboldts and Howards; and these have had their archetypes in the saints and sages, the philosophers and philanthropists of ancient times. But what individual nation of any period, has been the Plato or Pythagoras, the Howard or the Humboldt, the Franklin or Washington of all the rest? or has achieved proportionally, so long a life? or expired at last in sunsets of serenity and glory, and been embalmed and enshrined in the tears and gratitude of mankind? It is often said that the life of a nation is as the life of an individual; with beginning, progress, decay and dissolution. But the resemblance holds only in part. Consciousness comes to an individual, and self-respect; and from that hour growth and greatness (it may be) begin.

But with nations it is not so. Consciousness and self-respect seem not to pertain to mind in masses, more than to matter. Both may become avalanches, sweeping all before them. The world has not made the same demand of nations as of individuals, and so nothing is expected of them. Nations, hitherto, are badly brought up; have had indeed no bringing up. As yet they can be called but the primeval forests of civilization. In the light of a thousand years hence, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries will be “darker ages” than the eighth and ninth are to-day.

Accepting three score and ten as the common life of an individual, a degree at least of honorable manhood is often achieved, both in personal virtues, and in noble performance.

The canticles of the Almanac used to run, “At ten, a child; at twenty, wild; At thirty, strong, if ever; At forty, wise; at fifty, rich; At sixty, good, or never.” But at what age has any nation of any period or place become wise rich, or even strong; to say nothing of good?

The Roman Catholic Church is older than any civilized government on the globe. Lord Macaulay says, “It is the only institution left standing which carries the mind back to the time when the smoke of sacrifice rose from the Pantheon, and when tigers and camel-leopards 4 bounded in the Flavian Amphitheatre. The proudest royal houses are but of yesterday, compared with the line of the supreme Pontiffs, traced back in unbroken series, from the Pops who crowned Napoleon in the nineteenth century, to the Pope who crowned Pepin in the eight; and far beyond stretches
the august dynasty, until it fades into the twilight of fable! She saw the commencement of all
governments on the globe, and of all the ecclesiastical establishments now existing; and there is no
assurance that she is not destined to see the end of them all!"

The world has an accepted chronology of six thousand years. Its history and experience in
government reach back forty centuries.

It would be an interesting inquiry with what results governments have existed so long, especially in
the later periods and among the most enlightened of the nations.

Germany in the former and Spain in the latter portion of the sixteenth century almost ruled the
world. Charles the Fifth boasted that his empire saw no setting sun. It includes Spain and all her vast
American provinces, over large part of which to-day wave our own Stars and Stripes.

The national escutcheon bore two globes; and the coin, the two Pillars of Hercules, the then
acknowledged boundary of the Eastern world, with the motto “More beyond.”

Spain, too, under Phillip Second, dictated law, learning and religion, especially religion, to unknown
millions, not alone in Europe, but in North and South America, Africa and all the Indies. And now in
the centre of Europe proper, and remote in its south-western corner, are all that remain there of
these two mighty powers of the sixteenth century; figured most appropriately, on the map of the
world they once ruled, as two little splashers of blood.

France in the eight century under Charlemagne, was another mistress of the globe. And
Charlemagne was crowned by the Pope, “Sovereign of the New Empire of the West.” Distant princes
and potentates came to do him homage, like the Queen of Sheba to the court of King Solomon.
And yet, in less than fifty years, all the mountain of magnificence exploded; and many rival nations
sprang from its lava streams of blood and ashes!

A remnant, too, of France was preserved; and its history for almost eight hundred years, “may be
traced, like the tracks of a wounded man, through a crowd, by the blood;” until it culminated in
French revolution (“suicide of the eighteenth century,” as Carlyle calls that terrible phenomenon) and
Napoleon Bonaparte!

And he also summoned to his coronation the Roman Pontiff, like his great predecessor of a
thousand years before. And beneath the solemn arches and arcades of Notre Dame, was crowned
by Pope Pius the Seventh— “The high and mighty Napoleon, the First Emperor of the French!”
Plunging remorselessly into the most wars, he soon astonished the civilized world his successes. He made himself master of almost half the globe, and the terror of all the rest. He gave kingdoms to his four brothers, like baubles, his own vast possessions not feeling their loss. The earthquake that shook down Lisbon and entombed it forever, boiled the whole Atlantic like a cauldron, and stirred the waters of Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence as bubbling springs. So, too, the reign of Napoleon was an earthquake, which, for fifteen years, shook the sea and the land, carrying down unnumbered Lisbons and innumerable human lives in the general cataclysm.

But he sunk at last! No triumph like his could be long. No such meteor ever flew its moment across the skies. He aspired to the very heaven of heavens in his ambitions; and his conquests were the wonder and terror of mankind. But he left France smaller, weaker, poorer and more debased and depraved than he found her. Was it not well sung of him at his overthrow, “Since he, miscalled the Morning Star, Nor man nor fiend hath fallen so far!”

Of the later France—especially of its present condition, social and moral, as well as political—enough is well known to subserve all the purposes of this discussion.

Just eight hundred years ago last September, William the Norman landed in Britain and commenced its subjugation. Since that period, the history of Great Britain has not differed materially from that of other European nations. As the sun is said never to set on the British domain, so the thunder of its war-guns has reverberated almost continually in some corner of the globe.

To trace her history, however rapidly, even had we time, could give no pleasure to this audience, and would add nothing to my present argument. It is sufficient to say that, with real estate almost immeasurable, with personal property incalculable, with a wealth of material resources of every conceivable description, absolutely unknown and unknowable, she yet contrives to support her costly establishment by a system of oppressive taxation almost unparalleled in the annals of the human race.

Some of you must remember the graphic but not exaggerated description of British taxation given by Sydney Smith in the *Edinburg Review*. It was almost fifty years ago; but no less revenue must be raised in some way, still. He said:

“We have taxes upon everything which enters into the mouth, or covers the back, or is placed under the feet; taxes upon everything which it is pleasant to see, hear, feel, smell or taste; taxes upon warmth, light and locomotion; taxes on everything on earth, and in the waters under the earth; taxes on everything that comes from abroad, or is grown at home; taxes on the raw material, taxes on every fresh value added to it by the industry of man; taxes 6 on the sauces which pamper man's
appetite, and the drugs that restore him to health; taxes on the ermine which decorates the judge, and on the rope which hangs the criminal; on the poor man's salt and the rich man's spice; on the ribbons of the bride, on the shroud of the corpse and the brass nails of the coffin. The school-boy whips his taxed top; the beardless youth rides his taxed horse, with a taxed saddle and bridle, on a taxed road; and the dying Englishman, pouring his medicine, which has paid seven per cent, into a spoon that has paid fifteen per cent., flings himself back upon his chintz-bed, which has paid twenty-two per cent., and expires in the arms of apothecary who has paid a license of a hundred pounds for the privilege of putting him to death. His whole property is them immediate taxed from two to ten per cent. Besides the probate, large fees are demanded for burying him in the chancel. His virtues are then handed down to posterity on taxed marble, end he is gathered to his fathers, to be taxed no more!"

And we are told, what is doubtless true, that the enormous debt of Great Britain is the chain that binds its many parts together, and preserves its nationality. No nation, then, ever maintained a more precarious existence. Chartism in Scotland, Repeal in Ireland, Trades Strikes everywhere, East India Wars, Irish Famines, Fenianism, Reform Leagues, Reform Riots, Bread Riots—all these attest how volcanic is its under stratum, and what dangers impend above.

In some of the gloomy gorges of the Alps, there are seasons of the year when no traveller passes but at the expense of life, on account of the terrible “thunderbolts of snow” that hand suspended on the sides or summits of the mountains. None can know their hour; but descend they must, by all the laws of gravitation, with resistless energy, sweeping all before them. At such times, all who pass creep along with trembling caution. They move in single file, at distance from each other, hurrying fast as possible, with velvet step, avoiding all noise, even whispers—the guides meanwhile muffling the bells of the mules, lest the slightest vibration communicated to the air should untie the tremulous mass overhead and entomb them forever.

Great Britain, with her frightful debt, her terrible taxation, her dissatisfied, restless, beggared myriads of the lower working classes, her remorseless aristocracy, her bloated spirit of caste, her enforced but heartless religion, has hung a more terrible avalanche over her head than ever leaped down the heights of the Tyrol.

Such are examples of success or failure in attempts at government, among the proudest and most prosperous nations of the Old World, in modern and what are called enlightened times.

If seventy years be the life of a man, what should be the life of a nation? Half the children born, die under five years old. But proportionally a greater mortality prevails among nations and
governments. Not one nation has ever yet attained an honorable manhood. There is something rotten in the state of every Denmark.

Will you tell me Democracy, Republican, consecrated by Christianity, is the remedy for all these ills? Let us look, then, at the best example.

Our own nation is not yet a hundred years old, but it had behind it in the beginning, the chronicles of forty or sixty centuries, written mostly in tears and blood. At the end of an eight years' revolutionary war, our new governmental columns were reared, not, like some pagan temples, on human skulls, but on the imbruted bodies and extinguished souls of five hundred thousand chattel slaves. We had our Declaration of Independence, our war of Revolution, and a new Constitution and code of laws. We had a Washington for our first President, a John Jay for Chief-Justice of the Supreme Court, and a constellation of senators, statesmen and sages who challenged the respect and admiration of mankind. We closed that dispensation with James Buchanan as Chief Magistrate, and Roger B. Taney as Chief-Justice, with his diabolical Dred Scott Decision, and with a war of Treason and Rebellion which deluged the land in the blood of more than half a million of men. We had multiplied our slaves to four millions, with new cruelties and horrors added to the system, and at least ten generations of them were lost in unknown graves. The new Republican President pledged his official word and honor to the rebels already in arms, that, would they but return to their allegiance, he would favor amendments to the Constitution that should not only render slave property more secure than ever before, but also make all its old guarantees and safeguards, Fugitive Slave law and all, forever “irrevocable” by any act or decree of Congress!

So were we endeavoring to bulwark and balustrade our slave-system about, in the name of a Christian Republicanism, when it was struck by the lightnings of a righteous retribution, and the world is rid of it forever.

And our old nationality went down in the ruin. Now we are divided, distracted, deranged in currency, commerce, diplomacy, with State and Federal liabilities resting on the people, the producing people, amounting to not less than six thousand millions of dollars, not to speak of current expenditures which are also appalling; with a President whose weakness finds no parallel but in his wickedness, with a Secretary of State who has become his full counterpart in both, and a Senate too cowardly, or too corrupt, to impeach the one or to seek the removal of the other!

For more than two years we have been attempting to restore the fragments of our once boasted Union. With the history and experience of forty centuries shining back upon us, so far we have failed.
And under any existing or proposed policy we shall fail. By all the claims of justice and righteousness, we deserved to fail; for we are still defying those claims.

The son of Priam, a priest of Apollo, was commissioned to offer a sacrifice to propitiate the god of the sea. But the offering not being acceptable, there came up two enormous serpents from the deep and 8 attacked the priest and his two sons who stood with him at the altar. The father attempted to defend his sons; but the serpents falling upon him, enfolded him and them in their complicated coils, and strangled them to a terrible death. Let this governmental beware. The very union proposed will only bind and hold us together as in the deadly folds of a serpent more fearful than all the fabled monsters of the past! And so, hitherto, republics are no exception to the general law. Rickets in infancy, convulsions in childhood, or premature rheumatisms, have brought the nations of history to untimely deaths.

Material interests may flourish, and nations grow great and powerful, make wars and conquests, and rule the world. The ancients did all this, but where are those haughty omnipotences now? Charlemagne did but little less, and in half a century his magnificence was brought to nought. Germany and Spain survived a little longer in their glory and grandeur; but now the scanty blood-splash on the map describes them well.

The United States, young among the nations, the mother earth six thousand years old at their birth, wet-nursed by forty centuries of history, and schooled by all the experience of the ages, with almost half a globe for their inheritance, with Christianity their faith and Republicanism their form of government, they survived a precocious childhood and then fell a victim to their own vices and crimes. To-day they are in the hands of many physicians, though of doubtful reputation, who seem far less desirous to cure the patient than to divide and share the estate.

My main point is this—we have had enough of the past in government. It is time to change. Literally almost, more than metaphorically, the “times are rotten ripe.” We come to-day to demand—first an extension of the right of suffrage to every American citizen, of whatever race, complexion or sex.

Manhood or make -hood suffrage is not a remedy for evils such as we wish removed. The Anti-Slavery Society demands that; and so, too, do large numbers of both the political parties. Even Andrew Johnson at first recommended it, in the reconstruction of the rebel States, for three classes of colored men. The New York Herald, in the exuberance of its religious zeal, demanded that “members of Christian Churches” be added as a fourth estate to the three designated by the President.
The Woman's Rights Society contemplated suffrage only for woman. But we, as an Equal Rights Association, recognize no distinctions based on sex, complexion or race. The Ten Commandments know nothing of any such distinctions. No more do we.

The right of suffrage is as old, as sacred and as universal as the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It is indeed the complement and safeguard of these and all civil and political rights to every citizen. The right to life would be nothing without the right to acquired and possess the means of its support. So it were mockery to talk of liberty and the pursuit of happiness, until the ballot in the hand of every citizen seals and secures it.

The right of the black man to a voice in the government was not earned at Olustee or Port Hudson. It was his when like began, not when life was paid for it under the battle-axe of war. It was his with Washington and Jefferson, James Buchanan and Abraham Lincoln. Not one of them could ever produce a higher, boiler claim. Not can any of us.

We are prating about giving right of suffrage to black male citizens, as complacently as we once gave our compassion and corn to famishing Ireland. But this famine of freedom and justice exists because we have produced it. Had our fleets and armies robbed Ireland of its last loaf, and left its myriads of inhabitants lean, ghastly skeletons, our charity would not have been more a mockery when we sent them bread to preserve them alive, than it is now when we talk of giving the ballot to those whom God created free and equal with ourselves.

And in the plenitude of our generosity, we even propose to extend the gift to woman also. It is proposed to make educated, cultivated, refined, loyal, tax-paying, government-obeying woman equal to the servants who groom her horses, and scour the pots and pans of her kitchen. Unfortunate beings, without property, and scarcely knowing the English tongue, or any other, are entreated to grant to women, the superior of all the queens of the old world, the right to cooperate with them in the affairs of State. Women here in New York worth thousands and hundreds of thousands in gold, and whose money is the meanest part of their real value in society, are humbly petitioning their coachmen, their footmen and gardeners, the discharged State-prison convicts, the idiots and lunatics, all of whom may and often do exercise the right of the ballot, to permit them also to share with them in making and executing the laws.

Our Maria Mitchells, our Harriet Hosmers, Harriet Beecher Stowes, Lydia Maria Childs, and Lucretia Motts, with millions of the mothers and matrons of quiet homes, where they preside with queenly dignity and grace, are begging of besotted, debauched white male citizens, legal voters, soaked in
whiskey, simmered in tobacco, and parboiled in every shameless vice and sin, to recognize them also as human, and graciously accord to them the rights of intelligent beings!

And, singularly enough, in some of the States, it is proposed to grant the prayer. But the wisest and best men have no idea that they are only restoring what they have so long held by force, based on fraud and falsehood. They only propose to give woman the boon which they claim was theirs by heavily inheritance. But they are too late with their sublime generosity. For God gave that when he gave life and breath, passions, emotions, conscience and will. Give gold, give lands, give honors, give office, give title of nobility, if you must; 10 but talk not of giving natural, inalienable and heaven-derived endowments. God alone bestows these. He alone has them to give.

Our trade in right of suffrage is contraband. It is bold buccaneering on the commerce of the moral universe. If we have our neighbor's right of suffrage and citizenship in our keeping, no matter of what color, or race, or sex, then we have stolen goods in our possession; and God's search-warrant will pursue us forever, if those goods be not restored.

And then we impudently assert that “all just governments derive their powers from the consent of the governed.” But when was the consent of woman ever asked to one single act on all the statute books?

We talk of “trial by jury of our peers!” In this country of ours, women have been fined, imprisoned, scourged, branded with red hot irons and hung; but when, or where, or for what crime or offence, was ever woman tried by a jury of her peers?

Suffrage was never in the hands of tyrants or of governments, but by usurpation. It was never given by them to any of us. We brought it; not bought it; nor conquered it; not begged it; nor earned it; nor inherited it. It was man's inalienable, irrepealable, inextinguishable right from the beginning. It is so still; the same yesterday, to-day and while earthly governments last.

It came with the right to see and hear; to breathe and speak; to think and feel; to love and hate; to choose and refuse; or it did not come at all.

The right to see came with the eye and the light; did it not? and the right to breathe, with the lungs and the air; and all these from the same infinite source.

And has not also the moral and spiritual nature its inalienable rights? Have the mere bodily organs, which are but the larder of worms, born of the dust, and dust their destiny—have they power
and prerogative that are denied to the reason, the understanding, the conscience, the will, those attributes which constitute responsibility, accountability and immortality?

Or shall God give the power to choose, or refuse obedience to his law and reign, leaving the human will free as his own; and must mortal man, the mushroom of yesterday and perished to-morrow, usurp a higher and more dreadful prerogative, and compel support of and submission to laws in which the subject has no voice in making, executing or even consenting, on pain of perpetual imprisonment, banishment or death?

Must a brave soldier fight and bleed for the government, and, pruned of limbs, plucked of eyes, and scarred all over with the lead and iron hail of war—must he now hobble on his crutches up to a Republican, Democratic, yes, and a Christian throne, and beg the boon of a ballot in that government, in defence of which he perilled all, and lost all but bare life and breath, only because an African instead of a more indulgent 11 can looked upon him or his ancestors in their allotment of life? And then, when the claim of immortal manhood is superadded, the inalienable rights of the soul, in and of themselves, the rights of the reason, the understanding, the conscience, the will—what desperation is that which treads down all these claims, and rushes into seats of higher authority than were ever claimed by the eternal God, and denies him that right altogether!

No white male citizen was ever born with three ballots in his hand, one his own by birthright, and to be used without restraint, the others to be granted, given to women and to colored men at his pleasure or convenience! Such an idea should never have outraged our common humanity. And any bill or proposal for what is called "manhood suffrage" while it ignores womanhood suffrage, whether coming from the President or the Republican party and sanctioned by the Anti-Slavery Society, should be repudiated as at war with the whole spirit and genius of a true Democracy, and a deadly stab into the very heart of justice itself.

I have referred to the age of the Roman Catholic Church. Lord Macanlay, in accounting for her astonishing longevity as compared with other institutions, turns with felicitous insight to female influence as one of the principal causes.

In her system, he says, she assigns to devout women spiritual functions, dignities, and even magistracies. In England, if a pious and benevolent woman enter the cells of a prison to pray with the most unhappy and degraded of her sex, she does so without any authority from the Church. Indeed, the Protestant Church places the ban of its reprobation on any such irregularity. “At Rome, the Countess of Huntington would have a place in the Calendar as St. Selina, and Mrs. Fry would be Foundress and First Superior of the Blessed Order of Sisters of the Jails.”
But even Macaulay overlooks another element of power and permanence in the economy of the Catholic Church. God, as Father, and as Son, and as Holy Ghost, might inspire reverence and dread only, in hearts that, at the shrine of the ever blessed Mary, Mother of God, would kindle into humble, holy and lasting love.

Frances Power Cobbe, though deprecating the doctrine of “Mariolatry,” as she terms the worship of the Virgin, yet says of it, “The Catholic world has found a great truth, that love, motherly tenderness and pity is a divine and holy thing, worthy of adoration. * * * * What does this wide-spread sentiment regarding this new divinity indicate? It can surely only point to the fact that there was something lacking in the elder creed, which, as time went on, became a more and more sensible deficiency, till at last the instinct of the multitude filled it up in this amazing manner.”

When Theodore Parker, in his morning prayer on a beautiful summer Sunday, addressed the All-loving as “Our Father and our Mother,” he struck a chord which will one day vibrate through the heart of universal humanity. It was a thought worth infinitely more than all the creeds of Christendom.

What if woman should even *abuse* the use of the ballot at first? Man has been known to fail at first in a new pursuit. A maker of microscopes told me that, in a new attempt on a different kind of object-glass, he failed forty-nine times, but the fiftieth was a complete success.

The Poet of Scotland intimates that even Creative Nature herself improved at a second trial: “Her ‘prentice hand she tried on man; And then she made the lasses, o’”

Woman might not vote wisely the first time. She might even reelect John Morrissey to Congress though Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Horace Greeley were both in the field a candidates. Politics sometimes make strange *revelations*, as well as strange bed-fellows.

From of old it was seen and said “it is not good for man to be alone;” the first social sentiment ever uttered, and clearly a divine inspiration. Not a Church in Christendom would survive, made up of male membership alone. It would soon lapse into a hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.

The angles in Heaven might not Lave rebelled, had both sexes made up the population. At least we hear of no *more* discords there, since Eve and her myriads of daughters are swelling the songs and refining the joys.
Must we be told that woman herself does not ask the ballot! Then I submit to such, if such there be, the question is not one of privilege, but of duty—of solemn responsibility. If woman does not desire the ballot, demand it, take it, she sins against her own nature and all the holiest instincts of humanity, and cannot too soon repeat.

After all, the question of suffrage is one of justice and right. Unless human agreement be in itself an unnatural and impious usurpation, whoever renders it support and submission, has a natural and inalienable, imperishable and inextinguishable right, to an equal voice in enacting and executing the laws. Nor can one man, or millions on millions of men acquire or possess the power to withhold that right from the humblest human being of sane mind, but by usurpation, and by rebellion against the constitution of the moral universe. It would be robbery, though the giving of the right should induce all the predicted and dreaded evils of tyrants, cowards and white male citizens.

Be justice done though the heavens fall, and the hells arise instead! Nay, it is only justice, reared as a lightning rod, that can shield any governmental fabric when the very heavens are falling in righteous retribution.

The past mortality must last among nations, so long as they set at nought the Divine economy and purpose in their formation. The human body may yield to decay and die, though the soul be imperishable and eternal. But nations, like souls, need not die. Streams of new life flow into them, like rivers into the sea; and why should not the sea and the nations on its shores, roll on together with the ages?

When governments shall learn to lay their foundations in righteousness, with eternal justice the chief corner-stone; when equal and impartial liberty shall be the acknowledged birthright of all, then will national life begin to be prolonged; and the death of a nation, were it possible, should be as though more than a Pleiad had expired. No more would nation then lift up sword against nation; and the New Jerusalem would indeed descend from God out of heaven and dwell among men.

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In the character of Elsie Magoon, I have endeavored to portray a true woman, filling her place as wife, mother, and member of society. Such wives and mothers are the great need of the age.—

Preface.

Orders should be sent to MARY E. GAGE, American Equal Rights Association, No. 57 Park Row, (Room 17,) New York.