

Rectory, Lime Rock
August 31, 1889

E.D. Goodwin, Esq: -

My dear Sir,

I thank you very heartily for your kind, friendly letter, and for the pamphlet accompanying it. Your thoughtful mind presents many suggestions well worthy of consideration, and stimulating to other minds. Your warm advocacy of Woman Suffrage is as sensible as it is gallant, although I fail to see how this suffrage, if obtained, would be a panacea for all our woes, political, social and moral.

Woman undoubtedly is entitled to the same legal rights enjoyed by man, and she can have them in this country the moment she claims them. It is true a few women clamor loudly for them, and for years have been trying to persuade their sisters to clamor also: but is likewise true that the great sisterhood is indifferent and cannot be stirred to action. Woman does not desire political recognition ; willing perhaps to accept it, she is not sufficiently interested to ask it.

Woman suffrage would be an unqualified blessing if all women were like those of your household and mine, intelligent, conscientious, and patriotic, and would make it a matter of duty to avail themselves of the political rights and privileges conferred upon them.

Why has New York City so often suffered from bad government? Why have Tweedism and boodleism and other forms of corruption so mightily prevailed? Simply because, we are told, good citizens do not take interest enough to go to the polls: they do not like to soil their fine linen by contact with the foul habiliments of the rabble: and so the elections often go by default, the vote of the more responsible and respectable classes being meagre (sic), while that of the irresponsible and lawless is brought out in all its fulness (sic). As in New York, so also, although perhaps in less degree, elsewhere.

If man thus instinctively recoils from the vulgar jostlings (sic) of the primary meetings, the riotous or the cleverly strategic proceedings of the caucus and the convention, and disagreeable associations at the polls, how will it be with more sensitive and delicate woman? Be assured a wife beater never staid (sic) away from the polls, nor a saloon keeper nor a thief, nor a burglar who is foolish enough to enter a parson's house in expectation of getting anything more valuable than a lot of old sermons which have failed to have much effect on others, and are likely to have no effect on him. Be assured also that when the caucus, the convention, and the polls are open to women, the bold, brazen-faced, the evil minded and the selfishly ambitious will be there in overpowering numbers. The good, the honest, and the uncorrupt will be there also, but numerically they will be a feeble representation of the high minded and true sisterhood.

My opinion is that little is to be expected of purification of politics from the influence of female suffrage. The muddy pool which ought to be clear as crystal, for politics may be highly honorable, will be muddy still.

One great want is the better education of masses in the principles of morality. Our public school system, the only system available to nine tenths of the people, is singularly defective in this regard. It may develop the intellect, and impart knowledge, but it does not cultivate the heart and elevate the soul. It does little towards making men and women honest and honorable, pure and patriotic. It stuffs young brains with geography and grammar, and leaves them to learn where and when they can, the value of moral worth, social virtues and domestic graces. It does not make the soul pure, and sweet and strong. It teaches that Washington was the first president and John Quincy Adams was the sixth, but it does not teach that "righteousness exalteth a nation, and sin is a reproach to any people". It fails to inculcate the truth taught by the old heathen Horace, "Unless your cask is clean, whatsoever you pour into it, turns sour".

But as I must sermonize tomorrow, I must bring my discourse with you today to a close. Again I thank you for the favor of your communication, and for the assurance of your friendship, which is most precious to me.

I have always been deeply interested in you. The patience with which you bore your long and painful illness, and the fortitude with which you bear your present affliction, have won my admiration and regard, and I cannot fail to appreciate the integrity of your life, the faithfulness with which you have developed your mental faculties, and the purity of your aspirations. You seem to me like one who is constantly searching after the bright truth, as the anemone constantly turns toward the sun. They that seek shall find. You are not far from the kingdom of God. You are on the threshold of that kingdom. Why not enter it? You will not find the truth in its fullness in your delvings in natural philosophy and natural religion. Your restless spirit will not find rest in theorizing about the equalizing forces of nature, in studying the problems of true statesmanship, and in criticizing the shortcomings of the Christian church. The church has often erred: Christian disciples are altogether too unworthy: the precepts of Jesus have rarely found full embodiment and illustration in religious organization, or in individual spiritual life. You may demur at the amplification of Christianity in the historic church, and in the private experience of its adherents, but you cannot demur at the heavenly spirit and the saving instruction of Him who loved you and gave Himself for you. You may justly pronounce the church imperfect and each Christian imperfect, but you know full well that the Christ whom we so unworthily follow is perfect, and the truth He teaches is a divine revelation. Accept then the Teacher and the Truth, even though the whole body of believers, and each believer may seem to you faulty and faithless. You are weary and heavy laden with a sense of sin and the suffering of sickness. Why not heed the invitation of Him who says, "Come unto Me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest?" (sic)

Yours affectionately,

Richard F. Putnam