

## Anna Howard Shaw, "The Story of a Pioneer" (1915)

In this excerpt from her autobiography, women's rights pioneer Anna Howard Shaw described the beginning of her involvement in "the great cause" of women's suffrage and women's rights. Shaw was born in 1847 and died in 1919. She served as a minister at various times in her life and received a diploma from Boston University Medical School in 1885. Around that time, she devoted herself to social work and lecturing on women's suffrage. Encouraged by Susan B. Anthony, she became involved in the National Woman Suffrage Association and in 1905 became president of the organization. In this excerpt, she captured the fierce passions that women's suffrage excited in both men and women.

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The story of a pioneer, by Anna Howard Shaw ... with the collaboration of Elizabeth Jordan;

... All is changed on Cape Cod since those days, thirty years ago. The old families have died or moved away, and those who replaced them were of a different type. I am happy in having known and loved the Cape as it was, and in having gathered there a store of delightful memories. In later strenuous years it has rested me merely to think of the place, and long afterward I showed my continued love of it by building a home there, which I still possess. But I had little time to rest in this or in my Moylan home, of which I shall write later, for now I was back in Boston, living my new life, and each crowded hour brought me more to do.

We were entering upon a deeply significant period. For the first time women were going into industrial competition with men, and already men were intensely resenting their presence. Around me I saw women overworked and underpaid, doing men's work at half men's wages, not because their work was inferior, but because they were women. Again, too, I studied the obtrusive problems of the poor and of the women of the streets; and, looking at the whole social situation from every angle, I could find but one solution for women--the removal of the stigma of disfranchisement. As man's equal before the law, woman could demand her rights, asking favors from no one. With all my heart I joined in the crusade of the men and women who were fighting for her. My real work had begun.

Naturally, at this period, I frequently met the members of Boston's most inspiring group--the Emersons and John Greenleaf Whittier, James Freeman Clark, Reverend Minot Savage, Bronson Alcott and his daughter Louisa, Wendell Phillips, William Lloyd Garrison, Stephen Foster, Theodore Weld, and the rest. Of them all, my favorite was Whittier. He had been present at my graduation from the theological school, and now he often attended our suffrage meetings. He was already an old man, nearing the end of his life; and I recall him as singularly tall and thin, almost gaunt, bending forward as he talked, and wearing an expression of great serenity and benignity. I once told Susan B. Anthony that if I needed help in a crowd of strangers that included her, I would immediately turn to her, knowing from her face that, whatever I had done, she would understand and assist me. I could have offered the same tribute to Whittier. At our meetings he was like a vesper-bell chiming above a battle-field. Garrison always became excited during our discussions, and the others frequently did; but Whittier, in whose big heart the love of his fellow-man burned as unquenchably as in any heart there, always preserved his exquisite tranquillity.

Once, I remember, Stephen Foster insisted on having the word "tyranny" put into a resolution, stating that women were deprived of suffrage by the *tyranny* of men. Mr. Garrison objected, and the debate that followed was the most exciting I have ever heard. The combatants actually had to adjourn before they could calm down sufficiently to go on with their meeting. Knowing the stimulating atmosphere to which he had grown accustomed, I was not surprised to have Theodore Weld explain to me, long afterward, why he no longer attended suffrage meetings.

"Oh," he said, "why should I go? There hasn't been any one mobbed in twenty years!"

The Ralph Waldo Emersons occasionally attended our meetings, and Mr. Emerson, at first opposed to woman suffrage, became a convert to it during the last years of his life--a fact his son and daughter omitted to mention in his biography. After his death I gave two suffrage lectures in Concord, and each time Mrs. Emerson paid for the hall. At these lectures Louisa M. Alcott graced the assembly with her splendid, wholesome presence, and on both occasions she was surrounded by a group of boys. She frankly cared much more for boys than for girls, and boys inevitably gravitated to her whenever she entered a place where they were. When women were given school suffrage in Massachusetts, Miss Alcott was the first woman to vote in Concord, and she went to the polls accompanied by a group of her boys, all ardently "for the Cause." My general impression of her was that of a fresh breeze blowing over wide moors. She was as different as possible from exquisite little Mrs. Emerson, who, in her daintiness and quiet charm, suggested an old New England garden.

Of Abby May and Edna Cheney I retain a general impression of "bagginess"--of loose jackets over loose waistbands, of escaping locks of hair, of bodies seemingly one size from the neck down. Both women were utterly indifferent to the details of their appearance, but they were splendid workers and leading spirits in the New England Woman's Club. It was said to be the trouble between Abby May and Kate Gannett Wells, both of whom stood for the presidency of the club, that led to the beginning of the anti-suffrage movement in Boston. Abby May was elected president, and all the suffragists voted for her. Subsequently Kate Gannett Wells began her anti-suffrage campaign. Mrs. Wells was the first anti-suffragist I ever knew in this country. Before her there had been Mrs. Dahlgren, wife of Admiral Dahlgren, and Mrs. William Tecumseh Sherman. On one occasion Elizabeth Cady Stanton challenged Mrs. Dahlgren to a debate on woman suffrage, and in the light of later events Mrs. Dahlgren's reply is amusing. She declined the challenge, explaining that for anti-suffragists to appear upon a public platform would be a direct violation of the principle for which they stood--which was the protection of female modesty! Recalling this, and the present hectic activity of the anti-suffragists, one must feel that they have either abandoned their principle or widened their views.

For Julia Ward Howe I had an immense admiration;

but, though from first to last I saw much of her, I never felt that I really knew her. She was a woman of the widest culture, interested in every progressive movement. With all her big heart she tried to be a democrat, but she was an aristocrat to the very core of her, and, despite her wonderful work for others, she lived in a splendid isolation. Once when I called on her I found her resting her mind by reading Greek, and she laughingly admitted that she was using a Latin

pony, adding that she was growing "rusty." She seemed a little embarrassed by being caught with the pony, but she must have been reassured by my cheerful confession that if *I* tried to read either Latin or Greek I should need an English pony.

Of Frances E. Willard, who frequently came to Boston, I saw a great deal, and we soon became closely associated in our work. Early in our friendship, and at Miss Willard's suggestion, we made a compact that once a week each of us would point out to the other her most serious faults, and thereby help her to remedy them; but we were both too sane to do anything of the kind, and the project soon died a natural death. The nearest I ever came to carrying it out was in warning Miss Willard that she was constantly defying all the laws of personal hygiene. She never rested, rarely seemed to sleep, and had to be reminded at the table that she was there for the purpose of eating food. She was always absorbed in some great interest, and oblivious to anything else. I never knew a woman who could grip an audience and carry it with her as she could. She was intensely emotional, and swayed others by their emotions rather than by logic; yet she was the least conscious of her physical existence of any one I ever knew, with the exception of Susan B. Anthony. Like "Aunt Susan," Miss Willard paid no heed to cold or heat or hunger, to privation or fatigue. In their relations to such trifles both women were disembodied spirits.

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