FEMALE SEMINARY AT WASHINGTON

William Henry Egle, An Illustrated History of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
(Harrisburg, 1879) 478
ON NOVEMBER 5, 1865, William Lloyd Garrison wrote to his wife from Meadville, Pennsylvania: “I got acquainted with Senator Lowrie, at Erie, a man of large wealth, a most radical abolitionist, and reminded me alike of Gerrit Smith and Charles Sumner, both in his looks and manners.”1 Garrison was referring to Morrow B. Lowry, state senator from Crawford County. Unfortunately, Senator Lowry has remained a neglected figure in Pennsylvania history. Only a few works mention him. Erwin Stanley Bradley in The Triumph of Militant Republicanism: A Study of Pennsylvania and Presidential Politics 1860-1872 gave him just a few lines. Bradley said: “He was known widely for his charitable work on behalf of orphans and abandoned children.”2 These were worthy endeavors, to be sure, but hardly ones to cause Garrison to refer to Lowry as “a most radical abolitionist.”

Philadelphia blacks would have agreed with Garrison, for Lowry was their great champion in the Pennsylvania legislature in the long and arduous struggle waged to eliminate discrimination against Negroes on the streetcars of Philadelphia. Indeed, he was the author of the law, enacted on March 22, 1867, which finally outlawed this cruel practice.3

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None of Lowry's letters or other papers are in the State Library at Harrisburg or the Erie County Historical Society. But a very significant letter by the Pennsylvania senator may be found in the Frederick Douglass Papers now housed in the manuscripts division of the Library of Congress. Douglass must have admired the views Lowry set forth in the letter, for he clipped it from a newspaper and pasted it in the collection of material he gathered under the heading, "Woman's Rights." This unnamed and undated newspaper clipping throws additional light on this remarkable Pennsylvania senator.

**Education and Enfranchisement of Women**

A convention of Presidents of different colleges assembled at Harrisburg last winter and petitioned the Legislature for State aid.

It was understood that Senator Lowry favored the application, provided that they would throw open their institutions to young women who could pass examination, upon equal terms with young men.

Mr. Rogers of McKean county, having written to our Senator as to his present position upon this subject, Mr. Lowry replies as follows:

**Erie, December 1, 1868.**

DEAR SIR:

You inquire in your letter of the 28th ultimo, whether I stand now where I did last winter on the subject of granting aid from the Treasury to the colleges and higher academies of education. I stand where I stood then, only a little straighter. Every dollar which has ever been expended for education in this State, taken together, has yielded a return of a thousand fold, and yet in the colleges of the State, it has only done half of what it should, for it has excluded one half of the community, and that half which most needed its protection.

The money in the Treasury of the State belongs equally to the fathers and mothers of Pennsylvania. Why should we take it to educate our sons in colleges for usefulness, prosperity, virtue and Heaven, and have our daughters in ignorance, uselessness, and on the way to destitution, poverty, and perhaps prostitution and hell?

I can easily understand how a pro-slavery Democrat can vote to exclude his sister from education and enfranchisement, and I cannot but think that a Republican who will do so, is greatly in want of a reconstructed heart and a logical mind. Our children had no more to
do with the formation of their own sex, than the negro with the color of his skin. The Republican party is fully committed to the education and enfranchisement of the negro in the South; if good for him in the South, why not in the North? If good and elevating for black men, why not for white women?

The laws of God are immutable, and not one jot or tittle of them should be more fully accepted than that no portion of his children can withhold any good thing from another portion without bringing ruin upon themselves. Paul pleaded like a man, and he "had respect for the true woman who labored with him in the Gospel." Why should we not qualify them for preachers, mechanics, doctors and merchants, for science, art and statesmanship, and skilled labor, upon equal terms with ourselves and our sons? And I know of no way that woman can get equal wages for equal work until she gets an equal vote.

The amended constitution of the State contemplates that the Legislature shall endow one or more institutions of learning, and I see no more direct way of meeting this woman question than this. I shall favor its settlement at the earliest day possible, and we would all do well to remember that nothing is settled that is not settled right. Educated men, the world over, make the best doctors, the best christians, the best farmers, the best mechanics, the best inventors, the best merchants, the best statesmen, the best neighbors, the best providers for those who are dependent upon them, and the best homes for themselves and their children, the best generals in the army and the best citizens in private and public life. If these things be true, how can we answer to posterity for cheating them out of the half, "and the better half," of them? It is not the dollars, or the mines, or the mountains and valleys, or "the cattle upon a thousand hills" that make our wealth. It is the high cultivation and education of the immortal part of man that constitutes our great wealth, and I will resist as best I can the crime of withholding upon equal terms that blessing, and that of enfranchisement from all mankind of both sexes, of all countries, and of all colors under general laws applicable to all. Intelligence is the lever that elevates the world, why should not the weight of our daughters be put upon that lever as well as that of our sons? I would go further and repeal the charters of all societies and institutes of learning that discriminates against the sex of their mothers, and issues their degrees of M.D. and D.D., and L.L.D. only to the lords and gentlemen. It is time the antediluvians were unearthed.
I will, therefore, not vote the money at all to any institution in the State that will not open wide its doors to all who can pass the requisite examination, regardless of sex, race, nation or color.

The indifference of woman to obtain human rights is no new feature in oppressed humanity, and should discourage no one. I can point to a man in Pennsylvania who was burned in effigy, in 1843, because he voted to abolish imprisonment for debt, and the deed was done by poor men, too, who believed no one would trust them unless they could imprison them.

In the days of Christ men and women whom he would save, cried "crucify him." In the days of John Brown ninety per cent of the people believed it a disgrace to give the martyr even a drink of cold water. We must bare our bosom to the world as we find it, and bear it onwards and upwards as best we can, and at this dawn of our millenium, we must educate and enfranchise, and open wide every door in the great contest of life to our sons and daughters upon equal terms.

Yours truly,
M. B. Lowry

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