Miss Susan B. Anthony

Dear friend,

I do not know that the world is quite willing or ready to discuss the question of marriage. I feel in my innermost that the thoughts I sent your convention are true. It is in vain to look for the elevation of woman, so long as she is degraded in marriage. I say it is a sin, an outrage on our holiest feelings to pretend that anything but deep, fervent love & sympathy constitutes marriage. The right idea of marriage is at the foundation of all reforms. How strange it is, man will apply all the improvements in the arts & sciences to everything about him animate & inanimate, but himself. A child conceived in the midst of hate, sin, & discord, nurtured in abuse & injustice cannot do much to bless the world or himself. If we properly understand the science of life—it would be far easier to give to the world, harmonious beautiful, noble, virtuous children, than it is to bring grown up discord into harmony with the great divine soul of all. I ask for no laws on marriage . . . remove law and false public sentiment & woman will no more live as wife with a cruel, beastly, drunkard, than a servant, in this free country will stay with a pettish, unjust mistress. If law makers insist upon exercising their prerogative in some way on this question, let them forbid any woman to marry until she is twenty one. Let them fine a woman fifty dollars for every child she conceives by a Drunkard. Women have no right to saddle the state with idiots to be supported by the public. Only look at the statistics of the idiot asylums, nearly all the offspring of Drunkards. Woman must be made to feel that the transmitting of immortal life is a most solemn responsible act & never should be allowed, except when the parents are in the highest condition of mind & body. Man in his lust has regulated this whole question of sexual intercourse long enough; let the mother of mankind whose prerogative it is to set bounds to his indulgence, rouse up & give this whole question a thorough, fearless examination. . . . [I]f by martyrdom I can advance my race one step I am ready for it. I feel this whole question of woman’s rights turns on the pivot of the marriage relation, & sooner or later it will be the question for discussion. I would not hurry it on neither would I avoid it. . . .

~ E.C. Stanton