

When Bly announced to Seaman the next week that she would be going to Washington to cover the National Woman Suffrage Convention, he quietly called John Hanley, the private detective, to shadow her. Hanley's suit against Seaman for nonpayment of fees two years later listed his trip to Washington to observe and report on Bly's "actions and conduct."

Her reporting from the convention was Bly at her very best. The story from the Church of Our Father, where the convention was held, had everything: details, descriptions, atmospherics, boredom, excitement, highlights of the proceedings, humor, ironies, the struggles with parliamentary procedure, comparisons and criticisms—all delivered with high readability. No wonder Brisbane was glad to have Bly on staff. She was able to create the sense that the reader was really a delegate, sitting all day and following the proceedings, stopping to whisper to a neighbor from time to time, making comments on various aspects of the discussion, observations and plain old gossip about people and platforms. The length alone gave a sense of how the day must have been experienced by those who attended. The story took up almost a full page.

World editors played the convention report on [page 4](#) of the news section—impressive prominence for a movement that would not reach its stated goal for another quarter of a century. Or maybe the significance was that Bly had covered it. Here is her initial observation: "The first thing I learned was that woman's suffragists do not differ from women of lesser ambitions. The hour of the meeting was announced for 10 o'clock, and it was exactly 10:20 when the President, Susan B. Anthony, appeared upon the platform."

In the course of the day, Bly seemed especially irked by the tendency of many of the suffragists to pay so little attention to how they dressed. Alice Stone Blackwell's double-breasted broadcloth coat with two rows of enormous pearl buttons was at least six years old and hideous, Bly said. And her black cashmere skirt was a horror—never had Bly seen one hang worse. Charlotte Perkins Stetson, she said, must be "daft on dress reform or some other abomination. She was decidedly wider at the waist than she was below it. We did not need to be told that she was corsetless and, I fear, petticoatless! ... I never could see any reason for a woman to neglect her appearance merely because she is intellectually inclined. It certainly does not show any strength of mind. I take it rather as a weakness. And in working for a cause I think it is wise to show the men that its influence does not make women any the less attractive."

Personal appearance was a fixation. She pounded the keyboard again later in the story: "Dress is a great weapon in the hands of a woman if rightly applied. It is a weapon men lack, so women should make the most of it. As their motto seems to be 'the means to gain the end,' why not use the powerful means of pretty clothes?"

Bly advised the suffragists to take a cue from men at political conventions and remove their hats when they appeared onstage. She said the one man who addressed the gathering was simply no match as an orator for the movement's impressive women speakers. The struggle of the movement to fund itself disturbed her. "When one hears the women talk about it being difficult to collect the dues and one realizes that it is less than a cent a week, one feels that woman cannot be given suffrage too soon, or anything that will make her less the slave of poverty," she wrote.

She followed carefully the debate over fund-raising methods. By far the most lucrative of the moneymaking schemes was the minstrel show staged by the North Dakota suffragists, which netted \$300, according to that state's delegate, Dr. Cora Smith Eaton. "We blackened our faces and gave a minstrel show and oh! it was so popular! ... The ladies hesitated to advertise themselves so we called it the Daughters of Ham. The first part was a minstrel show; the second part was a plantation scene. It was very, very comical. In part III we had the Highland fling and part IV was a cake walk. Oh! It was very funny!"

At least one woman was not amused. "Madame President," she called out to Susan B. Anthony. "Do you think a minstrel show stamps us with dignity? The Woman Suffragists should not do anything that will cause reflection to be made upon them. A minstrel show is rowdyism and lowers

us.”

Bly made note of the fact that there was only one “colored” delegate to the assembly and almost no one between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. No one opposed the minstrel show idea on racial grounds. Suffrage was still largely a movement of and for the white middle class.

The next day, under the headline “Woman in the Pulpit,” Bly provided endless detail on Mrs. Charlotte Perkins Stetson’s sermon preached at the People’s Church Typographical Hall at Number 423 G Street. Mrs. Stetson’s sermon was full of humor—“This is exactly what is needed in churches,” Bly remarked—and she repeated the story of Mrs. Stetson’s that had provoked the greatest laughter:

“Industry is part of the maternal function,” she continued. “Women produced children, and man ate them if he could catch ’em. The subjection of women was necessary for the elevation of man. The savage could eat and hunt. He could not work. His wife did that. Now, when he began to want to keep his wife shut up so she could not be seen by others, he had to find food for her, for his children and his maiden aunts and things, and thus, through his jealousy and selfishness, he learned to labor.”

Bly saved for the following Sunday her interview with the movement’s leader, the venerable Susan B. Anthony, to which *The World* again gave huge display. Although Anthony had been interviewed scores of times during a half-century in the suffrage movement, never had she revealed more information about herself than she did in her exchange with Bly.

Anthony spoke for many of the suffragists at the convention in voicing concern about the subjugation of Cuba by Spain and the talk of U.S. intervention to win Cuba’s independence. Both *The Journal* and *The World* were at the forefront of newspapers revving up concern about alleged atrocities against the Cuban nationalists. The era of Yellow Journalism counts some of its most notorious moments from this episode, taking its name from the Yellow Kid, a comic strip character in both newspapers.

“Tell me about Cuba!” Miss Anthony implored Bly after the two exchanged greetings. “I am so interested in it. I would postpone my own enfranchisement to see Cuba free.”

Bly fulfilled the suffragist’s request to be brought up to date on Cuba and then asked a slew of very personal questions, to which she got answers:

“Were you ever in love?”

“In love?” she laughed merrily. “Bless you, Nellie, I’ve been in love a thousand times!”

“Really?” I gasped, taken aback by this startling confession.

“Yes, really!” nodding her snowy head. “But I never loved any one as much that I thought it would last. In fact, I never felt I could give up my life of freedom to become a man’s housekeeper. When I was young, if a girl married poor, she became a housekeeper and drudge. If she married wealth, she became a pet and a doll. Just think, had I married at 20, I would have been either a drudge or a doll for 55 years. Think of it!

“I want to add one thing,” she said. “Once men were afraid of women with ideas and a desire to vote. Today, our best suffragists are sought in marriage by the best class of men.”

Bly seemed relieved to be able to report that “unlike most suffragists or ‘brainy’ women, for that matter, Miss Anthony is very particular about her dress. She is always gowned richly, in style and with most exquisite taste.”

“Do you pray?”

“I pray every single second of my life. I never get on my knees or anything like that, but I pray with my work. My prayer is to lift women to equality with men. Work and worship are one with me. I know there is no God of the universe made happy by my getting down on my knees and calling him ‘great.’

“True marriage, the real marriage of soul, when two people take each other on terms of perfect equality, without the desire of one to ... make the other subservient. It is a beautiful thing. It is the highest state of life. But for a woman to marry a man for support is a demoralizing condition. And for a man to marry a woman merely because she has a beautiful figure or face is degradation.”

Had Bly asked “Are you religious?” she would have been unlikely to have elicited a comparable response. It was indicative of her exemplary skill as

an interviewer.