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We Are Not Amused
by Laura Resnick
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Victoria Claflin Woodhull (1838-1927) travelled across the United States throughout her youth with her family's medicine and fortune-telling show, giving demonstrations in spiritualism with her younger sister, Tennessee. In 1868, the sisters settled in New York City, where they befriended Cornelius Vanderbilt, who set them up in a successful stock-brokerage firm. They used their profits to found Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly, a women's-rights magazine.

Woodhull espoused Pantarchy, free love, women's suffrage, short skirts, legalized prostitution, and the right of women to orgasm. In 1872 she became the first woman to run for the presidency, being nominated by her own Equal Rights Party. In addition to being unable to vote because she was a woman, Woodhull was arrested with her sister and imprisoned for obscenity-printing the Beecher-Tilton Scandal in the Weekly -- the day before the election.

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The following letters have been excerpted from _Correspondence Between the Victorias: An Insight Into the Decline of Victorianism, 1872-1880_ by Dr. Wiantha Woodhull. The author is a descendant of President Victoria Woodhull (1872-1876) and Attorney General Zula Maud Woodhull (1904-1908). The book will be published in its entirety this spring by Femme Fatale Press, cover price \$16.95.

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SANDRINGHAM, 10th December 1872:

Her Majesty Victoria, Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, Empress of India, wishes to convey her sincere felicitations to the President Elect of the United States of America, Mrs. Victoria Woodhull. The Queen was very strongly, though not unpleasantly, surprised to learn from Mr. Gladstone that Mrs. Woodhull has succeeded to the highest elected office of her charming country.

The Queen applauds Mrs. Woodhull's commendable and publicly expressed gratitude to Mr. Cornelius Vanderbilt, who aided and abetted her bold campaign for the presidency. The Queen knows little of Mrs. Woodhull's background, and wonders if the Woodhull and Vanderbilt families have been intimate for many years.

The Queen has learned that Mrs. Woodhull did not rely solely upon Mr. Vanderbilt for financial support for her campaign, but also engaged in active enterprise in partnership with her sister, Miss Tennessee Claflin, first as New York stockbrokers and later as the publishers of Woodhull and Claflin's

Weekly_. The Queen admires such industrious behavior and has very often encouraged it in her subjects! The Queen has been informed that a particular issue of Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly printed two days before the presidential election sold for forty dollars per copy. The Queen is most impressed that Americans are so eager to read, and she would very much like to know more about the contents of the Weekly.

Nevertheless, the Queen is well aware that it requires more than mere money to emerge victorious in a political campaign, having observed many such campaigns within her realm. Mrs. Woodhull may be surprised to learn that the Queen knows that, as early as 1870, she enjoyed the support of Congressman Benjamin F. Butler of Massachusetts who arranged for her to address the House Judiciary Committee.

It was certainly at this pivotal moment, when Mrs. Woodhull urged Congress to legalize women's suffrage under the Fourteenth Amendment (a speech for which, the Queen understands, the National Woman Suffrage Association delayed the start of their convention in Washington, D.C.), that Mrs. Woodhull's political career became of such interest to the British Prime Minister. The Queen commends Mrs. Woodhull on her successful efforts, since it is surely the woman's vote which has helped to place her so securely in office! The Queen is also sure that Mrs. Woodhull will agree that the Queen's own female subjects currently have all the rights and privileges they require and are in no need of suffrage like their distant sisters across the sea.

Although former President Grant cost Her Majesty's Government \$15.5 million in the settlement of the Alabama incident (and Mrs. Woodhull may be assured that no one had informed the Queen that the British weren't supposed to sell ships to the Confederates during the American Civil War, much less that there was evidently a precise difference between Confederate rebels and Cuban belligerents, or Cuban rebels and Confederate belligerents), he was evidently nevertheless a rather popular president within his own country (leading the Queen to believe that the American people still harbor some resentment from 1812).

It has been implied within Her Majesty's Government that President Grant may well have won re-election, had not Mr. Greeley and Mr. Sumner been successful in their advocacy of an amendment to limit the president to one term. Perhaps Black Friday and the Santo Domingo affair contributed to the success of this amendment. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that this surprising development, combined with the Republicans' misguided judgement in naming an actor as their next presidential candidate, contributed to Mrs. Woodhull's felicitous success. The Queen, known for her sense of humor, acknowledges the irony: Mr. Greeley succeeded in eliminating President Grant from the race, but he himself, as the Democratic candidate, suffered an overwhelming defeat at the hands of his female opponent, candidate of the Equal Rights Party!

The Queen has learned that a duck was somehow responsible for Mr. Greeley's defeat. Her Majesty is at a loss to understand how an ordinary farm animal could be instrumental in deciding the outcome of a presidential race, but she recognizes that Americans have lived in isolation for some centuries and may have unique values.

The Queen also wishes to take this opportunity to convey her felicitations to Mr. Frederick Douglass, the abolitionist and former slave who now stands beside Mrs. Woodhull as her Vice President.

The Queen concludes by advising Mrs. Woodhull to seek the advice and guidance of Mr. Woodhull, remembering as she does how greatly she valued and misses the strength and wisdom of her departed husband, Prince Albert.

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BUCKINGHAM PALACE, 28th April, 1873

The Queen has to thank President Woodhull sincerely for her letter of 15th February, and she is pleased to learn that the President felt her inauguration was a successful occasion!

The Queen further thanks President Woodhull for explaining how a duck

caused her Democratic opponent to lose the election. The Queen expresses hope that all ducks have been removed from his presence, as well as all children and all persons of character.

The Queen finds it most enlightening that President Woodhull's sister Miss Tennessee Claflin initiated their association with the esteemed Vanderbuilt family by administering a healing massage to Mr. Cornelius Vanderbuilt. However, though she seldom interferes in the affairs of foreign nations, the Queen feels bound to suggest that Miss Claflin may not be the best possible choice for the post of Surgeon General, since her medical practices led to her being indicted for manslaughter in Illinois in 1864.

Thanks must also be extended to President Woodhull for the time she took in explaining her Weekly's exposure of the Beecher-Tilton incident, though the Queen finds it quite difficult to believe such claims about a clergyman. Apparently the American people also found it difficult. The Queen is pleased to learn that President Woodhull and Miss Claflin have nonetheless been acquitted of obscenity charges.

On the issue of Mr. Woodhull, the Queen is somewhat bewildered, despite the President's explanation. If the Queen understands correctly, President Woodhull is the wife of Colonel James Harvey Blood, not the wife of Dr. Canning Woodhull. However, the President's former husband, the afore-mentioned Dr. Woodhull, now lives in the White House with the President and her husband.

Under the circumstances, the Queen agrees with President Woodhull that it might be wiser to seek advice from neither man for the time being.

The Queen is charmed to learn that President Woodhull is the proud mother of two children. From the President's description, the Queen concludes that Zula Maud is a child of remarkable resilience of character. The Queen expresses her sympathy that the President's son, Byron, has been diagnosed as a mental defective. Having recently read Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, the Queen can only conclude that this is often true of men named Byron.

Mr. Gladstone has informed the Queen of President Woodhull's Cabinet appointments. Evidently, Susan B. Anthony will make a vigorous Secretary of the Treasury, as she is now gamely grappling with the financial problems resulting from the American Civil War and Reconstruction; British subjects have already heard of a new currency called the "Susie Buck." Initiative should always be applauded!

The Queen also commends the President's wise decision to rejuvenate her nation's dealings with the American Indian tribes. They are still living far closer to civilization than they really need to be, and perhaps the President's newly appointed Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Talks Much Woman, can convince them of this, being one of their own kind.

However, Her Majesty's Government is concerned that the posts of Secretary of War and Secretary of the Navy are to be abolished altogether and replaced by the Secretary of Love and the Secretary of Reproductive Freedom. Mr. Gladstone and the Queen would both appreciate a more thorough explanation than offered in the President's previous letter.

The Queen cannot also help wondering if Elizabeth Cady Stanton, though movingly described by the President as a lifelong crusader against immorality, is appropriately qualified for the post of Attorney General.

Finally, the Queen expresses her admiration for President Woodhull's unwavering commitment to Pantarchy, but would like to know what it is.

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BALMORAL, 5th August 1873

The Queen thanks President Woodhull for her letter of 4th June, though she found the contents of said letter quite disturbing.

The Queen was aware that President Woodhull had once assumed leadership of Section Twelve of Marx's International Workingmen's Association, but thought it would be in poor taste to remind the President of her youthful indiscretions. Nor did the Queen wish to presume about President Woodhull's character. After all, Mr. Disraeli may be a Liberal, but he is nevertheless a most agreeable person, as the Queen keeps pointing out to Mr. Gladstone.

However, Pantarchy, a supposedly perfect state wherein children and property are managed in common by the members of society, sounds exactly like something those horrid Communists would propose. The Queen wishes to remind President Woodhull that free love and the breakdown of the family are in direct opposition to the values held by the Queen and, therefore, universally held by her subjects.

The Queen is further dismayed to learn that the President's administration is encouraging the legalization of prostitution. While the Queen cannot prevent the President from this folly, she can certainly resist the President's efforts to convince her to become a champion of legalized prostitution. Although the President's appeal to protect the lives and health of fallen women is most eloquent, the Queen assures her that no such problem exists in Great Britain (except possibly among the Irish who, after all, cannot help themselves). The Queen protests the figures quoted in President Woodhull's letter which indicate that Her Majesty's subjects enter brothels more frequently than they enter churches. While this is very possibly true of France, the figures are erroneous when applied to Her Majesty's realm!

The Queen recalls that the President's administration is instituting dietary reform, and she suggests that diet may well be at the very root of the problem. Some hearty roast beef, not to mention tea and clotted cream, might well minimize some of the President's more eccentric impulses!

The Queen understands from the President's letter that the Secretary of Reproductive Freedom will supervise research and legislation regarding abortion and birth control. Though the Queen cannot condone this, she does see how this could be considered necessary if everyone in America is going to start practicing free love, since primogeniture could become extremely confusing.

Evidently, the Queen misunderstood the President's purpose in appointing Talks Much Woman as Commissioner of Indian Affairs, as well as her goals in dealing with the American Indian tribes. Would it be too presumptuous of the Queen to inquire just how much more of the United States the President intends to give back to native tribes?

Finally, the Queen regrets to inform President Woodhull that her new American ambassador to the Court of St. James was arrested upon arrival. She was wearing a short skirt. A skirt which, the Queen is unhappily obliged to inform the President, exposed a considerable portion of her limbs. Mr. Gladstone was in a state of considerable excitement, the poor man.

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WINDSOR CASTLE, 23rd October 1875

Despite the Queen's firm resolve to have no further correspondence with President Woodhull after the remarks in her Christmas greeting of 1873, she now finds it necessary to appeal to the President to cease this relentless barrage of change which has so afflicted British society since the President's election.

The Prince of Wales has recently abandoned his wife, the Princess Alexandra, having explained to the Queen that he is now practicing free love in the American manner, finding it a charming and thoroughly civilized custom. The Princess objected until the American ambassador explained that free love is also her right, and she has since become the constant companion of Lord Tennyson (whose works are now sadly lacking in the fine moral tone for which he was once known).

The Queen's dearly beloved daughters, Princess Beatrice and Princess Louise, now habitually wear the short skirts first popularized by the President's select representatives in this country. Thousands upon thousands of young women have followed suit, and many of them have established rebellious musical groups which play Spanish and African instruments.

The Duke of York's eldest son has left home to go live with some of the American Indian tribes now settling in eastern United States. Young men in Trafalgar Square are wearing their hair in the style of Mohawk Indians and protesting the Government's involvement in India. They also protest the

situation in South Africa, melodically insisting that they shall "overcome" someday, which puzzles the Queen.

Mr. Gladstone's office at 10 Downing Street is daily besieged by women demanding the right to vote, the right to apply for men's jobs and earn men's wages, and the right to receive paid maternity leave from their places of employment. Factories in Britain have come to a standstill as workers strike and demand safe working conditions.

Furthermore, traffic in London has been totally disrupted by a group calling itself the British Union of the Sisters of Mercy and Comfort. The prostitutes of London, having heeded President Woodhull's international call to unionization, now daily parade around Picadilly Circus in most indecent attire, refusing to leave the public limelight until the Government recognizes and protects their places of employment. No doubt suffering from shock, Parliament has been unusually slow in taking any action whatsoever to stop these women from disturbing the peace.

The Queen has lived in seclusion at Windsor Castle for the past six months, waiting for the situation to improve. Mr. Gladstone has finally admitted that he thinks matters may continue on this downhill course for quite some time, though Great Britain, he assures his supporters, will never see a female Prime Minister!

To add to the Queen's woes, her once dear friend the Empress Augusta came to Windsor Castle for a visit this week. In a devastating blow to the civilized world, not only was the Empress wearing a short skirt, she also insisted that she adheres to President Woodhull's theory that every woman is entitled to... to... orgasm! After a most embarrassing discussion, the Empress made a number of comments about the late Prince Albert that the Queen really could not tolerate.

As abasing and humiliating as it is to admit these problems to President Woodhull, the Queen writes this letter in the hope that the President will see fit to eliminate her newly-proposed medical, legal, and environmental reforms. Surely the President can see that they would be the downfall of civilization!

The Queen holds President Woodhull entirely responsible for the chaos currently overwhelming Great Britain and now seeping into Europe, the alienation of her sons, the disgrace of her daughters, and the loss of a dear old friend.

In short, President Woodhull, the Queen is not amused.

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