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REFLECTIONS

There is great wisdom and moral assurance in the decision of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, one of America's greatest women, who chose self-euthanasia rather than endure a degenerative death by cancer. These were her last words, typed by her own hand: "A last duty. Human life consists in mutual service. No grief, no pain, misfortune or 'broken heart' is excuse for cutting off one's life while any power of service remains. But when all usefulness is over, when one is assured of an imminent and unavoidable death, it is the simplest of human rights to choose a quick and easy death in place of a slow and horrible one. Public opinion is changing on this subject. The time is approaching when we shall consider it abhorrent to our civilization to allow a human being to lie in prolonged agony which we should mercifully end in any other creature. Believing this choice to be of social service in promoting wider views on this question, I have preferred chloroform to cancer."

JOSEPH FLETCHER

Morals and Medicine:

... the patient's right to know the truth
[re] contraception, artificial insemination,
sterilization, euthanasia
Princeton University Press, 1954