

**WOMAN'S WORK
FOR
WOMAN'S WEAL**

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Woman's work for woman's weal by William Reid

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WILLIAM REID

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BY THE

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WOMAN'S WORK

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WOMAN'S WEAL.

I HAVE long been deeply impressed with the consideration that the women of our land are not sufficiently alive to the stake they have in the temperance cause. My conviction is, that they are the chief sufferers by intemperance. Many of them, it is true, are aware of this, and most valuable has been the aid which they have afforded in the prosecution of the movement; yet we fear that by far the majority of them treat our efforts with either indifference or opposition. How common is it for a newspaper, when reporting an anti-slavery or missionary meeting to remark by way of qualification, "the audience was composed chiefly of ladies." Now, the stupid reporter did not see that he was thereby unwittingly paying the object of the meeting the highest compliment in his power. When this can be said of temperance meetings our success will be greater; but I regret to say that the comparatively small attendance of women at our meetings proves that they have yet to learn how deep their stake is in our movement, and how essential their co-operation is to our success. My fear is that the promoters of the Temperance Reformation have not been sufficiently alive to this fact. What

special efforts have been made with the view of enlisting women in our cause? We have had tales and essays and lectures in great abundance, but how rarely have they been specially addressed. Now, why is it so? A mere general scattering of temperance truth on the face of society is not sufficient to baptize it with our principles, we must systematize our efforts, and no scheme of operations will be complete which does not make ample provision for the instruction of that class, by which all social questions are most powerfully affected. Enlist a man in favour of our cause, and good has been accomplished—it is much to rescue or preserve an individual—but enlist a woman, and it may be you have gained over an entire family. My purpose at present, then, is to show that the temperance question is pre-eminently a woman's question.

REFLECT, FIRST OF ALL, ON WHAT WOMAN SUFFERS BY INTEMPERANCE.

I have said that woman is the chief sufferer by intemperance. *Look at her as a wife.* It was a man she married; but is that a man? Where now is the noble form, and smiling face, and winning voice? He promised her his heart for life, and she gave him hers. But what has she got now? He has transferred his affection to the dram-glass, and scowls, oaths, blows, starvation are her only inheritance. "I have seen me," said one woman to me, "on hearing his foot on the stair, put my infant on a pillow beneath the bed, and go in there to suckle it." "Do you see these marks on the door?" said another drunkard's wife to me; "these are the marks of the poker when he was attempting to break the door to get out for whisky, and when I stood between

him and the door, and told him he would only get out over my murdered body." "I felt the razor at my throat," said another to me, "and lifted my child and fled as from a murderer." "He locked the door, and seizing a knife," said a fourth, "threatened he would do for us. I wrenched the lock from the door, got the children out, got the neighbours in, and bound him down." And even where there is not positive brutality, there may be the neglect and alienation which withers all the joy of a woman's heart. It was once the wish of a married lady, whose husband loved his books more than her society, "I wish I had been a book, then I might have got his attention." How many might think were they a bottle, they might have more of his regard. Why should a husband ever seek enjoyments to which he dare not introduce his wife? and how galling is it for her to know, that the company of men of questionable reputation is preferred to her own. I may, indeed, be told that a man cannot be always at his own fireside. Why, then, should the wife always be there? If it be proper for a husband to join in company to which he may not introduce his wife, why should not the wife be permitted to join in company to which she dare not introduce her husband? A man's attachment to home, we are persuaded, may be judged by the degree of his attachment to the bottle. As his love for the bottle grows, his love for home declines. Remove, then, this disturber of the peace of homes, this extinguisher of domestic joys, this source of waste and want, and woe, and social intercourse will be purified and extended. Were it not for the love of the bottle, the wife would more cordially welcome her husband's associates, for

then they might meet in presence of the family without that dissipation, which no virtuous woman will tolerate before her children, or she could even admit without complaint of her husband's absence, knowing, as she did, that he was neither wasting his means nor ruining his morals, and would return sober and affectionate. The interest of the wife, then, is to use her influence to the utmost in banishing from society this, the deadliest foe of her peace and comfort. What is there worse than a bad husband, and what husband so bad as a drunkard? Better none than such a one, unless you think with the married woman who, on telling a staid single lady, somewhat on the wrong side of fifty, of some domestic troubles, which she in great part attributed to the irregularities of her husband, was favoured with the reply, "Well, you have brought these troubles on yourself. I told you not to marry him. I was sure he would not make you a good husband." "He is not a good one to be sure, madam," replied the woman; "but he is a *power better than none.*" If, then, a bad husband is better than the solitude of single blessedness, what a blessing must be found in a good one.

Look at woman as a mother. Who shall fathom the depths of a mother's affection? It was but the other day I attended the death-bed of an old woman aged ninety-two. With tears she referred to the death of an infant. "He was a bias bairn," she said. Among all her recollection of the past it seemed the most affecting to her. And this flood of affection was gushing forth from a heart that had been stricken some sixty years ago. It has been beautifully said, there is an enduring tenderness in the love of a mother to a son that trans-

cends all other affections of the heart. It neither is to be chilled by selfishness, nor daunted by danger, nor weakened by worthlessness, nor stifled by ingratitude. She will sacrifice every comfort to his convenience; she will surrender every pleasure to his enjoyment; she will glory in his fame and exult in his prosperity; and if misfortune overtake him, he will be dearer to her from his misfortunes; and if disgrace settle on his name, she will still love and cherish him in spite of his disgrace; and if all the world beside cast him off, she will be all the world to him. As a mother's heart, then, centres chiefly in her children, what untold anguish is she made to endure on their account. What wrongs are to be compared with those inflicted on little children? What is tyranny? Is it not the mighty inflicting wrong upon the weak? Here, then, it is in its perfection. What tyranny to compare with this? and what is the recompense of tyranny? Does the day of retribution not come? Do not the oppressed become the curse of those who cursed them? Here, then, is a striking illustration. How often have profligate children flung back on their parents the charge of their ruin? We talk of the cruelties inflicted on children by heathen mothers. What is the giving of an unconscious infant to the alligator compared with the long years of suffering to which the drunkard's offspring are subjected. Burgess, who was executed lately at Taunton for the murder of his little daughter, confessed that he murdered the child that he might save 2s. 6d. weekly, which he paid for its board, he being a widower, that he might get more drink.

Great then as are the sufferings of little children, the

mother suffers most of all through her children. "One day, some time ago," says another, "I was calling on a widow, who does an humble provision trade in one of the poorest streets of a large city. I was speaking to the woman of the difficulty of her position, in being under the necessity of refusing the urgent appeals of the very poor for credit. The shopkeeper said, 'A body would just require to be made o' iron a' thegither; and yet,' she added, 'I'm sometimes glad that I'm no just cast-metal. A circumstance occurred very lately, that made me feel weel-pleased that there was a saft spot in my heart,' she went on; 'it was in the gloamin' that a poor woman came in and stood up at the counter there, (she had a bairn in her oxtar) and asked if I would trust her a forpfit o' meal—she was owin' me 17s. 6d.—so I just looked at her and said, I wonder you can have the face to ask me to trust you more, seeing what you are owin' me already—not that I have any doubt of your willingness to pay me if you could—but that drunken man of yours will never let you be in a position to pay me.' The woman answered—'I sat in the house a' day, thinkin' before I could hae the face to ask you, but' she added, pressing her child, 'this poor thing's ruggin' at my breast, and I hae naething to gie't.' The shopkeeper said she gave the child a 'piece,' and the woman left; but, said the shopkeeper, 'she was no sooner out at the door till I took a remorse o' conscience; I called her back, gave her the meal, and gave her likewise a little tea and sugar. She went home, mask'd the tea, but ere she had power to drink it, something came over her heart, and she died.'" Can we conceive of deeper anguish than that of a mother when she hears her