

OPPOSITION.

A LECTURE DELIVERED BY MRS. A. J. DUNNWAY BEFORE THE WASHINGTON TERRITORY W. S. ASSOCIATION, NOVEMBER 11, 1873.

[Reported by a friend of Human Rights.]
Gentlemen and Ladies:—This large and intelligent audience can bear me witness that our recent defeat in your Legislature has not demoralized us; neither has it in any way diminished our enthusiasm, nor destroyed one iota of confidence in our ultimate triumph. Indeed, we are stronger now than before the battle, as the increasing interest in our cause exhibited by this large attendance abundantly testifies.

As we have been unable thus far to arouse any opposition in these meetings, and I fear that our opponents are becoming demoralized, for the want of a champion to espouse their side of the question, and as I have the reputation of being somewhat of a philanthropist because my sympathies are always with the party that gets the worst of the argument, allow me, for the nonce, to assist our enemies in making out a case.

In rummaging among some old newspapers, at the house of a lady friend, we to-day found a poem entitled "What are Woman's Rights?" This poem originally appeared in the Pacific Tribune, and was suggested, as the introduction states, by the Woman Suffrage Convention held in Olympia two years ago. The author is unknown to me, but the poem reads, in part, as follows:

What are woman's rights? you ask me;
I would ask, what are her wrongs?
Does she seek for a position
Which to man alone belongs?
Does she (mourning and complaining)
Tread this beautiful green earth,

Thinking she is right in claiming
Things which never for her had birth?
No true woman seeks to bluster
All her rights or wrongs about—
Something meeker, nobler, higher,
Marks her quiet life throughout.

She will ne'er neglect the blessing
Which will give her greatest joy—
That for which she has her being,
Watching o'er her infant boy.

Ladies, I would not abate one jot or tittle of the sentiment contained in this very sentimental effusion. There is a great deal more truth than poetry in it. "Watching o'er her infant boy" is a very great joy to any true mother; but our friend forgot to add that these boys will grow; that they are not always "infants;" but after they have been "watched over" till "her being's" mission is accomplished, what is the mother to do next? All capable mothers have "watched" their "infant boys" out of pinafores and into trousers by the time that they (the mothers) reach the age that most men attain before they are safely launched into the public arena. But I forget myself. I am making an opposition speech. Here is something splendid:

Here it is to guard each footstep
From his boyhood up to man;
Training him for life's great conflict,
Teaching him to work and plan.

Man never uttered a grander, truer, or more noble sentiment than this. Who but woman has intellect and intuition sufficient to train the offspring of her existence "for life's great conflict?" Who but she can rightly "teach him to work and plan?" Certainly his political life has proved that he is not capable of "training" himself.

Here is another idea that woman cannot commend too strongly:

If more mothers saw their mission,
Greater would the Nation be,
Less of sin and degradation,
More of truth and honesty.

O, if mothers who live but for fashion, folly and display, neglecting, as they too often do, the immortal wails entrusted to their care by the great All Father—mothers who "have all the rights they want" while rum and licentiousness run riot—could but realize the power of this idea; could they more fully appreciate their individual responsibility and inalienable obligations to the commonwealth, there would then indeed be "less of sin and degradation."

Not by voting for the Nation
Does she strive to keep it up,
But in her household avocations,
These she helps to be its prop.

Here I am a little puzzled. Just how it is, and why it is, that woman "has her being" merely "to watch and guide her infant boy;" how it is, or why it is that she must "train him for life's great conflict," and "teach him to work and plan" merely that she may have a ruler to make and enforce laws that she is taxed to sustain, while her "household avocations" are added, merely as a "prop" to keep man's "Nation" up, I cannot clearly comprehend. There must be logic in it somewhere, but I confess I cannot find it:

Maybe this will give me light:
God's word tells them, very plainly,
To be chaste and keep at home;
But how often they reject it,
Making precepts of their own.

And we often find it written,
That, as Christ is to the Church,
The head, so man is to woman,
If we diligently search.

Of course, men implicitly obey the word of God, as they interpret it. But as women have no right to make interpretations for themselves, seeing that they "have their being" merely to "train their infant boys" to do it, it is doubtless very presumptive in one of these same mothers to "diligently search" into these things for herself while "teaching her boys to work and plan;" but wicked as it is, O man and brethren, I have done it, and will give you the result of my investigation:

I find that Christ so loved the world that he offered himself as a sacrifice for sin; that he was crucified in proof of his great love for humanity, and that it was his great sacrifice that made him the head of the Church. If man will go and do likewise he may then claim a prerogative of headship; but, until he does, anxious as I am to make a strong opposition speech, I must waive this part of the poet's argument.

God did not make man for woman,
She was really made for man;
And how full of perfect wisdom
Was the great Creator's plan.

Again, as a mother of men, I have read the Scriptures, and having found, in connection with the above, that "for this cause ought a woman to have power, because of the angels;" but I must get off of that point lest I weaken the argument. As the hard-shell preacher said, "I am not speaking on that branch of the subject;" besides, "that ain't the part."

Our poet continues:
For without her softening influence,
Maid would droop and pine away;
But she cheers him as he travels
On his journey day-by-day.

Should she be without a husband,
And she wants some partner, too,
Time is never to be squandered—
There is much that she can do.

All around her are the blessings
To be scattered, more and more,
Till her triumphs are as countless
As the sands upon the shore.

Friends, a great many good men oppose the enfranchisement of woman because of a vague and indescribable idea that they have conjured up regarding her sacred and refining influence, which they somehow feel must be restrained continually or it will lose its power.

Once the refining and invigorating influence of the sun exerted itself upon one of God's unproductive acres until there arose and grew great, "tall, fair ranks of trees." The months and years rolled themselves into decades, the decades at last into centuries, and there they stood, "massy and tall and dark." The vigorous branches at their tops reached out in all directions, overlapping and interweaving among each other, until the genial sunshine by whose aid these great, grand trees had been nurtured into life and vigor, was shut away from the earth into which they had taken root. Then, at their feet, great noxious weeds grew up, and noisome plants, with poisonous exhalations, crept over the dark, mouldy soil. Lizards glided in and out, and snakes hissed forth their venomous sounds, and writhed and raged as is their custom. Did a stray sunbeam sometimes enter this abode of corruption, causing a tiny blade of grass to dare peep forth, the wise branches of the great trees exerted themselves afresh, and whispered to each other, "We must not allow the purifying sun's rays to enter here. At our feet is a filthy pool in which they must not dabble lest they be defiled." And the lizards glided, and the snakes writhed, and the noxious weeds and noisome herbs joined in the refrain and sang out "filthy pool." But the noxious vapors that were generated in that damp, fetid air, attracted the wrath of a storm-cloud, who, in passing, scented corruption from afar. And the storm-cloud sent the forked lightning whose artillery shook the heavens, and lo, one of the grandest of the forest monarchs lay prone and helpless at the feet of his fellows. The storm-cloud passed on and straightway the genial and renovating sunlight shone down upon the "filthy pool." Great was the indignation of the standing monarchs. Exerting themselves with might and main they strove to reunite their broken phalanx, but too late; the sunlight had entered. And in spite of leafy hedges, noxious weeds and noisome herbs, not heeding gliding lizards or writhing serpents, and minding not the croaking of the self-consorted frogs who grumbled that their "filthy pool" should be disturbed, and though, according to our poet, it "did not to her belong," the sunlight persistently pursued her well-known way of duty. And lo, and behold! Beautiful flowers sprang up as if by magic where slimy weeds had grown. Fruit-bearing shrubs shot forth their well-laden branches, and trees, whose leaves waved for the healing of nations, budded into life and beauty. The "filthy pool" became a clear and rippling stream where golden fishes flashed, and bright-plumed birds made heavenly melody. And what of the trees? Taller and grander yet they grew; more glorious and strong and vigorous and beautiful because of the blessed influence of all pervading sunlight.

But look, again: Yonder, a little apart from the rest, in the majesty of his self-conscious pride, stands a grand, great oak. Stately and tall and beautiful he grows, spreading his branches far and wide. But even while we gaze a change comes over him. A "clinging vine," heavy, luxuriant, dependent, merciless, has fastened itself, by his own permission, around his massive form. It creeps over him and coils around him, gently, slowly, but insidiously. Look now, and you will see that the very life of the oak is being sapped. He is already dead at the top. The "clinging vine" which he so dearly loves to shelter and protect becomes a sordid vampire. It is needless to continue the picture. The "clinging vine" brings death to the oak, gentlemen. Can you point the moral?

But excuse me, I am making an opposition speech.
To return to our poet:
Ragged, homeless, friendless children,
Whom the ways of sin defile,
Could be won, by love and kindness,
To the paths of rectitude.

When the orphan needs some clothing,
She a Dorcas, too, might be,
And the widow she could succor
In her depth of poverty.

God has promised to befriend them,
But he needs the means whereby
To convey His promised blessing,
And their many wants supply.

It may be her lot is scanty,
And she seeks some friendly aid;
If the rich would help the needy,
Great improvement could be made.

Again I am constrained to affirm and applaud. To be a "Dorcas" is splendid. Lackadaisical young men are in their glory in "Dorcas" meetings. They are here enabled to eat a half dollar's worth of nice confectionery for a quarter, or ten cents. They here have splendid opportunity to exhibit their lily-white hands and display magnificent voices. By all means, let's have "Dorcas" societies, and lots of them.

Then the rescuing of "ragged, homeless, friendless children" is work which is indeed necessary. But, for the sake of my argument, I regret that the poet did not state that a far grander work would be accomplished by bringing about such a condition of society as should elevate humanity above the possibility of being "ragged" or "homeless" or "friendless." If I were speaking on the other side I should say that if women could help make the laws and manage the world, they'd soon get something better to do than patching up the blunders made by man in his futile attempts to beacheltering oak. It is a crying shame to our civilization that there are "ragged, homeless, friendless children." It is a libel upon our boasted enlightenment that we have need of penitentiaries and jails and almshouses and asylums for the insane. But again I forget that I am making an opposition speech.

I believe, if mothers' daughters
Lived more wise and virtuously,
There would be more wives; then woman
In her proper sphere would be.

God has formed the oak, so sturdy,
To withstand the winter storm,
And it leaves it bold and nobly
In its most impetuous form.

But more beautiful the lily,
Full of modesty's perfume,
Choosing the sequestered valley,
There in humility to bloom.

No the woman shines more lovely
In the home of love and truth,
Screened from all life's outward struggles
By the husband of her youth.

You know, gentlemen, that mothers' sons always live "wise and virtuously," consequently they are always "husbands" and are never out of their "proper sphere." Glancing back through the stanzas last read I find they are a little mixed, but you can't always expect a poet to be sensible in everything he writes; so you will please overlook the fact that all women don't get husbands; that all husbands are not "sturdy oaks," and that many of them are very slender saplings. Like the hard-shell preacher, "I am not speaking on that branch of the subject."

Here is something that just suits me:
Christ knew well the strength of woman,
When, upon the expiring tree,
He exclaimed, from this same moment
John thy guardian soul shall be.

Cried he not, in tones most tender,
Take my mother to thy home,
Cheer her heart, and make her happy,
Till I bid her to me come?

Thus it is a woman's duty
To make home her special care,
As it loses its enchantment
If her presence is not there.

I said that this just suited me; but somehow the closing stanza knocks the pith all out of my opposition argument. The fact is, a home without a man in it "loses its enchantment" just as quick as it would without a woman in it. O, how many wives are there to-night looking with ghastly faces out into the darkness, wondering where their truant husbands are! And O, how many of these husbands spend their nights, till the wee, small hours of the morning, in gambling and drunkenness, leaving the home and hearthstone desolate! How many mothers gaze anxiously out into the night, from homes which are aught but homelike, reaching out the bleeding tendrils of anguish-torn hearts, calling vainly for the return of the one "infant boy" who never went astray while under her guidance and "teaching," but who now is beyond the pale of "things which ne'er for her had birth;" consequently he enters dens whose steps take hold on hell, and goes straight to ruin.

Forgive me if again I quote:
If more mothers knew their mission,
Greater would the Nation be;
Less of sin and degradation,
More of truth and honesty.

I am afraid I am not making a good point for the opposition here, but the business is new to me. I am doing the best I can.

Here to meet the loved one, smiling,
When his duty tells her o'er,
Greeting him with fond embraces
As he enters at the door.

I guess our poet is "sparkling" some Olympia girl. His poetry is a little moonshiny just here, and men inspired by the tender sentiment are apt to be a little flighty. But his idea is beautiful, and will work both ways. If the poet's "girl" is present, let me say to her seriously, that she might go farther and fare worse. The man's heart is right; he only sees through a glass, darkly. When his vision gets a little clearer he will realize that man has some "smiling" duties to perform in home and marriage, as well as woman.

Here is another stanza of like import, every word of which I heartily endorse:

Here to share in every sorrow,
Making all his burdens light,
Till the dawn of each new morn'g
Shines upon his path more bright.

This is an idea that will work both ways, too.

But I am detaining you too long. When this part of my subject is finished, I have an hour's talk before me upon "Suffrage, and how to obtain it," and I must be careful not to tire you out upon this occasion, for sometime I shall want you to hear me again.

Our poet-friend's closing stanza is such a telling refutation of the nonsense given before, in which he would circumscribe woman's power and influence by denying her the ballot (which he forgets is not his to withhold), that I shall quote it without comment and pass to the consideration of the second part of my discourse:

Here to be his bright star, guiding
To heavenly cloudless heights,
Where no shadowy mist hangs;
That's what meant by Woman's Rights!