

113. Frances E. Willard, *Women and Temperance* (1883)

Source: *Frances E. Willard, Women and Temperance* (Hartford, Conn., 1883), pp. 43–46.

Founded in 1874, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) grew to become the era's largest female organization, with a membership of 150,000 by 1890. Under the banner of Home Protection, it moved from demanding the prohibition of alcoholic beverages (blamed for leading men to squander their wages on drink and treat their wives abusively) to a comprehensive program of economic and political reform including the right to vote. Women, insisted Frances Willard, the group's president, must abandon the idea that "weakness" and dependence were their nature and join assertively in movements to change society.

TO HELP FORWARD the coming of Christ into all departments of life, is, in its last analysis, the purpose and aim of the W. C. T. U. For we believe this correlation of New Testament religion with philanthropy, and of the church with civilization, is the perpetual miracle which furnishes the only sufficient antidote to current skepticism. Higher toward the zenith climbs the Sun of Righteousness, making circle after circle of human endeavor and achievement warm and radiant with the healing of its beams. First of all, in our gospel temperance work, this heavenly light penetrated the gloom of the individual, tempted heart (that smallest circle, in which all others are involved), illumined its darkness, melted its hardness, made it a sweet and sunny place—a temple filled with the Holy Ghost.

Having thus come to the heart of the drinking man in the plenitude of his redeeming power, Christ entered the next wider circle, in which two human hearts unite to form a home, and here, by the revelation of her place in His kingdom, He lifted to an equal level with her husband the gentle companion who had supposed herself happy in being the favorite vassal of her liege lord. "There is neither

male nor female in Christ Jesus;" this was the "open sesame," a declaration utterly opposed to all custom and tradition, but so steadily the light has shone, and so kindly has it made the heart of man, that without strife of tongues, or edict of sovereigns, it is coming now to pass that in proportion as any home is really Christian, the husband and the wife are peers in dignity and power. There are no homes on earth where woman is "revered, beloved," and individualized in character and work, so thoroughly as the fifty thousand in America where "her children arise up and call her blessed, her husband also, and he praiseth her" because of her part in the work of our W. C. T. U.

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But the modern temperance movement, born of Christ's gospel and cradled at His altars, is rapidly filling one more circle of influence, wide as the widest zone of earthly weal or woe, and that is government. "The government shall be upon His shoulder." "Unto us a King is given." "He shall reign whose right it is." "He shall not fail, nor be discouraged until he hath set judgment in the earth." "For at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done *on earth*." Christ shall reign—not visibly, but invisibly; not in form, but in fact; not in substance, but in essence, and the day draws nigh! Then surely the traffic in intoxicating liquors as a drink will no longer be protected by the statute book, the lawyer's plea, the affirmation of the witness, and decision of the judge. And since the government is, after all, a circle that include all hearts, all homes, all churches, all societies, does it not seem as if intelligent loyalty to Christ the King would cause each heart that loves Him to feel in duty bound to use all the power it could gather to itself in helping choose the framers of these more righteous laws? But let it be remembered that for every Christian man who has a voice in making and enforcing laws there are at least two Christian women who have no voice at all. Hence, under such circumstances as now exist, His militant army must ever be powerless to win those legislative battles which, more than any others, affect the happiness of aggregate humanity.