

## THE ORIGIN OF THE WORLD'S W. C. T. U.

BY FRANCES E. WILLARD \*

In 1883, in company with Miss Anna Adams Gordon, who has now been with me for more than twenty years, I visited every State and Territory of the republic. Many a time since then have I asked my journalistic friends—who are supposed to know most things!—if they knew of any one who had done this for purposes of business, or indeed for any reason, and have not yet found that our record of thirty thousand miles, covering every part of the republic and accomplished in one year, had anywhere been duplicated.

We reached California in May, and although I had spent several years in foreign travel, this seemed to me above every part of the world I had ever beheld to be "God's country." There was nothing left to be desired—except that everywhere, and most of all in San Francisco, I kept thinking of those lines from "Lalla Rookh":

"'Poor suffering mortals,' said the pitying spirit,  
'Dearly ye pay for your primal fall:  
Some flowerets of Eden ye still inherit,  
But the trail of the serpent is over them all.'"

As a matter of course, the most painful sight we witnessed in California was Chinatown. Accompanied by missionary workers

we went to the opium dens, where we saw men stretched out on shelves, like plates in a pantry, unconscious from the use of the pipe. Not far off where the little houses with a single door, the upper part of which was made to slide, so that in the opening might be displayed the carefully combed and shining head of a pretty Chinese girl (one in each of the houses), who had been imported for the most abominable purpose of which the mind can conceive. We went the rounds of these, the poor young creatures smiling upon us and seeming to be without any sense of shame. Looking out over the beautiful harbor, I knew that beyond the bulging waist of the big world one would find China, where the absolute dominance of the stronger has brought constant physical pain to half a race by reason of the foot-binding that prevents the women from ever escaping the clutches of their masters. I knew that farther on one would come to India, where it is admitted by men that the suttee, or burning alive of the widow on the tomb of her husband, originated in the purpose to prevent wives from poisoning their husbands, and where, as Mrs. Isabella Bird Bishop, the famous medical missionary traveller, tells us, the women of the harem begged poison from her that they might give it to "the other woman's son" so that their own would inherit the title or property or both. Farther on one would come to Turkey, where, when the sultan rides to his devotions at the mosque, half a dozen carriage-loads of most beautiful women accompany him to the door, but do not dream of entering, as they are only "on view," that the gaping public may see what are to him the choicest treasures of his realm.

Thinking about all this, it was borne in upon my mind that the crusade in Ohio, that whirlwind of the Lord which has spread so fast and far, drawing into its mighty circles of power good women in many lands, might well become consolidated into a society for the protection of the home, no matter where that home might be. The impression was so vital that it gave me no rest, and a few months later, when we were convened in our annual "harvest home"—this time at Detroit, Mich., 1883—I stated to my associates the conviction that we must organize a World's W. C. T. U. Many thought the plan chimerical, but some favored it and said "it will do no harm at least to comply with the single request that is made," viz., to appoint the five general officers of the National W. C. T. U. to consider the matter for a year and to take such preliminary steps as they deem wise.

That very autumn Mrs. Mary Clement Leavitt, of Boston, formerly at the head of a ladies' school there, and later president of the Boston local union and a national organizer of the W. C. T. U., set sail from San Francisco as our first white-ribbon missionary round the world. When I wrote asking if she would undertake such a difficult mission, knowing that the society was not yet

organized and as a matter of course had not a penny of money, she answered in the most heroic fashion that she would go and take her chances. The temperance people of the Hawaiian Islands met the expenses of her voyage to Australia, and in the nine years during which she was constantly at work in foreign lands to make known the World's W. C. T. U. and the Polyglot Petition against the alcohol and opium trades, Mrs. Leavitt's expenses were met by the many among whom she toiled, save that in response to my appeal our American white-ribboners raised three thousand dollars, of which she did not, I think, receive the last installment until she was about to return home.

It is undoubtedly true that no man or woman ever invested so long a time in as many countries with so little financial support as Mrs. Leavitt, and she will always stand in the annals of our society as its capable and loyal pioneer. She was asked to be the first president of the World's W. C. T. U., but declined, saying she preferred to remain a free-lance rather than be tied down to the drudgery of official routine. It then occurred to me that we might make her honorary president, which

was done at Boston in 1891. Mrs. Leavitt still travels and works for the temperance cause, lecturing in the United States during the warm season and going to Mexico, Jamaica, the Bahama Islands, or some other milder climate during the severities of winter, because after living so long in the tropical countries she cannot endure our winter weather. The statistics given by her in Boston show that Mrs. Leavitt organized the W. C. T. U. in the Hawaiian Islands, Australia, Madagascar, India, China, Madeira, Mauritius, Ceylon, Siam, the Straits Settlements, Corea, Japan, and Europe, besides visiting South America in its interest.



GENERAL OFFICERS OF THE WORLD'S W. C. T. U.

Agnes E. Sack, Sec'y

Lady Henry Somerset, Vice Pres.

Frances E. Willard, Pres.

Anna A. Gordon, Asst. Sec'y.

Mary E. Sanderson, Treas.

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