

Dawn of Woman's Day 1888

by Frances Willard

There is a prayer, uttered or unexpressed, that brings us face to face, and it is this: "Help me to heal the heart-break of humanity." The measureless injustice that surrounds us like an atmosphere and the fathomless misery that broods over us like a malaria make many a murmuring heart cry out:--

Had I God's power or He my love,
We'd have a different world from this we see.

But the philosophic mind perceives that everywhere God works by means, and that evermore the Christ-spirit must be incarnate or it cannot carry out its miracles of healing. In the order of evolution it is first of all embodied in the individual, then in the home, then in society, then in the State, and some day shall be in that Universal Republic of which the Laureate sings, when

The flags shall all be furled
In the Parliament of Man, the Federation of the World.

Our meeting here hastens that coming consummation. Mother-love works magic for humanity, but organized mother-love works miracles. Mother-hearted women are called to be the saviors of the race. I speak it reverently, as a loyal worshiper of Him who said, "Mother, behold thy Son."

We all know that organization is the one great thought of nature. It is the difference between chaos and order; it is the incessant occupation of God. But, next to God, the greatest organizer on this earth is the mother. She who sends forth from the sanctuary of her own being a little child has organized a great spiritual world, and set it moving in the orbit of unchanging law. Hence woman, by her organism, is the greatest organizer ever organized by our beneficent Creator.

But in the nature of the case, the mother, patiently preoccupied in deeds of love for those about her, has been slowest of all to reflect on her own innate powers, and has not until recently so much as dreamed of the resistless force of the world's aggregated motherhood. When I was graduated from college in 1859 there was not on the face of the earth, I venture to say--certainly there was not in my native land, the most progressive land of all--a national society of women. We worked on in weakness and seclusion, in loneliness and isolation. But we learned at last the gracious secret that has transformed the world for men and made them masters. We learned the mighty difference between the wide, open hand with individual fingers impotent because

separate, and the condensed, constructive, organized power of those fingers when combined. We learned that floating timbers on the sea are not more futile as compared with the same timbers when organized into a ship than are solitary human beings as compared with the same persons when organized and instructed, unified and equipped in societies and guilds. The mighty work done to mitigate the horrors of our Civil War first revealed to us and to our brothers the latent power of the nation's womanhood; next came the holy zeal of the Women's Foreign Missionary Societies; then the heavenly enthusiasm of the Woman's Temperance Crusade, with its marvelous sequel, the Woman's Christian Temperance Unions; then the beautiful younger sister, the Woman's Home Missionary Society, while the Women's Christian Association and Congress, the women's clubs, industrial and educational unions, relief corps, protective agency, the mighty labor movement, and the countless societies for local help to the sick, the friendless, and the poor abundantly testify to that esprit de corps which we women have at last acquired and are now so sure to utilize for purposes of blessing vastly wider, more pervasive, and more varied than we could at first have dared to undertake or dreamed of compassing.

From this time on the world will have in it no active, organic force so strong for its uplifting as its organized mother-hearts. You will notice the breadth of my generalization. I do not say "all mothers," because all women who are technically mothers are not "mother-hearted," while many a woman is so, from whom the crisscross currents of the world have withheld her holiest crown.

In my own quiet refuge at Evanston, where we talk of all these things, I once said to Susan B. Anthony, that noblest Roman of us all:

"Bravely as you have trodden it and glorious as has been your via solitaria, have you not always felt a sense of loss?"

She answered in the gentle, thoughtful voice that we all love:

"Could I be really the woman that I am and fail to feel that under happier conditions I might have known a more sacred companionship than has ever come to me, and that the companion could not have been a woman?"

But that she also felt God's call under the unhappy conditions that exist to go her own victorious way alone is proved by her reply to a good man and leading publicist who once said to her:

"Miss Anthony, with your great head and heart, you, of all women I have met, ought to have been a wife and mother."

Our noble pioneer answered him after this fashion:--

"I thank you, sir, for what I take to be the highest compliment, but sweeter even than to have had the joy of caring for children of my own has it been to me to help bring about a better state of things for mothers generally, so that their unborn little ones could not be willed away from them."

Far be it from me to draw, by any definition, such a line around the regnant organized womanhood of the nation as would leave out our mother-hearted Susan B. Anthony.

Men know where their true interests lie, and women whom men love and trust and honor are always motherly at heart.

If there is a spectacle more odious and distasteful than a man who hates women it is a woman who hates men. If I am glad of anything it is that, while I have my playful quips and passing sallies anent them in my own inner home circle, when some passing injustice of the old regime quickens my pulses, the lifelong tenor of my pen and voice and work have been not more for "Peace on earth" than for "Good will to men." This frank utterance may surely be permitted to one who on this day completes the first week of her fiftieth year, and who thanks God with unspeakable tenderness for all the pleasant land on which she can look back from the high chronologic vantage-ground she has attained. If this had not been so, surely these royal wives and mothers who today have rallied around me would rightfully have refused my leadership.

It has required more than a generation of training within the sheltering circle of the church, where most of us have had our schooling in organized endeavor, to prepare us for so large a thought as was launched at Washington, D. C., last spring in the International Council. We knew that by the law of fittest survival, each group of women working together according to a plan develops its own leadership. But there and then began the widest evolution possible to us as women and the last in our slow process of training for our true position as the equal partners of men in the great world and its work, for at Washington was evolved the idea of a society made up of leaders only--a Council of Women, every one of whom should be an expert and a specialist in some department of work for the uplifting of humanity, and to which should be eligible the leader of every society in the nation, "the nature of whose work is undoubtedly national in either its character or its value." Then, once in five years, the International Council of Women, also organized at Washington, is to meet, to which

will be eligible only the presidents of National Councils. Fifty-three different organizations of women, all but four of which were of national scope and all of national value, were there represented. The subjects of education, philanthropies, temperance, industries, professions, organization, legal conditions, social purity, political conditions, and religion were all discussed. While no restriction was placed upon the fullest expression of the most widely divergent views upon these vital questions of the age, it is cause for rejoicing that the sessions, both executive and public, were absolutely without friction.

It is the unanimous voice of this council that all institutions of learning, and of professional instruction, including schools of theology, law, and medicine, should, in the interest of humanity, be as freely opened to women as to men; that opportunities for industrial training should be as generally and liberally provided for one sex as for the other. The representatives of organized womanhood in this council will steadily demand that in all avocations in which both men and women engage equal wages shall be paid for equal work; and, finally, that an enlightened society should adopt, as the only adequate expression of the high civilization which it is its office to establish and maintain, an identical standard of personal purity and morality for men and women.

The general declaration of the National Council of the United States as well as of the World's Council was as follows:

We women, sincerely believing that the best good of our homes and nation will be advanced by our own greater unity of thought, sympathy, and purpose, and that an organized movement of women will best conserve the highest good of the family and the state, do hereby band ourselves together in a confederation of workers committed to the overthrow of all forms of ignorance and injustice and to the application of the Golden Rule to society, custom, and law. This council is organized in the interest of no one propaganda, and has no power over its auxiliaries beyond that of suggestion and sympathy; therefore no society voting to become auxiliary to this council shall thereby render itself liable to be interfered with in respect to its complete organic unity, independence, and methods of work, or be committed to any principle or method of any other society, or to any utterance or act of the council itself, beyond compliance with the terms of this constitution.

No sooner was this new thought launched on the seething waves of journalism than good women everywhere began to say to one another: "If unification is strength in the national movements of women, why not in the States, and why not in each city, town,

and village? If, as the 'Council Women' said in their preamble, such an organization 'will incalculably increase the world's sum total of womanly courage, efficiency, and esprit de corps, widen our horizon, correct the tendency to an exaggerated impression of the value of one's own work as compared with that of others, and put the wisdom and experience of each at the service of all,' then let us all have councils, local and state, and let us have them speedily."

Here in Chicago seventy societies have already responded to the call and fifty-seven have allied themselves with the new movement. In Kansas a state woman's council was organized, as I suppose, this week, and another will be in Ohio the 11th of this month. I have never known a movement among women so enthusiastic and spontaneous. The time for it has fully come; the clock of God has struck the hour, and the best manhood of the manliest nation reaches out a brother's hand of help to us as we move forward bearing woman's white flag of peace, inscribed, "For Home and for Humanity."

This is the latest outgrowth of that gospel which raises woman up and with her lifts toward Heaven the world.

Let us think for a little while about the results to be expected from this movement. Naturally they will be twofold: First, the reflex influence of such association upon the members themselves. For instance: Here is a woman devoted to self-culture. She learns, not to put aside her Plato, but to alternate its study with that of Helen Campbell's Prisoners of Poverty and to divide her time at the art gallery with her visits to the white slaves. Here is a woman who is so devoted to the Waif's Mission that she takes no time for books. Her association with the self-culturist leads her to ask for Emerson's Essays at the Public Library, and perhaps to advance so far beyond her former horizon as to join a Robert Browning club. Here is a home missionary woman devoted to the Bohemians, not of journalism, but of Pilsen on the Nord Seit. She is assigned to duty with a foreign missionary woman, and from association with her discovers that electricity and steel have shrunk the world till it is hardly bigger than an orange, that the Bohemian beyond the sea needs looking after just as badly as his brother on this side, while the zenanas of India and the Congo atrocities in Africa become so vivid in recital as to seem knocking for relief at her door. Meanwhile the foreign missionary woman at her side makes the useful discovery that the telescope of observation by which she was wont to bring the distant near can be adjusted as a microscope, magnifying to her perceptions the tenement-

house horrors of her own city. Here is a temperance woman who solemnly believed that prohibition was the be-all of the republic's hopes and the end-all of its sorrows; but the Knight of Labor woman at her elbow convinced her that better economic conditions enter into that colossal problem and prevailed on her to read Edward Bellamy's wonderful book, entitled Looking Backward, while the working woman graciously accepted in return a copy of the platform of the Prohibition party, which appeared to be quite edifying reading. Here again is a Republican woman placed alongside a Democratic woman, and as true yokefellows they go on a legal embassy from the Woman's to the City Council, and whatever their opinion of their respective parties may be, from what they there perceive they will be pretty sure to gain from one another a more hopeful view of those two great marching armies of civilization, whose guns are ballots and whose bullets are ideas.

Here is a Protestant woman who thinks there is no good in Catholics, never was, and never will be, but she is placed on the Public Library Committee with a communicant of the Cathedral, and finds her "so much like other folks" that she would really have supposed her to be a devout Presbyterian, while the Catholic sister comes into kindly fellowship with her Baptist committeewoman, and will never again believe but that Protestants are really reputable people and quite likely to be saved.

Thus in a thousand ways the blessed education into a tolerant spirit goes swiftly on; the cobwebs of ignorance are brushed away; the rusty chains of prejudice are filed in two, and sectarianism is replaced by sisterly love; meanwhile the horizon of the heart is widened because the outlook of the brain is elevated, and into the lonesome little coves, inlets, and bays flow the strong, healthful tides of life's cosmopolitan sea.

But this is only the beginning. These women in council will not be theorists--they will be above all else practitioners in that word's widest sense. They will have no use for any philosophy of life that cannot be translated in terms of good works as well as of good will. Their deeds will all be "deeds of weekday holiness, nor will they ever chance to learn that aught is easier than to bless." In the wide realm of human misery they will have one guiding star and that is JUSTICE. Wherever there is a sister more downtrodden than any other, more helpless and forgotten, there by the law of spiritual gravitation they will delight to invest the weight of their power and the momentum of their united enthusiasm.

But while we believe the reflex influence of the Woman's League upon its members will be of incalculable value to them all, we are chiefly concerned today with its reaction upon the five great organized forces by which the council is environed--namely, the home, the school, society, the church, and government.

The united wisdom and work of Chicago's organized womanhood directed upon Chicago homes will mean a better knowledge of sanitation and hygiene as applied to home architecture, ventilation, drainage, light, heat, diet, and dress adornings. If the best and broadest-natured housekeepers, or, as I like a thousand times better to call them, the homemakers of our city, could put their heads together over this problem of the modern home, as their husbands do over the problem of rapid street-car transit and the bridge question, I believe that such an impetus would be given to invention and such encouragement to enterprise that the following improvements would be wrought out within ten years:

Hot water and steam-heated air supplied to every house as gas is now from common reservoirs; a public laundry system, so complete as to drive the washtub out of every kitchen, banishing forever the reign of a steamy, sudsy, indigo-blue Monday; and a caterer's system so complete as to send the cooking-stove into perpetual exile. If men had these problems on hand, complicated with the unspeakable servant-girl problem, they would have solved them by a syndicate long before this, putting no end of money in their purses and no end of misery outside of home's four walls. The servant-girl question will ere long be answered by not having servant-girls. The relations of the maid-of-all-work to the average household are abnormal, if not to a degree inhuman. They ought to be abolished, and will be in the growing unrest and uplift of the wage-worker on the one hand and the growing tendency of the employer to look upon this woman as a convenient "Celtic apparatus" on the other. Invention, enterprise, and associated effort, stimulated by the united wit and wisdom of united housekeepers, will lead us out of this wilderness.

I often think, when rejoicing in the homelike amenities of a vestibule train, with its day-coach, dining-car, and sleeper, that if George M. Pullman could be induced by a council of women to give five years of his wonderful brain to this problem of household comfort off the rails, counseling with the housekeepers, as he would be wise enough to do, he might crown his splendid life by carrying into the average home the same wholesale comforts and elegances with which he now regales the traveling public. Only in that case we must petition him to spare us the diffusive atmosphere of

that horrible smoker's annex. He would have his house porters who would come around regularly and set everything to rights, build fires in the open grate, just for the beauty and coziness thereof, and clear up the house generally; his pneumatic tubes through which to send the meals ordered by telephone, and waiters detailed, so many to the block, to serve and gather up the fragments of the same, at far less cost than now, taking the wholesale contract by the year, while the average excellence of viands prepared by experts would be far higher than at present, with a proportionate increase in the health and happiness of the families thus served. To preserve the individuality, the privacy, and sanctity of home while diminishing its cost and friction is the problem that women in council must set themselves to solve. Notable homemakers, ready for the next thing, and not afraid of it because it is the next and not the last, should be organized into a standing committee on this subject.

What is done on a large scale places the doer on a vantage-ground financially, socially, legally, and every way. The boardinghouse, that sepulchre of domestic happiness, would disappear to the incalculable advantage of husband, mother, and child, and the notable women who have a genius for affairs and now conduct our boardinghouses would find a broader field in the supervision of apartment houses and other details of the better housekeeping arrangements herein proposed, while the bachelor who now leads the sorry life of "a young man about town" would find his pathway to the marriage altar far less hedged about with financial briars and brambles, a "home of his own"--that dearest wish of every true man's heart--having become possible on easy terms.

Specialists in industry everywhere command respect and have a first mortgage on success, but the infinite variety of industries that a maid-of-all-work must carry on, whose thankless task is never done and seldom well done, ought at this advanced stage of invention and enterprise to follow the otherwise almost universal law of corporate direction. Each branch of her neverending duties is capable of being so administered as to make it a great business controlled by the best brains and handled by trained experts.

The only class that yet retains the badge of servitude in its name of servant girl deserves the utmost consideration at the hands of women well to do, for what other class has placed us upon such a vantage ground? While I believe that the tendency of the time is toward such a scientific rectification of household duties as will render the office of maid-of-all-work obsolete, I believe that for the present distress a training

school for domestics would be a boon to housekeepers and a capital help for hired helpers which this league of women might well lend its great influence to establish and maintain.

It has been justly said that many now living have seen in the last eight years changes for the better that the previous eight centuries have hardly noticed. "The tendency of today is to afford to each individual in the community a service that would once have been attainable only to the man of large wealth. In all directions the tendency is toward making the advantages of the few the privilege of all, and the all can collectively afford a better service than the few." When the public learns that it can do anything better and cheaper by concerted action, it will not be slow to make new applications of that lesson, and household industries will be differentiated and specialized to a degree that will solve the servant-girl question to the advantage of all concerned and assign the well-disposed and capable among such girls to the fast multiplying trades and occupations now opening to women on every hand.

"And the earth helped the woman," is one of the Bible's grandest prophecies, fulfilled for us and yet to be far more perfectly fulfilled in the material inventions whereby woman shall be relieved from the drudgery of daily toil and lifted to the level of her highest and her holiest ministries.

But with these varied cares and perpetual annoyances removed, how will the homemaker of the well-to-do classes employ her time? In the care of her children, the companionship of her husband, and in works of philanthropy, by which the coming epoch shall be hastened forward when there shall be no classes that are not well to do.

But there remains abundant territory to be possessed in home's illimitable realm. Women in council working to improve that sanctuary of their hearts will find grievous inequalities in the laws that relate to property as between husband and wife; they will find that in most of the States a wife cannot bring a civil suit for damages against her husband; that as a rule the crime of despoiling a woman of her honor is not punished so heavily as the stealing of a cow; that in general the protection of the person ranks far behind protection of the purse; that in all the thirty-eight States but four still make the father the natural guardian of the children, and that as against all but his wife he can will away the guardianship of his child, whether born or unborn,

while she cannot will away hers as against all but her husband.

To show how gladly good men help us toward better law let me recite an incident. In the winter of 1856-57 Judge Waite was sitting in his law office in this city when a woman came in and said her husband was about to convey the homestead and have her put out of doors. She asked if this could legally be done. The judge told her he feared it could be, but would examine carefully. She came in the next day, and he was obliged to tell the poor woman that her husband could take away her home. But Judge Waite immediately drafted a bill to prevent such action in this or any case, sent it to a member of the State Senate, and it was passed at once, and was the first or among the first statutes of the kind in the United States. So that we must not only say that "The earth helps the woman," but that the good and true man everywhere is more than glad to help her.

A great world is looming into sight, like some splendid ship long-awaited for--the world of heredity, of prenatal influence, of infantile environment. The greatest right of which we can conceive, the right of the child to be well-born, is being slowly, surely recognized. Poor old humanity, so tugged by fortune and weary with disaster, turns to the cradle at last and perceives it has been the Pandora's box of every ill and the Fortunatus casket of every joy that life has known. When the mother learns the divine secrets of her power, when she selects in the partner of her life the father of her child, and for its sacred sake rejects the man of unclean lips because of the alcohol and the tobacco taint, and shuns as she would a leper the man who has been false to any other woman no matter how depraved; when he who seeks life's highest sanctities in the relationships of husband and father shuns as he would if thoughtful of his future son the woman with wasp waist that renders motherhood a torture and dwarfs the possibilities of childhood, French heels that throw the vital organs out of their normal place, and sacred charms revealed by dresses décolleté, insisting on a wife who has good health and a strong physique as the only sure foundation of his home-hopes, then shall the blessed prophecy of the world's peace come true; the conquered lion of lust shall lie down at the feet of the white lamb of purity and a little child shall lead them.

Society and government are two circles which interplay like rainbows round a fountain, and that fountain is the home. Women in league or council will bring their united power to bear wherever in the operation of an unjust law, whether it be of custom or of legislation, any woman is defrauded of her right. Let us picture them in action: The Municipal Council is in session; but the Board of Directors of the

Woman's Council is in session also; it represents not some single, isolated, and comparatively uninfluential society, but the united forces of Chicago's organized womanhood. We want an ordinance giving better protection to shop and factory girls; providing more carefully for their physical health, comfort, and convenience, guarding them so far as possible from moral disaster and disease. Through our office secretary we have sent out petitions to every woman's society in the city asking for this ordinance and pledging its enforcement by means of women inspectors from our own number who will serve without fee or reward. The petitions come back signed by tens of thousands. All reputable employers are with us in this effort, and the wage-workers of the city are well pleased to have our help, hence the voting majority that makes and unmakes city councils is on our side.

Thus panoplied with the power of organization of numbers or a majority among the voters, and, best of all, pleading a cause that tends towards human brotherhood, the Women's Council goes before the City Council and wins the day. But without the law-enforcer back of the law, it is like a rusty sword in a still more rusty scabbard. Already the working-girls of Chicago have much more law upon their side than is utilized for their defense. But there has been no eye to pity, and no hand to save. Now you are here, the women whose opulent and forceful lives have been from a thousand springs of opportunity and blessing; you are here with the arrest of thought in your brains and the enthusiasm of humanity in your hearts; let us bring the solid weight and total momentum of Chicago's organized womanhood to bear upon the problem of a better and a happier life for working-girls. For one I promise, overwhelmed with cares and duties as I am, to give one afternoon in the week as an inspector to see that the laws we have and mean to get for these women are carried into execution. Nor do I see anything generous about the offer. It will help me as much as it can possibly help those to whom I minister. In the spiritual as well as the material realm, action and reaction are equal. Working along large lines as a reformer, I covet the opportunity to come face to face with those in whose interest I have tried to toil. The warm hand-clasp, the gentle greeting, the tear of sympathy, I want to give them all, not for the girls' sake only, but also to make me mellow hearted as the swift years roll on. I hope the reply is apocryphal that I once heard attributed to Charles Sumner when he was asked by Julia Ward Howe to help a little colored girl, and said: "Madam, bring no individual cases to me, for I am consecrated to the uplifting of a race." Surely this is not the spirit of His life who went about doing good to the lowly and forgotten. And we, going straight to those who need our help, shall learn a thousand ways of helping that we do not dream of now, while the public sentiment we can arouse and educate will wonderfully hasten the better

day. We must be willing to go forward upon this untried pathway just a step at a time. The whole question of tenement-house misery will open before us, and we shall yet find remedies; the unutterable problem of Chicago's haunts of infamy will be understood and studied as it has not been before; the right of workingmen to one day in seven for rest; the people's right to outlaw the liquor saloon as well as the gambling saloon--these and cognate forms of philanthropy will claim our courage and devotion.

Think for a moment of all this upon a larger scale. When each village, town, and city of our State shall have its league or council of good women, they can do for their localities what we hope to do for ours. But we must set them the example. As President of the Women's National Council, I earnestly hope they will move at once along these lines of organization, which mean power, and when the legislature meets next winter the State Council of Illinois ought to meet also, bringing the combined influence of us all to bear in asking for such legislation as our committee on legal work agree upon, and no bill should go before the legislature that is not backed up by the State Council of Women. We should have our representatives constantly at the capital--the State Council regularly holding its sessions there, and asking unitedly for the things that have heretofore been asked for only by separate societies. A law for the better protection of women; for raising the age of consent; for the teaching of hygiene in all grades of the public schools, with especial reference to stimulants and narcotics; for compulsory education; also for appropriations in aid of the industrial school for girls and other institutions to which our philanthropic women are devoted--we must together strive for these.

Locally, a Woman's League should, in the interest of that mothering which is the central idea of our new movement, seek to secure for women admission to all school committees, library associations, and boards entrusted with the care of the defective, dependent, and delinquent classes; all professional and business associations; all colleges and professional schools that have not yet set before us an open door of ingress: and each local league should have the power to call in the united influence of its own state league or of the National Council if its own influence did not suffice.

In the development of this movement I am confident that it will impart to women such a sense of strength and courage that their corporate self-respect will so increase that such theatrical bills as we now see displayed will not be permitted for an hour without our potent protest; and the exhibition of women's forms and faces in the saloons and cigar stores, which women's self-respect will never let them enter, and the

disgraceful literature now for sale on so many public newsstands, will not be tolerated by the womanhood of any town or city.

To develop the great quality of corporate as well as individual self-respect, I believe no single means would do more than the study of Frances Power Cobbe's noble book on *The Duties of Women*. It ought to be in the hands of every woman who has taken for her motto, "Hearts Within, God O'erhead," and surely it ought to be in the hands of every one who has not this high aim, while I am sure that every man who lives would be a nobler husband, son, and citizen of the great world if he would give this book his thoughtful study.

Dear friends, you know the story of Androcles and the lion; how the poor animal came limping out of the forest, knowing the gentleness of Androcles and unable longer to endure the pain of the sharp thorn it carried. To me that lion is a figure of humanity in its rough strength and staggering misery as it turns toward mother-hearted women for relief. I wish that we might have as a seal and emblem of our society the picture of a woman healing a lion's hurt. You know, as the sequel of the story, that when, long afterward, Androcles was condemned to fight with a lion in the arena, it proved to be his former friend, who received him with every demonstration of tenderness and loyalty.

Let us work on with the HUMAN rather than the WOMAN question as our deepest motive, and in the individual no less than the collective struggle of our lives we shall discover friends where foes were feared.

Francis Willard, Evanston, IL

Bio <https://sites.northwestern.edu/radicalwoman/>