

# **The New Godiva**

Josephine Butler

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# The New Godiva

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THE NEW GODIVA: A DIALOGUE

BY

JOSEPHINE E. BUTLER.

THE NEW GODIVA.

A DIALOGUE. SCENE.—A Smoking Room, Tyburnia.

THE INTERLOCUTORS ARE TWO BROTHERS, VICTOR AND CECIL.

"You would not let your little finger ache For such as these?" 'But I would die,' she said. **VICTOR.**

The last of them gone, thank Heaven! Now, at last, we shall get a couple of hours alone together. I seem scarcely to have seen you since you came home. By the way, let me congratulate you on the figure you make in society, after ten years in Queensland. Our friends to-night, I could see, imagined they had been asked to meet a kind of savage, a sort of wild-man-of-the-woods, and were surprised, and a little disappointed, to find a cultivated English gentleman, well up in the politics, literature, and even small-talk of the day, and guiltless of eating with his knife, or helping himself with his fingers.

**CECIL.**

You flatter me. More than once this evening, I felt painfully conscious of my social inexperience. When your friend Aimee, for instance, sounded upon woman's suffrage, and eyed me with good humored contempt as I feebly expounded my retrograde views on that subject, I devoutly wished myself back in the Bush.

**VICTOR.**

I deny the contempt. Aimee is incapable of scorn, except for what is base. She is the greatest friend my wife has.

**CECIL.**

Indeed! I should have thought her too strong-minded for the gentle Mary. You smile—

**VICTOR.**

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At the notion of anything strong-minded, in the vulgar sense of the term, in one of the most refined, tender, and lovable of women. Oh, prejudice! what a miracle-worker art thou! You met a charming, sympathetic, feminine creature like Aimee, and you are prepared to fall at her feet. You hear that she wants the franchise, and instantly, without any change in her demeanour, you dub her strong-minded, a compound of Medusa and Mrs. Jellyby, an unsexed, aggressive, officious, dangerous being, to whom all rational persons would give a wide berth!

**CECIL.**

Aimee, at any rate, is fortunate in her champion! But, seriously, granting the prejudice, and attributing it, if you like, to a very natural cause, my ten years' exile from the haunts of civilization and progress, I confess that nothing has amazed me more in my solitude than certain recent developments of this woman question. Reading, of course, can never take the place of personal intercourse with one's fellows, to which, for all except scholars proper, it is at best an adjunct, and it is very possible that my mind has been warped by the solitary perusal of what Aimee would call reactionary journalism and periodical literature. But failing such personal intercourse, I have read all the more diligently, and, perhaps, I may say, honestly, and the result is a feeling of some bewilderment at what would appear to be some very curious, if not threatening, social phenomena. Even the strides of science, inconceivably marvellous though these are, seem to me to be less portentous than the moral revolution which is rapidly modifying and displacing the sex.

**VICTOR.**

Perhaps you would mention some of the more alarming of these phenomena, some of the graver symptoms of the malady?

**CECIL.**

You are laughing at me. You know better than I do what they are. In the first place, you have ladies' high schools and colleges—women receiving men's education and men's degrees. Then you have lady doctors—women familiarized with dissecting rooms—vivisection rooms too, if our medical faculty is in the right. Then you have lady members of school-boards and boards of guardians; ladies wielding the municipal franchise; ladies assembling in monster demonstrations to clamour for the parliamentary franchise. Literature, of course, has been their special field for long; but, so far as I know, it is only of late years that they have joined the ranks of atheists and agnostics, and that if you happen upon a magazine article of more than common rancour against existing creeds, you are safe in taking for granted that it was written by a woman. Last, but not least, you have women initiating and banding together to promote an agitation of too unsavoury and repulsive a character even to name. How it has come to pass that any pure-minded woman could mix herself up in the remotest degree in so contaminating a matter, I am, for my own part, totally at a loss to conceive. It is, of course, impossible not to credit the greater part of the large number of women who seem to be concerned in the movement with honest, if mistaken and pernicious motives. I can only say that, personally, I find it difficult to reconcile the notion of anything honourable or worthy with a "mission" of that sort. To take the most charitable view of the thing, I do not suppose that misguided philanthropy, ignorant, hysterical, feminine enthusiasm, even culminated in so painful and revolting a monstrosity as this of the "shrieking sisterhood"—

**VICTOR.**

That will do. Your outburst is natural enough, and you will easily believe that it is not the first philippic of the kind I have listened to. But before you go any further, I think it only fair to mention that the ranks of the "shrieking sisterhood" have been swelled by a recent convert, in the person of—your sister-in-law, my wife!

**CECIL.**

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Gracious powers!

**VICTOR.**

Do not look so distressed. I expected all this and only said nothing of the matter in writing, because I felt a personal explanation would be easier.

**CECIL.**

But you have allowed it? you countenanced it?

**VICTOR.**

Pardon me. There is no question of allowing between my wife and myself. That is the relation between master and slave; or, if you will, between parent and child, not between two grown human beings endowed with reason. I admire Mary's "enthusiasm" and I share it, for reasons which I shall presently explain.

**CECIL.**

Good heavens! The gentle Mary! The sweetest, tenderest, merriest little girl of eighteen, as I recollect her. And so beautiful now, so young, so fair, a man

"Would not beteem the winds of heaven

Visit her face too roughly!" If these things must be—and from your espousal of the cause, I am willing to believe there is more in it than I know—surely they should be left to older women, to matrons and spinsters who are tired of Dorcas meetings and district-visiting. That they should take to political agitation—and such political agitation—is bad enough. But a woman like Mary! born to enchant society! a woman you can hardly endure to see cross the muddy streets!

**VICTOR.**

I can best answer you by repeating a short conversation I had with her a few days ago. I found her one evening sitting alone—beautiful enough in the bright light—the face whiter than usual from a vigil that had not been tearless; the blue eyes still large with tears, yet, oddly enough, a smile about the mouth. She saw me start, and turned to me. "I was thinking," she said, "how glad I am that I have kept my good looks. I have found out the use of being pretty now. It is a proof that you are in earnest." "How so?" I asked. "It is not hard," she said, "to make yourself unpopular, when you have few popular gifts to sacrifice, when you are wrecked by time, and, if not soured, saddened—as I suppose all thinking beings must be—by age. But to embrace an unpopular cause when you have, in a sense, the world at your feet; to lay yourself open to misconception and calumny and scorn, and worse" (here she shuddered), "when you might surround yourself with nothing but what is flattering and pleasant—this, I think, is to show that you are disinterested and sincere."

**CECIL.**

It would be difficult, certainly, to, look into Mary's eyes and imagine her to be anything else. But go on. Did she say anything more?

**VICTOR.**

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She did. After thinking for a few minutes very gravely, she began to smile again in that curious, tearful manner. "And in another way," she said, "I have found it of use to be tolerably fresh and pleasant looking. It puts me quicker en rapport with my girls. It shows them that at least I have known what it is to be young and foolish. They write to me about my 'dear face,' my 'bright face,' my 'happy smile.' All that is useful, and not to be despised. I notice there are so many women who take up 'work' of various kinds from motives which are not the highest. They want occupation; they are tired of home restraints; they have had disappointments, and 'epousent Dieu, parce que'elles n'ont pu epouser leur cousin.' Now, in my case, my children can never think I go to them because I have nothing else to do."

**CECIL.**

Then Mary has some class of girls?

**VICTOR.**

Not exactly. Mary is a believer in individual treatment, and, never has more than one with her at a time, if she can help it. She says she gets at them better in one tete-a-tete than she would do in twenty classes. Besides, classes are not exactly compatible with rescue work.

**CECIL.**

Rescue work. Do I understand you that Mary visits Refuges and Penitentiaries.

**VICTOR.**

I should have said with the branch of rescue work which she has taken up. No. She has chosen a field which she deems of more importance, because it is the most difficult of all, and the workers in it are scarce, as yet. She and her friend Aimee visit the houses of ill-fame in the daytime, try to reach the inmates separately, and when they have got them out, which they accomplish mainly by winning their affections, deal with each case singly, as the special circumstances require.

**CECIL.**

I am bewildered! To hear you talk so calmly of such horrors! As if it were a matter of course that one's wife should be exposed to such contamination, should go freely into those dens of iniquity and associate on equal terms with the wretched women whose very existence it is a shame she should know of!

**VICTOR.**

I am only not surprised at your bewilderment, but I can sympathize with you in it. It is not till a man has given long, patient, unprejudiced and unselfish thought to this matter, that any other attitude of mind can be expected of him. We are all brought up, or have been until quite latterly, men and women alike, to ignore, as far as it can be ignored, that outward and visible sign of an inbred taint and of wide-spread corruption known as the "social evil." What we have heard of it in our youth, we have heard illicitly and by stealth; any practical knowledge we may have of it in later years, we acquire also illicitly and by stealth, lest our mothers and sisters, lest any pure-minded woman, or, for the matter of that, high-minded man, hear of our wild-oat-sowing; or, if we are of a different calibre, and unfortunately brought, officially or otherwise, into contact with the abominable thing, we get through our distasteful duties as rapidly as we may, thinking nothing of the tremendous issues, national and domestic, that are involved, but only how we may pass on, with all expedient haste, to less unsavoury business.

**CECIL.**

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I confess I have not been in the habit of regarding this matter from a "national" point of view. What do you mean, now, by tremendous national issues?

**VICTOR.**

I could talk to you on that chapter till morning. But I prefer to sum up in words not my own the substance of what I should say. I can put my finger on the passage—here—in my common-place book. It is from the first volume of Froude's "Early Life of Carlyle":—

He saw that now, as much as ever, the fate of nations depended, not on their material development, but, as has been said in the Bible, and among all serious peoples, on the moral virtues, courage, veracity, PURITY, justice and good sense. Nations where these were honoured prospered and became strong. Nations which professed well with their lips, while their hearts were set on wealth and pleasure, were overtaken as truly in modern Europe as in ancient Palestine by the judgment of God.

**CECIL.**

I suppose there is no controverting the argument contained in that very eloquent passage. But I am afraid I am a dense, matter-of-fact person, not very susceptible to flights of rhetoric, and I own I should prefer some less vague and general proof of your assertion.

**VICTOR.**

As I said before, it would take me all night to prove it categorically. For the rest, I am not a great believer in statistics. As George Eliot says, "the driest argument has its hallucinations," and I maintain that men may dream in statistics as well as in demonstrations, and cut out for themselves illusory worlds in the shape of returns, as well as axioms, "with a final exclusion of fact signed Q.E.D." But if you are a stickler for figures, I will mention one or two. They will, I think, content you. The number of victims—I will call them by no harsher name, lest I come short of the truth—the number of victims to the selfishness of men, the indifference of women, and the ignorance and callousness of society generally, in London alone has been computed at 80,000. Suppose it is only half as many. Imagine forty thousand women living in a state of the profoundest moral and physical degradation, in a servitude more abject than the most abject form of slavery recorded in history, in a defilement as complete as anything we have shuddered at in the annals of ancient Rome or modern Paris! The fact requires no comment. It is not an agreeable fact; it is not a cheerful fact. But I think it cannot be gainsaid that it is an important fact, and that it behoves us as citizens—I will not say as humane and rational beings—to look it in the face. My common-place book, which, with your leave, will remain open while we are upon this subject, furnishes plenty of evidence, not of a "vague and general" character, if more be desired. Here is a specimen. "I consider," says a writer who has earned the right to be heard on this question, "the saddest and deepest of our social evils, the degradation of women, as preeminently a sin against the community, feeding the crime and disease of the country to a degree that few altogether realize. Out of 18,700 summary female convictions in Ireland, 11,463, or 61.3 per cent. were prostitutes. The statistics of disease would show more terrible results still, could they be obtained." Have you had enough? Or will you hear another fact? Our slave-population of degraded girls is of a transitory, not of a permanent character. About two-fifths of them marry. What of their subsequent history? What of their off-spring? What of a society recruited from such elements, of a lower class so mothered? But, as I said, to my own mind no figures are needed to expose the horrors of this national sore we hide indeed, but secretly nourish—I had almost said cherish—at any rate, accept as a disposition of things that always must be, as it always has been. For one whose eyes are opened, the proofs of the injury it occasions to the community, the deep-seated evil of which it is at the same time cause and effect, are not far to seek. They are in every newspaper he takes up, every book he reads, every chance conversation he hears.

**CECIL.**

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May I interrupt you to ask a question in passing? I do not understand why you insist on calling these wretched women victims and slaves. Surely they are free agents like the rest of us, and have themselves to thank for the plight they are reduced to.

**VICTOR.**

Are women free agents? Do we consider our own women—the women of our own class—free agents? Even when we have braced and strengthened them with all that care and culture can do for them; when, amid the amenities of home life, we have taught them German and music, possibly Greek and mathematics; do we consider them, so trained and panoplied, fit to be launched upon the world alone at fifteen, sixteen? Do we not look upon them as quasi children while they are in their teens—indeed, in many cases, till they marry, at whatever age? Do we not foster them, shelter them, shield them, demur to their going abroad unchaperoned—continue, in short, to father them? Yet these girls who make our streets unholy and our nights hideous—you persist in calling them women! What wondrous hallucination is this? Is it a far-off memory of the "strange woman" of Proverbs? And do you seriously believe that three thousand years have wrought no change in this thing—that the Judea of Solomon's time was in all respects as the London of our own, that "the profligate married woman of mature years, described in those verses, bore the smallest relation to the wretched, hungry, and ignorant children who infest our streets?" Again, it is scientific fact that a rapid physiological development is frequently accompanied by a sluggish mental one. The woman of sixteen is an infant in judgment, in reflection, in self-control—

**CECIL.**

But not always in experience.

**VICTOR.**

Almost always in experience that is calculated to do her any good. Of what use is it to her to know that infamy exists years before her sister of the upper classes suspects it? How does she acquire the knowledge? From the lips of the only teacher that ever kept man or woman steadfast in innocency of life—the lips of love? Or from her low surroundings, her unscrupulous companions, her coarse, unlovely mode of life, and those harsh threats which sow the seeds of every evil they are intended to avert?

**CECIL.**

It is the matter of fact that these girls are for the most part very young in years?

**VICTOR.**

It appears from the statistics of Rescue Societies that the greater number are led astray before they are eighteen. I will not touch upon the appalling fact of the increasing desecration of mere children. You know that up to thirteen the law affords them a certain protection. After that we have ordained that these infants in mind and will, these unstable ones, these, orphaned ones—for orphaned they usually are of all true succour—shall be free agents. If they had so much good fortune as to possess material wealth, we should guard that for them till they were twenty-one. No plea of "consent" would avail one who should seek to defraud them of their gold. But, if in a moment of giddiness and blindness—ah me! of hunger and of anguish—they barter away the one priceless possession that they have, what is that to us? She is of age, ask her, she shall speak for herself. She is—thirteen! Good God! It makes the blood curdle. Upon the condition of public opinion which renders such a state of the law tolerable for another hour, I will not trust myself to enlarge. I will merely turn again to the writer whose impassioned words I have quoted more than once. "As long as ruined girls are talked of as a necessity of a complex civilization, which delays early marriage; as long as a high price is forthcoming for the commodity; as long as Englishmen remain on a level with the Zulu chieftain who, when the English Government sent him a



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present of wagons and wheelbarrows, exclaimed, in fine scorn, 'What's the use of those things for bearing our burthens whilst we have plenty of women?' as long as the British Zulu says complacently, 'What is the use of our bearing that burthen of self-control which civilized life throws upon us, whilst we have plenty of women to crush and degrade,' so long the demand will create the supply.

**CECIL.**

Stop a moment. You are going too fast. Your zeal, which I will admit to be righteous, seems to me to be slightly outrunning your discretion. I do not believe that the majority of men reason in that manner.

**VICTOR.**

Oh, for that matter, neither do I. I am speaking of their practical, not of their ostensible reasoning. It matters very little to you how men talk, if once you have the unlucky knack of examining the logic of their actions.

**CECIL.**

Then you would give men in general credit for being so black-hearted?

**VICTOR.**

Heaven forbid. My quarrel is with principles, not with individuals. They are the victims of a false public opinion, that is all. For the most part they have no conception themselves where that same unconscious logic of theirs really lands them. I think well enough of my species to believe that when any average man does know it, does learn, by careful investigation, observation, and reflection, the true position in which he is placed by the anomalies of our present social code, he repudiates that code as he repudiates cowardice and baseness, and everything that dishonours, deforms, and degrades his manhood. For the rest, if I exaggerate in discussing this question, you must condone it on the score of the centuries of numbness, of deadness, that have surrounded the aspect of it upon which we are just now dwelling. We have hitherto exaggerated our blame of the weak woman. We may be pardoned for temporarily exaggerating our blame of the strong man. Let our endeavour be to fix our eyes neither upon man nor woman, but upon truth only, and the balance may be trusted to redress itself of its own accord. Meanwhile, there are heroic spirits who are not afraid of exaggerating their own share of responsibility in this matter. There is a young man—a kind of Galahad—brave as only the very pure can be—a true knight of modern times—who is giving his life to the cause. He once went up to a group of outcasts, and told them from his heart, with all the pitying respect and courtesy due to their spoiled womanhood, that when he thought of how men had wronged them, he was ashamed to look them in the face—he was ashamed to be a man.

**CECIL.**

You speak as though none of them had ever tempted men—young men especially—to evil.

**VICTOR.**

I never hear that argument without thinking of that manly excuse of Adam's: "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." But granting, as you know that I do abundantly grant, that most men are simply without the means of knowing their real duty in relation to women; that we wrong them only less cruelly than we wrong their temptresses, that we educate them falsely at home, at school, and in the world,—are we, on that account, to keep up our pariah-system with regard to the weaker class of transgressors only? How did they become such? From choice? I answer most deliberately—No. In Paris, the "brothel of Europe," as it has been called with painful fitness, it has been computed that only about five per cent. of these poor souls voluntarily choose and like their life. They are in prison and cannot come forth. The first false step has

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placed them under the social ban. Henceforth retrieval is made well-nigh impossible. They must "tempt" or starve. They are the scorn of women, the slaves of men. The leaden pall of age-long custom, of tradition, of conventionality, has descended upon them, as it were, in an instant, and effectually shut off from them all hope of rising into a purer air. Last of all, the State steps in to recognize their "trade" and fit them for it, to carefully exclude them from every constitutional, as they are already excluded from every social, privilege, to brand them like cattle, and set them apart for uses less noble than those to which we devote the beasts of the field.

**CECIL.**

But are we to condone impurity in a woman? Is there not something to be said for the "age-long custom" which ostracizes a fallen woman? Is she not a traitress to the cause which it is her special mission to uphold—the cause of domestic purity, of untarnished family life?

**VICTOR.**

No doubt the same reflection occurred to the Scribes and Pharisees when they brought the woman taken in adultery to One whom they suspected of disaffection towards certain of their existing institutions. But His pure eyes saw, through the mists of a dim nature, a fairer day arise, when the responsibility of the family—that unit of the State upon which its stability add strength depend—would not be thrown alone upon its weaker members; when men, of stronger passions if you will, but also stronger in the power of self-control, would scorn to exact from women a standard of moral purity they were not prepared to conform to themselves. Tracing upon the sand those mystic signs whose purport we know not, we know that his passionate soul was kindling with pity and shame, and the sorrowful indignation of the man who, amidst prevailing obscurantism, apprehends truth, who, amidst cynicism and cruelty, hungers after love. And those scathing words when his trance was ended,— "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her," —how is it that they have not branded for ever our unequal moral standard with the infamy it deserves?

**CECIL.**

That it is an unequal standard must occur at times to every one who thinks. But I have been accustomed to explain it to myself on the ground that it is based upon a natural law. The infidelity of the woman saps the very foundations of family life, confuses offspring, destroys the home, whereas the license of the man—

**VICTOR.**

Creates a pariah-class which cannot exist without the most deadly injury to the family. How fatal to family life the existence in our midst of a class of women dedicated to impurity must be it would seem needless to demonstrate, were it not for the paradox current in some quarters that its maintenance is actually a safeguard of the family! There is no time in a desultory conversation like the present to refute this and such like arguments seriatim, We are but cursorily skinning the surface of a vast question, which branches out at every turn into fresh ramifications. But I may tell you that science, medical and economic, is hourly proving the fallacy of any such sup- position. For the rest mere common-sense, without the aid of science, ought surely to suffice. As well keep an open cesspool at your door on the plea of its being a safe-guard to health, as a moral plague-spot like this in your great centres of population to preserve the purity of domestic life intact. Apart from the more obvious and hideous dangers, must not such an institution react in a thousand subtle ways upon the atmosphere of our homes? Is it not a standing education in selfishness to our sons, in stupid heartlessness to our daughters?

**CECIL.**

What do you mean?

**VICTOR.**

Ah! you should hear Mary on that chapter. Her education, as you know, was neither more nor less Pharasaic than is usual with girls of her class. But she has often told me that when she made for herself the discovery that these nameless ones were her sisters, made of her own flesh and blood, only poor, only weak, only ignorant, only ground into a foul serfdom by the tender mercies of our Christian civilization, it revolutionized her life. She had been taught that it was wrong to know of their existence. When the scales fell from her eyes, she saw that in that teaching lay the root of half their wrongs. And she has told me, moreover, that it would be well if a childish, ignorant hardness were the worst result upon the characters of women, of this division of their sex into two classes, one to be cherished, the other to be destroyed. She has noted in some circles she was at one time a good deal thrown with—and who that has been much in society of late years will not confirm her words?—she has noted a deterioration among her girl companions and among women generally, which she cannot but attribute to the same source. She says that in the conditions of modern society it is impossible that the contamination should not spread beyond the limits we have tried to assign to it. One result of the increasing disproportion of women to men has been a tendency on the part of women of the upper classes to ape men's habits, amusements, dress and so forth, and among other things, to adopt more and more the moral tone which men think good enough among themselves. How can the constant companions of "fast" men fail to become "fast" themselves? and, in the over crowded state of the marriage-market, not endeavour to outdo in dress, manners, ay, and in morals, their most formidable competitors? It is their metier to affect the style the men they consort with most admire, and who shall blame them? When men really worship and reverence purity in women—not in the woman they intend to make the mother of their children, but in women, in womanhood—things will mend fast enough.

**CECIL.**

I suspect from what you say that the tone of society generally has not improved during the last few years. I have been leading the life of a recluse, and though you are pleased to compliment me on having preserved a certain veneer of civilization, our talk to-night has made me feel more than ever behind the world. I do not recollect in my college and law-student days such a condition of moral degeneracy as you describe.

**VICTOR.**

Because, on the one hand, you had small natural affinity with it, and on the other, it never occurred to you to take cognizance of it from the, so to speak, external standpoint of the social reformer. Besides, it is true that matters have not changed for the better in recent years. How should they? We are reaping as we have sown. We have, as a community, sown to the flesh, and, as a community, we are reaping corruption. I have here a collection of notes, culled at random from the current literature of the day, and from my own personal experience, bearing on this part of our subject. Many of them are insignificant enough in themselves, merely the straws that show which way the wind blows. Will you hear a few?

**CECIL.**

You know my penchant for documentary evidence.

**VICTOR.**

The first I open to is from a book which has recently had an almost miraculous amount of success among all classes of readers. It purports to be the history of a scholar, a Christian, and a gentleman of the seventeenth century, whose varied culture and catholic breadth of spirit are probably intended as a model for all time. This is his attitude with regard to the virtue of chastity:—"As a courtier and man of the world [John Inglesant] was profoundly tolerant of error and even of vice (provided the latter did not entail suffering on any innocent victim), looking upon it as a natural incident in human affairs."

**CECIL.**

Well, what more would you have?

**VICTOR.**

Before I reply to that question let me give you the absolutely identical views of a gentleman of the nineteenth century,—not a notorious rouse whom we, I mean whom some of us, would be shy of admitting into our families—but a man neither better nor worse than other men, a "good fellow," kind-hearted, honourable, and popular in society. He figures in one of Whyte Melville's later novels, called "Roy's Wife." He is, or imagines himself to be, deeply in love with a good woman, when he makes the following proposition to a friend. "Dine with me quietly, en garçon. I've a box at the Deucalion. We'll see the Ugly Duck—its rather a good burlesque—and bring What's-her-name back to supper. It wouldn't be bad fun." Now, I need not point out to you that the author who credits a young Englishman with so much respect for women in general, and for the woman he loves in particular, is not one who is drawing on his imagination. He was, on the contrary, better qualified than most novelists to describe the bachelor life of our gilded youth. He was himself of a nobler strain than the Fitz-Owens. Commenting upon this young gentleman's theory of life, he says—"Lord Fitz-Owen's code of morals was one of which we cannot approve, the result of a false system of education..... He could see that it was wrong to disturb wedded happiness and the peace of families, to blight a girl's hopes, or taint a woman's reputation before the world with the lightest breath of shame. Such injuries he would no more have inflicted than he would have .... struck a man when he was down. To his own code of social morality as it may be called, he adhered strictly, but this left a wide range wherein he felt at liberty to disport himself, as he pleased." Is not that John Inglesant to the letter? "Tolerant of vice provided it did not entail suffering on any innocent victim, looking upon it as a natural incident in human affairs."

**CECIL.**

Precisely; and I say again, what more can you expect? You are not, surely, sanguine enough to suppose that the "man of the world" will ever look at it in any other point of view?

**VICTOR.**

Why should he not?

**CECIL.**

Why? The thing is an absurdity. And so about this pariah class, as you call it. It always has existed, and it always will exist.

**VICTOR.**

Spare me that time-honoured argument. It has been pleaded against every reform that ever germinated in the brain of prophet or seer, and, having drained his heart's blood, and procured for him the proud reward of cross or stake, went forth triumphant through an adoring world, and became a truism on children's lips. I am not so credulous as to suppose that we can eradicate vice any more than that we can eradicate murder or theft. What I do maintain is that we can eradicate tolerated and approved and legalized vice, and that by a due leavening of public opinion we can place it where it should be—in the same category with murder and theft. Have we ceased to regard the soul as of greater worth than the body? It is the murder of the soul. Do we revere the body? It is the theft of all that sanctifies that "temple."

**CECIL.**

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But if the murder be already done, the theft committed?

### VICTOR.

Let me recall to you that social code of Lord Fitz-Owen's. He would not "strike a man when he was down." That would have been as heinous as to cheat a man at cards, break your solemn word to a man, be guilty, in short, of any dishonourable act towards your equal and associate—man. But when it comes to a woman—when it is a woman who is "down"—what then? Plunge her lower! Heap infamy upon her! Place one more stumbling-block in the way of her retrieval! Do your best that she shall continue a by-word! You have law on your side, you have society on your side, you have—or until quite recently you had—women your side, you have immemorial usage on your side, and that noble "always—has—been—and—always—must—be" as your excuse. Against you, you have only—shall I call it the law of God?—the immutable law of Goodness which will have mercy and not subscriptions to charity-lists, and justice rather than many missionary societies. But we are digressing. I will now give you a "straw" of a more portentous character. I have it recorded here in the terse form of a letter addressed not a great while since to a newspaper by a lady signing herself "A Soldier's Sister." Referring to the case of an ex-officer of the British Army, who was cashiered for what the judge who sentenced him described as "a wicked outrage which I must call cowardly and dishonourable," she remarks that "the world to her has been a drearier place since 359 members of a leading club have pronounced that the conduct for which he was expelled the army has not detracted from his character as a gentleman." Again I refrain from commenting upon the moral condition of a society in which such a phenomenon is possible. Let us pass on. My next extract is from a Times' Parliamentary report of last session. It shows, as you will see, that there is something irresistibly ludicrous to our senators in women meddling with politics at all; but that when they meddle with them at the expense of their dearest prejudices, and of their keenest susceptibilities, when they meddle with them at the cost of their happiness, their peace of mind, their health—ah me! of their reputation itself—that then the joke becomes truly exquisite.

### CECIL.

You refer, of course, to the annual difficulty of clearing the Ladies' Gallery when the objectionable Acts are under discussion. I cannot bring myself to see that it is in any way necessary—nay, that it is not highly undesirable that it should be occupied on those occasions.

### VICTOR.

Waiving that question for the moment, you must agree with me that the manner and mood in which its clearance is sought to be effected leave something to be desired. In the course of a brief discussion on the motion to exclude strangers, the Times reports "laughter" no less than five times. After this the common talk about Christianity elevating the social status of women, about chivalry "through which the reverence of man for woman became an integral part of the moral structure of society!" smacks somewhat of irony. "Integral part of the structure of society!" We have not learned the A B C of true reverence for women.

### CECIL.

You surprise me: one would expect the graver aspects of these questions to appeal to men responsible for public affairs.

### VICTOR.

The causes of the anomaly, like the causes of everything else, lie buried deep in the past, and would require half a lifetime to disinter and disentangle. But one broad fact may be stated, without fear of contradiction, which accounts for a good deal. The Christian Church (though the world owes to her the first recognition of personal purity, as a binding obligation on man and woman alike) in violent reaction against the excesses of the worn-out

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Pagan world, started off in very early times on the wrong tack. She made the grand—I had almost said the irretrievable error—of seeking to be wiser than nature, wiser than God. Instead of placing purity where it was intended to be, in the very head and forefront of all the moral virtues, she gave it a second place; she subordinated purity, with marriage for its end and crown, and conjugal fidelity for its sacred duty and ideal, to a fantastic invention of her own called virginity. The result was, as might have been foretold, a speedy lowering of the chimerical standard, and a hopeless confusion of moral ideals. Concessions had to be made to the weak, sin had to be winked at; the doctrine of the "higher spiritual life" had to be invented—by the devil.

**CECIL.**

And pray why—by the devil?

**VICTOR.**

Because a dual standard of morality can by no possibility have any other parentage. As soon as you admit that there can be a different standard of right and wrong, in essential matters, for pope and emperor, for monk and man of the world, for clergy and laity, you open the door to every sort of logical fallacy, and every form of creeping, contemptible iniquity. You speedily reach a state of things typified by the immortal grocer of "sand—the-sugar-and-then-come-into-prayers" celebrity, or by the Italian cut-throat who mutters an orison to the Virgin, with one hand on his stiletto and the other in your pocket.

**CECIL.**

What about the Reformation? Did not the vessel of the church shift her course a little at that time?

**VICTOR.**

She did little more than exchange the Scylla of ceremonial for the Charybdis of dogma. And between these two she has most pitifully wavered ever since; the two opposing parties, Orthodox and Heretic, Catholic and Protestant, High and Low—call them what you will—too much occupied in vituperating each other to notice that all the time the angel of Goodness was standing without, forgotten and alone, yea, though his outstretched hands bore the print of the nails, and his face was, as it were, the face of the Christ.

**CECIL.**

The charge is a terribly sweeping one.

**VICTOR.**

Let me remind you, I am not speaking of individuals, of the handful of men who have battled in all ages, and in all communions, and who, as I thankfully acknowledge, are battling at the present moment, with real, not with what Milton called scarecrow, sins. But ask the average clergyman or minister whether he preaches against fornication, as St. Paul did. Your invariable reply will be something in which the phrase "mixed congregations" is chiefly audible.

**CECIL.**

But do you not sympathize with him in his difficulty? How can he shape his discourse so that it shall not offend—I do not say the prude or the Philistine—but the little ones of his flock?

**VICTOR.**

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I wonder whether these nice considerations weighed with St. Paul, when he lifted up his voice against the torrent of evil he saw threatening to overwhelm the world, or with the Baptist, when he cried to men in the wilderness to flee from the wrath to come! But tell me, where do you hear even the secondary causes of immorality denounced as they should be, and could be, without offense to any, from every pulpit in the land? Where is the prophet, who proclaims that selfish luxury, that busy idleness, that the life devoted to pleasure, to sport, to tittle-tattle, or worse, is absolutely and unconditionally sinful, more sinful I say it without a shadow of hesitation—more sinful than the life of the wretched housebreaker or pickpocket, than the life of the child-harlot, be she nine or nineteen? Where do you hear the hideous forced over-crowding of our people, and the avariciousness of landlords, and supineness of municipalities, to the health and morals of the people denounced as they ought to be? Where do you hear the miserable condition of the large majority of working women and domestic servants exposed as it should be—the horrible extortion and oppression, whether voluntary or not, of the employers of women's labour, the starvation rate of wages, literally forcing them into sin, the total absence of every form of innocent recreation such as the young need, of all cheerful kindly sympathy in their bitter struggle for existence?

**CECIL.**

To hear you talk, one would suppose the "Song of the Shirt" might have been written yesterday.

**VICTOR.**

Ay, and its sequel the "Bridge of Sighs." There are at the present moment in London about 60,000 working girls earning wages barely sufficient to support life. What do you say, for instance, to shirt-making at 2d., 1¾d., some-time one penny each? The white slave, thus remunerated, can make six, or eight, perhaps even a dozen shirts in a day, by sitting at her machine from six in the morning till twelve at night. Out of this stupendous wage, she has to find her own thread. Or her trade, perchance, is the making of women's ulsters. For one of these garments, selling at 7s. 11d., she will be paid 2d.; for one selling at 25s., 6d. She can, with difficulty, make six in a day; thus earn a glorious income, out of which, as you may imagine, she scarcely misses 5d. for every dozen ulsters spent in twist and cotton! Or she is an apprentice, aged fifteen, in a house of business, a mile or two from her home. The walk is long, the hours of attendance are long, and she is often very weary. And she earns 2s., sometimes 1s. a week!

**CECIL.**

And your theory is that this miserable and really iniquitous rate of payment. is one of the great feeders of the social evil?

**VICTOR.**

Is it necessary of theories? Do not the facts stare one in the face? And yet we scorn, and yet we condemn, and yet we pass by on the other side. How can we expect self-control, self-denial, self-respect, from those poor shivering, underfed bodies, to whom a hearty meal, a warm good garment, an hour's frolic, comes only in the form of temptation? It grows late, and the note-book, which you have had too much of already, must be put away for to-night, or I could poison your dreams with some entries under this head.

**CECIL.**

There is time for one or two.

**VICTOR.**

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A lady who devotes herself to some of these friendless ones, principally young servants who have forfeited their characters, writes:—"The feeding of poor girls at home has much to do with their unsatisfactory service. They go with a weak body to work hard—no appetite when they can get food." Another lady says:—"I know of workroom where they have no fires until a certain date no matter how cold it may be. During last November the girls suffered horribly, and for one of them I had to procure a ticket as out-patient to a hospital, her delicacy having been chiefly induced through constant suffering from cold whilst at work." A doctor at Islington informs a daily paper that "within half a mile of my place there are a large number of retail establishments, chiefly of the cheap and competing kind, and at the present time I have on my books more than a dozen patients, young women, whose ailments are entirely attributable to the excessive number of hours they are compelled to work, and to their being constantly on their feet." These same patients are described as "some weak and fragile, others more robust, but all alike suffering intense pain, the natural consequence of being on their feet thirteen or fourteen hours every day, and sixteen or seventeen on a Saturday....." And now to bed, with what appetite for sleep you may!

**CECIL.**

Stay a moment. Time was made for slaves. Do you know you have touched me a good deal for these young creatures?

**VICTOR.**

If I could tell you all that I have heard from a woman's lips of what women, even women of the well-nourished classes, suffer from the frailty of their bodies, the chronic lassitude, the regiment of woes falling under the to us mysterious head of "nerves," the hidden sufferings of potential and actual motherhood which suck the energy and verve from life, as we men know it—but I have said enough. Cecil! it is time we shook off the selfishness of our cynicism, whether of word or act, and rose to a manlier view of our responsibilities towards the other sex. It is time we assumed something of the prerogative of strength; protection, even of the vile; pity, even for the temptress, spoiled, seared, bestialized by sin; reverence even for that most horrible, and happily rare thing, a womanhood tainted from the birth by hereditary guilt, and altogether past redemption by any effort of ours. Shall we not remember—

"What 'tis to be a man—to curb and spurn  
The tyrant in us—that ignobler self,  
Which boasts not loathes its likeness to the brute,  
And owns no good save ease, no ill save pain!"

**CECIL.**

Believe me, I do not speak mockingly when I say that I am ashamed to interrupt you with a reflection that has occurred to me more than once in the course of your remarks. But you will not misunderstand me. You have incidentally referred to a difference of opinion as to the necessity for the existence of an outcast class. I think you have disposed of your opponent's case from the more strictly social point of view. But you have touched very lightly upon the hygienic question. If I am rightly informed, the medical faculty are not altogether at one upon the point, and I understand that some doctors of repute are in the habit of giving young men counsel diametrically opposed to that which you would offer them.

**VICTOR.**

Believe me, I do not speak thoughtlessly when I say that I am ashamed, always deeply ashamed and humiliated, when I am called upon to encounter that argument. It shows a profound ignorance of sound human physiology, which teaches us that self-government is the principle of individual health, and chastity the condition a strong national growth. Two words should guide medical counsel—Temperance and Occupation. But usually I prefer to



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meet this difficulty with a *reductio ad absurdum*. If the existence of a class of *hetærae* is a necessity, it should be not only, as indeed it is already, recognized by law as an industry like any other, but respected socially as an important factor in the national health and well-being. It should be recruited—if there is anything in the enthusiasm of humanity not solely from the daughters of the people, because forsooth, they are the most defenceless; but fathers and brothers of the well-to-do classes, willing Jephthahs should occasionally, from patriotic motives—

**CECIL.**

Hold! hold! A jest may be carried too far.

**VICTOR.**

Not in this connection. What do you say, for instance, to the jest of a magistrate at Orleans the other day, who, when a poor victim was about to name the wealthy scoundrel who had been her moral murderer, shut her mouth with, "Hush! Do not compromise the honour of a respectable man!" But this in passing. No, I do but depict the logical consequences of these theories about the necessity of vice. All I have said should, logically, take place, and something more. We should pull down, not only our churches—that goes without saying—but the institutes and lecture-rooms where we inculcate humanity, ay, and the hospitals and asylums where we practise it. We should once and for ever do away with our religion, of course, but equally with our cant of virtue, of altruism, of a race made perfect by upward striving, and glorious by self-renunciation. If we are so inconceivably selfish, cruel, and bestial as to set aside in cold blood a certain number of thousands of poor girls—not being OUR OWN sisters and daughters—as a holocaust; natural and necessary for the good of the community—why, we may talk of Suttee and the torturing of Hindu widows, we may talk of the atrocities of Mohammedan harems and of Australian savagedom—the only difference between these degraded barbarians and ourselves will be that we shall be a thousand times more degraded, more contemptible, more unspeakable than they, for we have prided ourselves on our civilization, we have prated of virtue, we have received, century after century, upon our foreheads the symbol of self-effacement, the sign of the Cross, and we have called ourselves for ages by the name of the pure and compassionate Christ.

**CECIL.**

I was thinking how our conversation began. Was it not with Aimee and the "shrieking sisterhood?" I should be glad to hear more of your views on the subject of that agitation, and its relation to the broader questions we somehow drifted into discussing.

**VICTOR.**

That must be for another day. In the mean- while, beware of regarding it as anything but what it is—a symptom of a great moral revolution. It is not a spasmodic, isolated phenomenon; it is a precursor of a chance already stirring in the secret heart of multitudes. The smuggling of those amazing and iniquitous Acts into our Statute-books (in other countries, as you may not know, they exist only in the form of police regulations) was but the spark falling on the tinder, the last drop in the over-full cup. Like the great kindred movement for the abolition of slavery, this movement is the product of the world's growth in the humaner virtues, of the late blossoming of loving-kindness, mercy and equity. We may call in question, if we choose, its mode of operation, the details of its programme, the feasibility, nay the sanity of its immediate aims; about the principles which gave it birth are their own justification, and carry within them the germs of future, absolute triumph.

**CECIL.**

You are not too sanguine?

**VICTOR.**

Who said that history was prophecy? Even a superficial study of history makes one something of a sooth-sayer. There was a time when the conscience of the world was ripe for a protest against the traffic in human flesh. The world knew it not. Slavery always had been, and, so it was said, always would be; but those who could read the signs of the times knew that it was doomed, and that had the nations been polled, and the result been a minority of one against the fated institution, still that the world would come round to that minority of one. Emerson spake truly. And so it is now. The world is ripe, not for perfection, not for Paradise, not for Utopia, but for the abolition of vice legalized, vice patented, vice tolerated in society with a toleration strangely like acquiescence, if not approval. That portent that struck you just now with horror and amazement—the descent of pure women into the arena—is perhaps the most momentous of them all. Well may it amaze, even appal you! It is a measure of the significance of the combat. This protest of women against the systematized degradation of their sex, against the desecration of marriage, against the undermining of the family, is a profounder thing than you know. It is unperceived, nine-tenths of it; it is as yet immature; but it is growing fast; its roots are striking deep into the soil of the civilized world, and it will not fail to bear fruit upward.

There was a picture of Long's in the Academy two or three years back—you were in the Bush—which held me spell-bound. It represented Esther, the Queen, seated in royal apparel. She is about to carry out her grand resolve. It is a question of life or death. In her fixed pathetic eyes you read, "If I perish, I perish." You cannot take away your own from them. The details, the technique of the picture are lost in that absorbed, absorbing gaze; tranquil, heroic, pitiful. I think of Esther now as symbolic of the woman of the nineteenth century, sacrificing life itself in the cause, not merely of her people, not even of her sex, but of humanity.

Often I compare her to Godiva, staking something dearer than life in the high emprise, stripping herself bare of the very vesture of her soul, rather than see the poor of her people become a prey, the rich given over to selfish indulgence and shortsighted cruelty. It is no hyperbolic phrase that I use when I say, "dearer than life."

"You would not let your little finger ache

For such as these?' 'But I would die,' she said." —the Godiva of old. And she would have died, probably would have preferred death to the grisly alternative which she accepted for the people's sake.

From the new Godiva, too, a harder thing than the mere laying down of one's life has been required. From her, too, it has been exacted to place upon the altar her reputation, exposing herself to something worse than mere physical torture, to a species of misconception more exquisitely agonizing than the most ingenious refinement of bodily suffering. For her the delight of living is gone, the invigorating charm of social pleasures, the early, innocent gladness of the world. Friendship, the consoler, is often spoiled for her; sometimes she is cut off from love—the breath of life. Over all her pathway a shadow lies, and when her eyes are brightest, and her talk gayest, the heaviness of this thing is at her heart.

Oh, the heaven has been working for years! Thinking women of the last generation saw well enough that the existing social code was rotten, a pitiable convention, one half prudery, the other half laxity— "Whose pureness rooted in impureness stood, to adapt a line of the Laureate.

They saw even then that something less hollow, less negative, less hypocritical, was required. They craved even then a more passionate goodness, a more militant purity; and in their lives and writings they presaged dimly the bursting forth of the flame that was smouldering in their day. The works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning are charged with this sense of crying need and of coming change. It was strong in Harriet Martineau and in Mary Carpenter. Earlier still, it kindled the "genius of benevolence" in Elizabeth Fry, and drew her, tender and tremulous and self-distrustful as she was, with irresistible force to the filth and infamy of the female side of Newgate. Were that grand spirit among us now, with what holy joy would she have united in the crusade initiated

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by her spiritual daughter, Josephine Butler, supported in different ways and at different points of the field of battle by women like Fanny Vicars and Ellice Hopkins, Frances Power Cobbe, Elizabeth Blackwell, and Emily Venturi, and sanctioned by a name dear to every English heart, the honoured name of Florence Nightingale!

**CECIL.**

And the name of my sister-in-law—the sweet child I remember—is to be added to the bede-roll. I still cannot find it in my heart to bear that she should suffer so.

**VICTOR.**

Mary and I sometimes agree that heroism a deux is not so very heroic after all, and that martyrdom together would be quite possible to bear. But since when have reformers trodden a primrose path. Since when have they not been despised and rejected of men—men and women of sorrows and acquainted with grief—from whom the world they shed their blood for hides, as it were, its face? And then, there is solace in high endeavour, and the very balm of Gilead in a great conviction. This new conception of one moral law for man and woman, this late-won truth that prudery is not purity, and that laxity is merely baseness, that, if there be any virtue or any praise, the "sacred human principle of sex" is to be recognized from the first with a reverent candour, and trained from the first with religious awe, and that only sin is shameful—this, too, has its consolations, its brighter aspects, its glimpses of solemn energizing rapture.

And the rest Time rectifies. The day is not far distant when we shall look back with a certain ashamed incredulity at our past selves—we who have mocked, or opposed, or stood aloof—and admit that while we loathed to see the people over-taxed, while we shuddered and blundered, multiplied churches, subscribed to charities, tinkered at our Poor Law and fought over our School Boards, some women had had the inconceivable courage and devotion to grapple personally with the most deadly, difficult and distasteful of all the causes at the bottom of the pauperism, crime, and threatened national disintegration with which we were contending, and that the New Godiva—"Did more, and underwent and overcame."

## **A LETTER TO THE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION OF WOMEN AT WASHINGTON FROM JOSEPHINE E. BUTLER. March, 1888.**

DEAR LADIES,

Being prevented by domestic circumstances from attending your assemblies personally, I am glad to entrust a few words of greeting to my dear and honored friend, Mrs. STEWARD, who has consented to cross the Atlantic, at my earnest request, as a delegate from our Ladies' National Association. That Association was formed in the winter of 1869, having for its definite aim the obtaining of the repeal of the Acts of Parliament of 1866–69 for the State regulation of vice; or, in other words, for the provisioning of the army and navy (not in Great Britain alone, but in our Indian Empire and all our colonies) with selected and superintended and healthy women. "A celibate soldiery," it was said by our heathen legislators of that day, "require such a provision as urgently and as regularly as they required daily rations."

Now, I have no reason to suppose that this special subject (always a mournful and repellant one) will be formally brought forward in your Convention; although the kindred and closely-allied subject of personal and social purity will surely be so. It would, however, be impossible for me either to appear at or write to your Convention with the aim of furnishing a contribution to your deliberations, except in connection with my own life work, and the deep convictions which instigated that life-work—and which have become even more and more profound as I continued in it.

A LETTER TO THE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION OF WOMEN AT WASHINGTON FROM JOSEPHINE E.

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The Committee of our Ladies' National Association therefore strongly desired that a delegate should be selected from our midst, who had been associated in that work from an early period; and such an one is Mrs. Steward, who has been an indefatigable worker, not only in England, but in Belgium, in pursuit of and for the saving of the English-girl victims who were bought, stolen and destroyed under this diabolical system of State-protected vice in that country. There is now a crowd of younger workers who are bravely preaching the purity crusade and doing excellent vigilance work; while there are few of the veterans left who inaugurated in 1869 the fierce contest with our Government, the Houses of Lords and Commons, the Medical Boards, the Press, and the Upper Classes generally, in order to gain the abolition of the vice-protecting laws—and to assert the equality of the Moral Law for two sexes, as well as the dignity and sacredness of Womanhood. Among those veteran workers were included the names of Florence Nightingale, Harriet Martineau, Mary Somerville, Mary Carpenter and others. Some are gone to their rest; others are aged and worn, and waiting for their call home. Those who remain hold together and work together still, bound to each other by strong affection, and by the memory of past suffering and conflict shared together. Of this group Mrs. Steward is one, and I commend her to your sisterly kindness and hospitality.

It may not be out of place here, in order to set forth the motives which drove us to devote ourselves to this Crusade before all others, to quote some words of mine which were drawn from me at a great meeting in Leeds, in July, 1870. Some of us had been long working for the "Higher Education of Women." A council for that end had been formed, embracing members from all the northern parts of England. I was for three years the President of that Council; but in 1870, feeling impelled to resign the presidentship, I thought it right to give my reasons for doing so. I venture to quote from a Report of that meeting.

"There were gentlemen present who would give some account of the educational movement now going on in our country in its different branches. She proposed to give a short sketch of the educational efforts now being made on the Continent, under the auspices of the International Association of Women. They had arrived at a period of the world's history when the injunction, 'Look not every one to his own things, but to the things of others,' had become applicable to nations as well as to individuals. In fact, England could not safely live any longer for itself only, nor could any country; and she thought there was an exclusiveness peculiar to our insular character as a nation, which required correction before we could hope to give and receive all the benefit we might, and to get rid of war and other disturbances of progress and happiness. The objects of this International Association were the amelioration of the social position of women, and their moral and intellectual elevation, through education; and the granting of the various rights which they claimed.

"Mrs. Butler detailed the practical steps which have been taken in the direction of this education, both at home and in Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Russia, France, and Constantinople; and in proceeding to consider the relation of this educational movement to a more general and a very great social movement, including innumerable interests—a movement which she trusted would result sooner or later in a purer and juster state of society—she said: 'I proposed at our meeting yesterday to resign the office of President of this Council as soon as may be convenient to this Council to allow me to do so. It is not because I am not deeply interested in the cause which this Council represents. I may say I am more deeply interested than ever, for I see in the education of women one of the most necessary means of freeing poorer women from the awful slavery of which I have seen so much lately; nor do I undervalue the higher culture of the individual as a means towards the attainment of the highest personal happiness.

The strangely providential guidance of all our schemes has lately been deeply impressed on my mind. We started our educational schemes, I believe, in an honest and humble spirit, and they appeared to us the readiest path towards aiding our fellow-women, the distressed, the needy, and the wronged; and I believe our labour has not been in vain. But in this, as in all our work on earth, we need further enlightening and teaching. Looking back on my own experience of the past year, it appears to me as if God in His goodness had said to me, "I approve your motive and your work: but you are trying to lay on the topmost stones while there is an earthquake shaking your foundations. You must first descend to the lowest depths before you can safely build up;" and then He showed us a plague spot—He showed us a deadly poison working through the wholesale, systematic, and now legalized,

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degradation of women to the service of vice. He showed us the ready elements for a speedy destruction of society, which the highest education itself would not be able to stem. Not that our work in the cause of education has in any sense been a failure, far from it; but we need a still larger infusion into these noble schemes for educating the masses, of the spirit of self-sacrifice, even of martyrdom; we need to have our hearts more deeply penetrated with pity, and to be more resolutely bent on making all our practical efforts tend to the revival of justice and of a pure and equal moral standard and equal laws.

"While, therefore, I continue to regard the cause of Education as a most sacred cause, I come to the present meeting with a saddened heart; and I only propose to relinquish the office I now hold, because I feel that God has called me to a more painful one. All members have not the same office; all are not called to descend to the depths of woe to clear out moral sewers, and to cast in their lot among wretched slave gangs, in order to help the slaves to carry the weight of their chains, if not to break them away. This work, I think, is mine, but there is other work not less holy, and which aims not less directly at a future emancipation; so while I feel all the deeper gratitude to you, my fellow-workers in this Council, for the work you are doing in the cause of humanity, I am obliged to confess to you that, for my own part, I fear I may not in future be able to give the needful time to this work which it demands. I wish to leave it in abler and freer hands. It has my deepest sympathy. It points to one of the most important of all the means by which we hope to undo the heavy burdens and let the oppressed go free and inaugurate a purer and sounder National Life. To keep pace, however, with this portion of the great work, one requires to have the head and heart free, and that cannot be the case with one who is called to deal with the most miserable, to walk side by side, hand in hand, with the outcast, the victim of our social sins, whose names one scarcely dares to name in refined society. I am full of hope for the education cause, and for the anti-slavery cause, in which we are engaged. Nevertheless my very soul grows faint before the facts of 1870, and though that faintness of soul may complete one's fitness to be a fellow-sufferer with the slave, it does not increase one's capacity for a work which requires intellectual energy."

It is impossible, and would not be right, that I should trouble you with a report of the arduous work which our Women's Abolitionist Society accomplished between 1869 and 1874. Suffice it to say, that we shook the Government and aroused the whole nation; mountains were removed by the energy imparted by a gigantic faith. In 1874 a "new departure" was inaugurated. The battle was carried across the channel to France—where, under the first Napoleon, this abominable and impure tyranny had first been instituted in the end of the eighteenth century—to Italy, to Switzerland, to Germany and to the Netherlands. It afterwards spread to Spain, Holland, Denmark, Austria, Hungary; and Sweden and Norway. We now have friends in Russia; but no association is yet found there. The first year's work was reported by our financial secretary, Prof. Stuart, as follows:

"It was indeed a wise intuition which led the women of England to carry into its original strongholds the campaign against the system of regulated vice, against whose encroachments we are contending in this country. That move will benefit the agitation for Repeal in this country not only by the vast strengthening and encouragement which the knowledge of the sympathy and co-operation of persons of all tongues and countries has brought to so many of our workers here, but also because it has opened up an attack upon the whole vicious system in its rear, and, drying up the sources and roots, so to speak, will cause the system to fall more easily in this country; and not least because it has called forth in many countries the co-operation of new Workers who may, confident of success and with united force and power, carry on the work against profligacy itself throughout a Christendom united for that end.

"Not only have we seen, during the year of work just concluded, Refuges for the fallen established throughout many cities of Europe, and men and women of many languages joining together to call for and work for the abolition of regulated prostitution, and to aim through that at the abolition finally of prostitution itself; but we have seen whole cities shaken as it were with the wind of a new revival, recognizing the crime that they have committed before God in regulating and licensing the destruction of His image; we have seen through the length and breadth of nations societies formed, actively working in a cause which had before laid dormant; and we have seen the whole great nation of Italy, called as it were by the voice of God through his poor and weak servants,

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recognizing that virtue and purity alone can be the basis of future greatness."

In a brief time we had won the public adhesion to our cause of many of the most distinguished persons on the Continent, among whom we counted Joseph Mazzini and Garibaldi, in Italy; Jules Favre, Jules Simon, and Victor Hugo, in France; the Count Agenor de Gasparin and the Countess de Gasparin, of Geneva; Baron de Bunsen and Count Ungern Sternberg, in Germany; M. Emile de Laveleye, the well known writer and economist of Belgium. But it is not so much to the adhesion of the great men that we hold, as to the active concurrence of the thousands of women on the Continent of Europe, who have been awakened on this question, and who have formed numerous and ever-increasing Associations for working out our aims, more especially in Switzerland, Holland, France, and the Scandinavian Peninsula.

Our Continental Secretary, Mr. Humbert, writing on this subject after fourteen years' experience, says: "Happy are those nations in which women themselves have taken the initiative in this great movement, for in such cases the movement will never die; whereas in countries where the work is left entirely to men, although some reforms may be achieved, the movement is fitful and never possesses the same life."

This brings to me the most recent expansion of our work in the Colonies and in India. It is in allusion to this new expansion that Mr. Humbert writes the letter just quoted. He continues, "How are we to proceed successfully for the emancipation of women from the hateful thralldom imposed on them by the civilization of conquering races, the thralldom of compulsory and state-regulated prostitution among Buddhists, Brahmins, Mahometans, or Pagans, where the fate of women, in this world, at least, depends absolutely on the will of man, their master? This is a difficult question to answer. We see occasionally a spark kindled amongst those nations; but the light is short lived, and it continually requires to be rekindled." In spite of these difficulties, however, we are pushing forward our work in Egypt and in the French Colonies of North Africa, as well as in other directions.

We believe that the question is coming rapidly to the front in India. The present mission of Mr. Dyer to India is producing an awakening there that will be productive of very decided results from a Parliamentary and Governmental point of view. We, as women, are more especially concerned with the awakening of the women of India on the subject of this imperially-imposed degradation of their race, and to kindred questions vitally concerning womanhood. On this side we are full of hope. It is affecting to see the petitions which are now in the hands of some of our Members of Parliament this session. These petitions are from Anglo-Indian and native women—and many are signed in Hindoo characters. The prayer of the petition is for relief from this degrading law. We receive also privately very touching appeals from Indian ladies, and to these our Association responds with eager sympathy. The following quotation from one of the replies, sent from the Leeds branch of our Abolition Society, will show you the spirit with which the women of the world are communicating with each other on this subject:—

"Do let us assure you, dear Indian friends, that we have found that so long as our motives are pure, no evil knowledge can hurt us. We have seen, on the contrary, that work of this kind undertaken in the spirit of consecration (and in no other spirit can anyone endure to continue the work), may lead to a higher and purer knowledge of life and the human heart. That many have found (as all must do sooner or later) that intellectual force alone cannot guard against the horror of this evil; and have thus been driven to seek more spiritual means of warfare, and so have passed into a higher life.

"Do be sure, dear friends, that whatever your enemies may say of you, in the invisible kingdom of righteousness, you can but be purified by this labour of love.

"And when you most greatly doubt success, when the power and wiles of the enemy seem indeed to be too powerful for the feebleness of your hands, we feel sure you will find, as we have found, that from quarters least expected, from the darkest parts of your sky, from the weakest parts of your army, help and light and strength will come to you. Our victories do not often come to us in the manner or at the time that we expect, any more than do

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our defeats.

"We cannot direct the whole order of the conduct of life; we can only fight in our own place, obeying the nearest word that reaches us, knowing that no army can be beaten of which each individual soldier refuses to accept defeat."

Thus the women of the world are reaching out their hands to each other, and banding themselves together so that when councils, rulers, and lords of science endeavour by decrees or by social tyranny to give a continuance to the most degrading institution which has defiled the history of the human race, they will have the power to say, "You shall not slay us or our sisters." They have struck a note for which the ages have been waiting, and which even the Church itself in its organized ecclesiastical forms has never yet intoned.

There is a point on which I have sometimes thought (possibly without reason) that American women feel less strongly than we do: I allude to the physical treatment forcibly imposed, the personal outrage on women, which lies at the root of the practical working of the whole system of the state regulation of vice. You have happily not had in America the practical experience which we in the old world have had of the degrading effects of this outrage. It is the final and most complete expression of the foul idea of woman as a chattel, a slave, an instrument, a mere vessel, officially dedicated to the vilest uses.

At our last International Congress, held at Lausanne, in September, 1887, some of our less-instructed followers had been occupying too much of our time in an attempt to defend, up to a certain point, the State's action in tyrannizing over women. Thinking that the moment had come for a decided word on the part of women themselves, I gave utterance to the thoughts which were in my mind; and in doing so I proclaimed in the name of all women, that whatever subtlety of argument might weigh with certain doctors, legislators, etc., this was nothing to us, and we women solemnly declared again the principle of our own dignity, and our determination never to sanction the enslavement of any woman by the outrage perpetrated under this system. At the close of my few words Mme. de Morsier, of Paris, rose, and with uplifted hand asked earnestly that every woman present who agreed with, and re-echoed from the depths of her heart the words of Mrs. Butler, should stand up. The large hall was crowded with women as well as men. The men continued sitting, but every woman rose, and with right hand uplifted high, followed the action of Mme. de Morsier and Mme. de Gingins, responding to the solemn words uttered by her—"In the name of God, Amen!" There was a significant silence of a few moments. Some of the gentlemen were surprised; most were deeply moved; and to every woman present, I feel convinced, it was a ratification of our principles never to be forgotten. The sound of it went far abroad beyond the mere hall of meeting itself.

I mention this incident merely as an illustration of the spirit of our women in their jealous guardianship of the sacredness of womanhood, even in the persons of the most degraded of their sisters. I myself believe this spirit to be thoroughly in accord with that of our Master, Christ.

As an inevitable and necessary accompaniment of the establishment of licensed houses of ill-fame under Government patronage, all over the world there exists, as you well know, the most extensive slave traffic in the interests of vice. This fact has become so fully acknowledged during the last few years as to have given rise to that admirable and much-needed Society--the "International Association of Friends of Girls,"--originating in Switzerland and now spreading all over and far beyond Europe. That Society has been greatly strengthened in England since the Congress held in London in 1886; and this fact is brought home to us by the reassuring sight at various railway stations and landing places of the warnings and friendly placards, so diligently distributed and put up by the English branch of the Society, informing all girls and women of where they may find friends, and of what dangers they must beware.

Our Federation has collected carefully many facts and statistics concerning this world-wide slave traffic. People in Europe speak with indignation of the traffic in negroes. It would be just as well if they would open their eyes to

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what is going on much nearer—throughout the whole of Europe—especially in Germany and Austria, where the exportation of white slaves is carried on on a large scale. A terrible picture is presented to us of the enforced movement to and fro upon the face of the earth of these youthful victims of human cruelty. "Numbers are embarked at Hamburgh, whose destination is South America, Bahia, and Rio de Janeiro. The greater number are probably engaged for Monte Video and Buenos Ayres; others are sent by the Straits of Magellan to Valparaiso. Other cargoes are sent to North America, some being forwarded to England others direct. The competition which the traders meet with when they land sometimes constrains them to go further ahead; they are found, therefore, descending the Mississippi with their cargoes to New Orleans and Texas. Others are taken on to California. In the market of California they are sorted and thence taken to provision the different localities on the coast as far as Panama. Others are sent from the New Orleans market to Cuba, the Antilles, and Mexico. Others are taken from Bohemia, Germany, and Switzerland, across the Alps to Italy, and thence further south to Alexandria and Suez, and eastward to Bombay, Calcutta, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Shanghai. The Russian official houses of vice draw their slaves in a great measure from Eastern Prussia, Pomerania, and Poland. The most important Russian station is Riga; it is there that the traders of St. Petersburg and Moscow sort and get ready their cargoes for Nijni-Novgorod, and from this latter place cargoes are sent on to the more distant towns of Siberia. At Tschita, a young German was found who had been sold and resold in this manner."

You in America are happily free from the state regulation of vice; but, undoubtedly there is an extensive traffic in white slaves in your midst, and a constant importation of poor foreigners to your shores, who are destined to moral and spiritual destruction. I trust you will, from your Congress, put out strong hands for the abolition of this traffic.

It may be that I am writing to some who have been accustomed to think of the poor outcasts of society as beings different from others—in some way tainted from their birth, creatures apart without the tenderness and capacities for good possessed by your own cherished daughters.

You may have imagined them to be for the most part reckless and willful sinners; or, if in the first instance betrayed or forced into sin, now at least so utterly destroyed and corrupted as to have become something unmentionable in polite society. Now, all who have had a practical acquaintance with the lives of poor and tempted women, know how mistaken is such a judgment, how cruelly false in most cases. But granting for the moment that women who have fallen from virtue have become so degraded as to be repulsive or uninteresting to you, what have you to say concerning outraged children?—And thousands of these are but children in age and in knowledge.

Who will dare to say that any child is determinedly, willfully wicked and degraded; that any child in the world is further from God's kingdom than we grown-up people are, however virtuous we may be? Nay, but "of such is the Kingdom of Heaven." One who never errs has said it. We are not told that He selected an exceptionally pure and holy child when He set a little child in the midst of the multitude, and said that, Except we become as such a little child, we shall in no wise enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Verily, "their angels do always behold the face of my Father, which is in Heaven," and woe be to that man, to that nation, to those mothers of men and of nations, who, seeing that little child fallen among thieves, robbed, wounded, murdered, dying, shall calmly pass by on the other side! A day is coming in which it will not avail any of us to say, we knew it not; for now we know it. The means of knowing it, and the means of helping to redress this wrong are within our reach, at our very hand. I cherish the hope and the belief that the time is at hand when all women who are indeed mothers, and worthy of the name, will give up the chilling reserve, which seems too much like acquiescence in evil, and will come forward to the rescue, not only for the sake of the innocent and betrayed, but for the sake of their sons, and of our nation.

This letter is sent forth with earnest prayer that while pardoning the imperfections of my poor appeal, God would make use of it to fan the holy and purifying fire, which I feel sure is already kindled in your hearts. When I kneel in my chamber to plead for the deliverance of these little ones for whom Christ died, I seem to see the childish faces gathering in crowds around me, filling the space on every side—the faces of the slaughtered dead as well as



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of the living. These victims, voiceless and unable to plead their own cause, seem to make their ceaseless, mute appeal from their scattered, unknown graves and from out those dark habitations of cruelty, where they are now helplessly imprisoned.

But their weeping has been heard in heaven, and judgment is at hand. Of their destroyers it may be said, "They murder the fatherless; yet they say the Lord shall not see it." Of you, O friends, let it be said, and let the Saviour Himself speak the words, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, ye have done it to Me."

JOSEPHINE E. BUTLER.