



WOMAN'S HOLY WAR, GRAND CHARGE ON THE ENEMY'S WORKS.

Temperance and Women's Rights

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Go here for more about [Elizabeth Cady Temperance and Women's Rights speech](#).

Image above:
Woman's Holy War. Grand Charge on the Enemy's Works. From the Temperance Collection, Library of Congress.

It follows the full text transcript of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's *Temperance and Women's Rights* speech, delivered at Rochester, New York — June 1, 1853.

A little more than one year ago,



in this same hall, we formed the first Woman's State Temperance Society. We believed that the time had come for woman to speak on this question, and to insist on her right to be heard in the councils of Church and State.

It was proposed at that time that we, instead of forming a society, should go *en masse* into the Men's State Temperance Society. We were assured that in becoming members by paying the sum of \$1, we should thereby secure the right to speak and vote in their meetings.

We who had watched the jealousy with which man had ever eyed the slow aggressions of woman, warned you against the insidious proposition made by agents from that Society. We told you they would no doubt gladly receive the dollar, but that you would never be allowed to speak or vote in their meetings.

Many of you thought us suspicious and unjust toward the temperance men of the Empire State. The fact that Abby Kelly had been permitted to speak in one of their public meetings was brought up as an argument by some agent of that Society to prove our fears unfounded. We suggested that she spoke by favor and not right, and our right there as equals to speak and vote, we well knew would never be acknowledged. A long debate saved you from that false step, and our predictions have been fully realized in the treatment our delegates received at the annual meeting held at Syracuse last July, and at the recent Brick Church meeting in New York.

In forming our Society, the mass of us being radical and liberal, we left our platform free; we are no respecters of persons, all are alike welcome here without regard to sect, sex, color, or caste. There have been, however, many objections made to one feature in our Constitution, and that is, that although we admit men as members with equal right to speak in our meetings, we claim the offices for women alone. We felt, in starting, the necessity of throwing all the responsibility on woman, which we knew she never would take, if there were any men at hand to think, act, and plan for her.

The result has shown the wisdom of what seemed so objectionable to many. It was, however, a temporary expedient, and as that seeming violation of man's rights prevents some true friends of the cause from becoming members of our Society, and as the officers are now well skilled in the practical business of getting up meetings, raising funds, etc., and have fairly learned how to stand and walk alone, it may perhaps be safe to raise man to an entire equality with ourselves, hoping, however, that he will modestly permit the women to continue the work they have so successfully begun. I would suggest, therefore, that after the business of the past year be disposed of, this objectionable feature of our Constitution be brought under consideration.

Our experience thus far as a Society has been most encouraging. We number over two thousand members. We have four agents who have traveled in various parts of the State, and I need not say what is well known to all present, that their labors thus far have given entire satisfaction to the Society and the public. I was surprised and rejoiced to find that women, without the least preparation or experience, who had never raised their voices in public one year ago, should with so much self-reliance, dignity, and force, enter at once such a field of labor, and so ably perform the work.

In the metropolis of our country, in the capital of our State, before our Legislature, and in the country schoolhouse, they have been alike earnest and faithful to the truth. In behalf of our Society, I thank you for your unwearied labors during the past year. In the name of humanity, I bid you go on and devote yourselves humbly to the cause you have espoused. The noble of your sex everywhere rejoice in your success, and feel in themselves a new impulse to struggle upward and onward; and the deep, though silent gratitude that ascends to Heaven from the wretched outcast, the wives, the mothers, and

the daughters of brutal drunkards, is well known to all who have listened to their tales of woo, their bitter experience, the dark, sad passages of their tragic lives.

I hope this, our first year, is prophetic of a happy future of strong united, and energetic action among the women of our State. If we are sincere and earnest in our love of this cause, in our devotion to truth, in our desire for the happiness of the race, we shall ever lose sight of self; each soul will, in a measure, forget its own individual interests in proclaiming great principles of justice and right. It is only a true, a deep, and abiding love of truth, that can swallow up all petty jealousies, envies, discords, and dissensions, and make us truly magnanimous and self-sacrificing. We have every reason to think, from reports we hear on all sides, that our Society has given this cause a new impulse. And if the condition of our treasury is a test, we have abundant reason to believe that in the hearts of the people we are approved, and that by their purses we shall be sustained.

It has been objected to our Society that we do not confine ourselves to the subject of temperance, but talk too much about woman's rights, divorce, and the Church. It could be easily shown how the consideration of this great question carries us legitimately into the discussion of these various subjects. One class of minds would deal with effects alone. Another would inquire into causes. The work of the former is easily perceived and quickly done; that of the latter requires deep thought, great patience, much time, and a wise self-denial.

Our physicians of the present day are a good type of the mass of our reformers. They take out cancers, cut off tonsils, drive the poison which nature has wisely thrown to the surface, back again, quiet unsteady nerves with valerian, and by means of ether infuse an artificial courage into a patient that he may bravely endure some painful operation. It requires but little thought to feel that the wise physician who shall trace out the true causes of suffering; who shall teach us the great, immutable laws of life and health; who shall show us how and where in our every-day life, we are violating these laws, and the true point to begin the reform, is doing a much higher, broader, and deeper work than he who shall bend all his energies to the temporary relief of suffering.

Those temperance men or women whose whole work consists in denouncing rum-sellers, appealing to legislatures, eulogizing Neal Dow, and shouting Maine Law, are superficial reformers, mere surface-workers. True, this outside work is well, and must be done; let those who see no other do this, but let them lay no hindrances in the way of that class of mind, who, seeing in our present false social relations the causes of the moral deformities of the race, would fain declare the immutable laws that govern mind as well as matter, and point out the true causes of the evils we see about us, whether lurking under the shadow of the altar, the sacredness of the marriage institution, or the assumed superiority of man.

We have been obliged to preach woman's rights, because many, instead of listening to what we had to say on temperance, have questioned the right of a woman to speak on any subject. In courts of justice and legislative assemblies, if the right of the speaker to be there is questioned, all business waits until that point is settled. Now, it is not settled in the mass of minds that woman has any rights on this footstool, and much less a right to stand on an even pedestal with man, look him in the face as an equal, and rebuke the sins of her day and generation. Let it be clearly understood, then, that we are a woman's rights Society; that we believe it is woman's duty to speak whenever she feels the impression to do so; that it is her right to be present in all the councils of Church and State. The fact that our agents are women, settles the question of our character on this point.

Again, in discussing the question of temperance, all lecturers, from the beginning, have made mention of the drunkards' wives and children, of widows' groans and orphans' tears; shall these classes of sufferers be introduced but as themes for rhetorical flourish, as pathetic touches of the speaker's eloquence; shall we passively shed tears over their condition, or by giving them their rights, bravely open to them the doors of escape from a wretched and degraded life? Is it not legitimate in this to discuss the social degradation, the legal disabilities of the drunkard's wife?

If, in showing her wrongs, we prove the right of all womankind to the elective franchise, to a fair representation in the government, to the right in criminal cases to be tried by peers of her own choosing, shall it be said that we transcend the bounds of our subject? If in pointing out her social degradation, we show you how tile present laws outrage the sacredness of the marriage institution; if in proving to you that justice and mercy demand a legal separation from drunkards, we grasp the higher idea that a unity of soul alone constitutes and sanctifies true marriage, and that any law or public

sentiment that forces two immortal, high-born souls to live together as husband and wife, unless held there by love, is false to God and humanity; who shall say that tile discussion of this question does not lead us legitimately into the consideration of tile important subject of divorce?

But why attack the Church ? We do not attack the Church. We defend ourselves merely against its attacks. It is true that tile Church and reformers have always been in an antagonistic position from the time of Luther down to our own day, and will continue to be until the devotional and practical types of Christianity shall be united in one liarinonious whole.

To those who see the philosophy of this position, there seems to be no cause for fearful forebodings or helpless regret. By the light of reason and truth, in good time, all these seeming differences will pass away. I have no special fault to find with that part of humanity that gathers into our churches; to me, human nature seems to manifest itself in very much the same way in the Church and out of it. Go through any community you please-into the nursery, kitchen, the parlor, the places of merchandise, the market-place, and exchange, and who can tell the church member from the outsider? I see no reason why we should expect more of them than other men.

Why, say you, they lay claim to greater holiness, to more rigid creeds, to a belief in a sterner God, to a closer observance of forms? The Bible with them is the rule of life, the foundation of faith, and why should we not look to them for patterns of purity, goodness, and truth above all other men?

I deny the assumption.

Reformers from all sides claim for themselves a higher position than the Church. Our God is a god of justice, mercy, and truth. Their God sanctions violence, oppression, and wine-bibbing, and winks at gross moral delinquencies.

Our Bible commands us to love our enemies; to resist not evil; to break every yoke and let the oppressed go free, and makes a noble life of more importance than a stern faith. Their Bible permits war, slavery, capital punishment, and makes salvation depend on faith and ordinances.

In their creed it is a sin to dance, to pick up sticks on the Sabbath day, to go to the theater, or large parties during Lent, to read a notice of any reform meeting from the altar, or permit a woman to speak in the church. In our creed it is a sin to hold a slave; to hang a man on the gallows; to make war on defenseless nations, or to sell rum to a weak brother, and rob the widow and the orphan of a protector and a home.

Thus may we write out some of our differences, but from the similarity in the conduct of the human family, it is fair to infer that our differences are more intellectual than spiritual, and the great truths we hear so clearly uttered on all sides, have been incorporated as vital principles into the inner life of but few indeed.

We must not expect the Church to leap *en masse* to a higher position. She sends forth her missionaries of truth one by one. All of our reformers have, in a measure, been developed in the Church, and all our reforms have started there. The advocates and opposers of the reforms of our day, have grown up side by side, partaking of the same ordinances and officiating at the same altars; but one, by applying more fully his Christian principles to life, and pursuing an admitted truth to its legitimate results, has unwittingly found himself in antagonism with his brother.

Belief is not voluntary, and change is the natural result of growth and development. We would fain have all church members sons and daughters of temperance. But if the Church, in her wisdom, has made her platform so broad that wine-bibbers and rum-sellers may repose in ease thereon, we who are always preaching liberality ought to be the last to complain.