



Report on the World's WCTU Frances E. Willard (1886)

Frances Willard was a white Methodist and president of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), the largest women's organization in the United States during the 19th century. The organization's membership was predominantly white and Protestant. While centrally focused on campaigning against alcohol—a cause which activists called “the Crusade”—Willard expanded the WCTU's scope to pursue other social reforms, including women's suffrage. The WCTU expanded also under Willard's leadership by forming chapters, or “unions,” in other countries. Chapters outside the US constituted a separate organization from chapters in the US: the World's WCTU, as distinct from the National WCTU. In 1884, Willard appointed British temperance activist Margaret Bright Lucas to be president of the World's WCTU. In that same year, Willard dispatched Mary Clement Leavitt, a white New Englander, on what became an eight-year journey around the globe as a temperance “missionary.” Leavitt organized chapters of the World's WCTU and collected signatures for the Polyglot Petition, which called on the world's governments to prohibit alcohol and opiates.

Excerpted here is the closing section of a speech Willard gave at an annual convention of the National WCTU, held that year in Minneapolis. Earlier in the speech, Willard had reported on recent gains for women's suffrage in the US and Canada, had discussed a need to expand the WCTU's temperance work into Alaska, and had expressed outrage about rum being manufactured in the US for export to Africa. In this closing section of her speech, Willard touts the accomplishments of Leavitt and other WCTU activists working outside the US, and she hails Lucas, who had come from England to attend the Minneapolis convention.

Two years ago, the Crusade dove spread its white wings and went forth with this sweet cry: “For God and home and every land.” [...A] capable and resolute woman, when asked to venture on a temperance tour around the world—and told she must take all the risks, for there was no money for the journey and no invitation from the other end of the line—quietly replied, “I will undertake the task.” Never let it be forgotten that Mary Clement Leavitt, of Boston, changed the World's WCTU from a fancy to a fact. To be sure, we have stood by her to the limits of our power. After the first year, the local unions, then first appealed to, collected in small sums nearly three thousand dollars for her use, while press paragraphs and private letters, by scores and hundreds, have heralded her progress at home and sought to prepare her way abroad. [...] Mrs. Leavitt is now in the third year of her lonely pilgrimage, and we should devoutly thank heaven for her uniform good health and remarkable success in the Orient, to say nothing of her Australian work, which is well known to us and has been admirably followed by Mrs. Judge Ward, of New Zealand. Mrs. Leavitt has made a profound impression upon the high-class Japanese, and her opportunities with them have been unmatched by those of any other foreigner.

[...] Now, what are we to do this year for the World's WCTU? Not to take advanced ground would be unworthy of our genius, for we are nothing if not progressive. Mrs. Leavitt requests that the fund should no longer bear her name but be called the World's Fund, and that what remains of it should be used for Miss Gray's work.^a But she does not know that Madame

^a Charlotte A. Gray, a white temperance activist from England, had recently begun working for the WCTU in continental Europe.

Andersson Meijerhelm, of Stockholm, is in the field; that in response to petitions from America, the Czar of Russia now permits men and women to hold temperance meetings, but for no other purpose, so that the Muscovite empire is especially open to our work. [...] We have also established a "Department of the Press" in Berlin, with Mary B. Willard at its head, who is moving actively to introduce the leaven of temperance news and sentiment into the press of the Continent [...]

The first to send money to Miss Gray, outside of our own society, was the WCTU of the Sandwich Islands, as Mrs. Leavitt had predicted, in a private letter to me, would be done. Canada and Australia will help; nay, we shall soon be receiving dues from the WCTU of Japan, for Mrs. Leavitt has already, by invitation of government officials, organized a White Ribbon Temperance Union among women with whom it is fashionable to paint the teeth black! Our great petition is circulating today in all quarters of the globe; Japan has it, and China, and it is borne upon the breezes that "blow soft o'er Ceylon's isle." Liberia is circulating it, and Edward S. Morris, the philanthropist, writes me: "If we could but reach Timbuctoo and the center of Soudan, one million orthodox Mohammedan women would gladly sign their names, because they practically believe in the law of their Koran that fermented liquor is a snare and a curse from the devil." [...]

What shall we say of the mother country, doubly endeared to us today by the genial presence of Mrs. Margaret Bright Lucas, first president of the World's WCTU? I have reserved, as the climax of this report, the official announcement of what the cablegram from Hannah Whitall Smith long ago flashed under the sea: "England joins the World's Union. Hallelujah!" For the first time in history, the imperial mother and the dauntless daughter of the Anglo-Saxon race clasp hands in a union never to be broken and saying to each other, "I'll stand by you till the morning"—that blessed morning when home shall rule the world, and the fiends of alcohol and lust slink to their native hell, crying, "*Galilean, thou hast conquered.*"

[...W]hat shall I say of her advent here, who, at the age of well-nigh seventy years, leaves her delightful home and braves distance and tempests that she may attest the unity of her spirit with our own? Margaret Bright Lucas, [...] first president of the World's WCTU, the Crusaders who are the mothers of us all salute you! New England's daughters pay glad homage to Old England's loyal daughter; the stately East accords you honor; the great West waves you welcome; the Pacific Coast and Puget Sound delegates lift glad eyes to one whom they have crossed half the continent to greet; the genial South offers the immemorial hospitality of its most heartfelt welcome. In your honor, who outrank us all in years of service and in official leadership, and in honor of these your coadjutors, we will now unite our hearts and voices in singing "God Save the Queen."

Source: “Annual Address of Frances E. Willard, President of National WCTU,” *Minutes of the National Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, at the Thirteenth Annual Meeting* [...] (Chicago: Woman’s Temperance Publication Association, 1886), 70-90, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/wu.89073021271>. Public domain, Google-digitized.

Excerpts edited and annotated by John-Charles Duffy. Antiquated spellings of place names retained, but the spelling *centre* Americanized. Punctuation emended in line with modern conventions, including omitting periods from the abbreviation *WCTU*. An opening quotation mark that lacked a closing quotation mark omitted; quotation marks enclosing the now-familiar term *dues* omitted. The terms *heaven* and *mother country*, capitalized in the source publication, have been converted here to lowercase. The source’s capitalizing retained for *Crusade* and *Crusaders*, to clarify that these refer to a specific movement; but other capitalized terms designating elements of the WCTU’s organization or branding have been converted to lowercase: *unions*, *fund*, *president*, and the slogan of the World’s WCTU (“For God and home and every land”).

These edited excerpts from Willard’s address are intended for **teaching** purposes only. For **research** purposes, you should consult, quote, and cite the source publication listed above.



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