

HER CHILDREN'S RIGHTS.

(Jennie N. Standifer.)

"When did you return home?" I asked a handsome, black-eyed woman as we sat on a rustic bench waiting for a car running from the suburbs to the city.

"Last week. I am back in Mississippi to stay."

"How did you like the West?"

"It is fine in many respects. Women vote in the State in which we sojourned, and that, as you know, is a long stride in the march of progress. Only one thing brought me back to the South. We lived in a wet State, and it did not agree with Jim. As he is my 'better half'—so-called—I thought it my duty to consider his good."

"Of course that was right, but I was under the impression that you were living in a dry, healthful climate."

"It was another kind of 'wet' that was harmful to Jim. You remember he drank before we married, but he vowed he would never touch another drop of liquor if I would only take his name—and being in love, I believed him. He didn't have many temptations so long as we lived here, and he kept as sober as a judge. When he had a splendid salary offered him for work in the West I did not think that living in a wet State would cause him to backslide. There were two babies to be provided for, and Jim seemed to be thoroughly cured of the drink habit."

"My husband's work, after we moved, often kept him out late at night. Our house was securely protected, and I was not afraid when left with only the children. One night Jim did not return until after the clock struck one. When he came in I smelled whisky on his breath, and saw at once that he was drunk. I did not waste time lecturing him, but took the babies into the guest room, and locked them and myself in. Next morning I told Jim plainly but firmly that I could not and would not have a drunken man in my house. As a mother, I had the right to protect my children, and I would not take the risk of having them maimed for life or killed by an inebriate. He declared they were perfectly safe, and solemnly promised to keep sober."

"It wasn't a week until Jim came staggering up the steps, drunk again."

I had bolted the door, and his latch-key was of no use. I refused to let him in until almost daylight, when a sudden drop in the temperature caused me to fear he would take cold and have pneumonia. He was sober enough when I opened the door, but sulky. Again I took the children to the guest room and locked the door.

"Next morning I laid down the law of my house with renewed emphasis. No drunken man should ever enter my door, no matter who he was or what was the state of the weather. Jim was deeply penitent, and made his usual promises with customary seriousness."

"A few nights later, he came reeling home, drunk as a lord, and pounded loudly on the door for admittance. I paid no attention to his knocking, although the neighbours were aroused, and Jim grew furiously angry. By two o'clock he was sober enough to come in, but I advised him to go to a hotel, as I intended to keep my vow. At last he went away. He did not return until late the next afternoon. I had kept the doors locked all day, and responded to his knock through the closed door. I repeated my assertion that I was going to protect my children from a drunken man, and further declared that I was going to return to Mississippi. I laughed incredulously at his oft-repeated promises to never touch another drop of liquor."

"For one solid week I kept the house securely locked, but while the children took their afternoon naps I would sit on the porch dressed in my most becoming gown. One day, as I sat looking over some statistics of feeble-minded children, Jim came for his daily call. After greeting him with a cheerful 'Good evening,' I read aloud an article which stated that ninety per cent. of the idiots and weak-minded children sent to asylums were the offspring of drinking men. Jim looked very grave, but only observed that our children were not idiots, nor afflicted with weak minds."

"Another afternoon I read to him some newspaper accounts of murders committed by men while under the influence of liquor. One drunken brute had killed his wife, while another murdered his own mother."

"Upon another occasion I showed him pictures of maimed and deformed children, who would go through life hampered because of the abuse of

drunken parents. Our baby had been asleep. She awoke and called 'Daddy.' He started to go to her, but the door was locked. He begged for the key. I firmly refused to let him enter the house."

"'You may come to-morrow afternoon,' I said smilingly, 'and tell the children good-bye. I leave for Mississippi on the five-thirty train.'"

"'Don't you need money?' he asked, taking a roll of bills from his pocket."

"'No, thank you, I have saved enough from my allowance for my expenses,' I answered pleasantly."

"'When will you come back?' he asked anxiously."

"'Never, unless this State goes bone-dry, and becomes a safe home for the children. I am going to live in Mississippi—a prohibition State—and take boarders. None but teetotalers can board with me, no matter what they offer to pay. Good evening, Jim.'"

"He stared a moment, and then as I started towards the door, cried: 'Stop a minute. If you will let me, I will go with you. I may not get so large a salary, but we can live on much less. Happiness counts for more than money.'"

"'Does it count for more than the delights of drinking?' I asked."

"'Yes. A happy home is more than all else combined. I will sign a pledge of total abstinence for life, and God helping me—keep it. I will go to the driest community in a dry State, and you and the babies shall have your rights.'"

"'Come in and help pack, Jim,' I invited."

"So here we are for a short visit before going to live in H—, where Jim will have only day work and be with a firm that will not employ any but teetotalers. It takes grit and grace and tact—along with the patience of Job and persistence of Satan—for a woman to stand pat for her children's rights and bring a man to his senses, but a good man is worth the struggle. Here comes my car. Come to see me and let me tell you what equal suffrage has done for the West, and we will plan to bring a like blessing to Mississippi."

Toronto is the largest dry city in the world.