

To Hell with Her

Dyer D. Lum

April 10, 1891

I know a woman (in the profane, rather than in the sacred sense of that verb). She was born in far Norseland, and the bloom on her cheeks vied with the aurora borealis, the one dazzling young fishermen by day as the other did by night. Radiant in beauty and health, an eidelweiss on the bleak snow-covered scenery, the natural instincts which burn even in polar regions had their way: she married early. She gave birth to six children.

She is now thirty and in this land of liberty. Free, or a deserted wife to earn her own living by “taking in washing.” At first, like all honeymoons, everything went sweetly. But her husband with inborn continental instinct, was “master;” hence jars arose. Leaving her surviving children in Norway, where they remain, she accompanied him to this country. Her “master” breathed in the spirit of liberty and the sceptre was more strenuously wielded. Earning good wages, he doled out to her as he saw fit. Having served him as a plaything his fancy palled. A new quarrel and he left her. A deserted wife, proud, high spirited, self-assertive, disobedient. What good was she in this world? “To hell with her!”

Following the universal custom of her landsmen she enjoyed a glass of beer and convivial society. Whether fretting over household cares, worrying over children impossible to reach, or striving to make out the months rent which her husband could earn in two days—she liked beer. Alas! she had no culture; she had never graduated and learned the tricks of conventional art; she was a simple child of nature, full of natural sensibilities unadulterated by a finishing school; she was even so healthfully ignorant as to lack “nerves,” unless a brain occasionally befuddled with beer brought on hysterics. With a warm and generous nature she lacked polite discretion in concealing it. what was she good for? “To hell with her!”

With that instinctive art some women intuitively possess she had a taste in dress. It was laughable: she was a poor washerwoman, who knew more about herrings than ethics, who had the unconscious, yet unpardonable, guilt of a handsome face and well shaped form, earning scant pennies and spending dimes for pints of beer—she, to dress well! Not always however. Poverty often sat too long at her fireside, but when her winning ways brought a friend’s relief the paw tickets came out and the finery—and beer—were again in vogue. Surely such a being can not have the finer feelings of those hothouse specimens of cultured gentility who shriek at a more, or one pained at angling for fish, or grow sentimental over vivisection, or seek to convert themselves into herbivorous beings. Why should she mourn over departed hopes, far away children, penury and want? Could one who drank beer with her neighbors, whose knowledge of common-day

life was not the result of dilettante observation, whose bubbling good nature ever surmounted trials—feel as those whose artificial lives had made them but bundles of nervous susceptibilities, what was there in common between them? “To hell with her!”

I am afraid her morals were not steel. An innate modesty kept her from the brothel. She had an old fashioned superstition that conjugal relations required living together. True, she cared not for a certified license; but the man found, housekeeping began.

She was a genuine child of the people; warm, impulsive (in all but sexuality), generous to a fault, ever thoughtful of others, free from all self-aggrandisement, willing to share her last loaf of bread and pint of beer with any in need, she still seems an uncongenial plant in our soil. She would not be interested in a Woman’s congress or an Ethical culture society. Even in the fight Lucifer is making I doubt whether she could be brought to comprehend. She asserts her liberty—she is herself. Hence neither conventional culture nor social reform has use for her. “To hell with her!”

Such has been the verdict for years, but if she will not go. It may be her honest nature may outweigh what the world calls “her failings.” For one, I think it does.

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