

"Mr. President : In presuming to occupy your time on this occasion, I desire in the first place to awaken your sympathy for that miserable abortion of a defunct Parliament, 'The Habitual Drunkards' Bill,' to stimulate the power wielded by our Association to influence the House of Commons to restore the deleted clause, and give it a vitality and visibility that will render it a beneficial measure of restraint, and a practical remedy for restoring the victims of intemperance, not only to the domestic circle, but to the community they influence. I shall now give you, from actual observation, a short sketch of the working of an unlicensed retreat, conducted on the voluntary principle. Knowing from my boyhood the hardships some of my schoolfellows had to endure from the intemperate habits of either father or mother, long anterior to the era of temperance societies, I had the idea what a boon it would prove to many a disheartened household if there were places where drunkards could be sent to, where they would be compelled to work without a drop of drink. This boyish fancy was in after years strengthened by perusing my father's private journal, when surgeon of H.M.S. *Essex*, whilst cruising for slavers on the Gold Coast of Africa in 1824-25. After detailing the deteriorating effects of drink, which admitted of two courses, 'refrain and abstain and live, or drink and die!' he went on to say, 'he would advise the Home authorities to send all incurable drunkards to this station (Prince's Island), especially if they were men of education and reflection.' No wonder that I have taken a deep interest in the Habitual Drunkards' Bill, and at our last meeting in Edinburgh lifted up my voice in its behalf, and subsequently wrote three letters in the *Daily Review* in defence of it.

"I had a longing desire to see for myself the internal economy of a Home for inebriates. Circumstances favoured me, and last year saw me a visitor in Mrs. Theobald's, Tower House, Leicester; this establishment is for ladies only, of the upper middle class; terms from two and a-half to four guineas per week; medical attendance by Dr. Clarke extra. My curiosity had been previously aroused by the reading of a pamphlet consisting of testimonials and letters brimfull of gratitude; having also been informed that medicine played but a sorry figure, and that the panacea was simply entire abstinence and a combination of womanly sympathy; remembering, too, that this was the first venture of the kind in England. The conclusion I came to was to ascertain if all written about it was true. Tower House is two miles out of the town, and stands on its own ground, surrounded by luxuriant shrubbery, where singing birds abound; there are a greenhouse, croquet lawn, ample kitchen garden, stables, coach-

house, and all the *et ceteras* needful for an establishment of twenty-one rooms, well furnished—almost luxuriously so. That the sanitary arrangements are perfect is proved by the fact of not a single death occurring since the house was opened, thirteen years since. One part of the treatment is early rising: the bell rings in winter at 7.30 a.m., at 8.30 for breakfast, at one for dinner, at five for tea, at 8.30 for supper, and at ten for prayers. Another matter is not only the punctuality of meals to a minute, but an ample and varied supply of the best of everything in season, cooked *secundem artem*. Here I may observe (in parenthesis) the claims put forward by the vegetarians in behalf of their system in conquering the drink-crave, without giving any opinion of my own, except the old wise saw—'What is one man's meat is another man's poison.' Mrs. Theobald assures me that nutritious food, consisting largely of animal diet, and plenty of it, nicely prepared, is one of her most successful agents. There did not appear to be a single dyspeptic in the house. The law of kindness predominates—in fact, Mrs. Theobald is formed by nature and education to carry on the work which engrosses her whole mind and energies; and were she not well supported by three able assistants, she would break down under the severe strain. The crowning part of the treatment is the total exclusion of all alcoholic compounds; and here lies her chief power—no tampering with the scorpion; no substitution of spirits of sal volatile; no lavender water or *eau de cologne*; not even camphor allowed, under any pretence whatever.

"The effects of the treatment.—I saw no appearance of discontent; all seemed happy and cheerful, and as busy as bees; employed in all sorts of needlework. Nor is that solace of the mind—music, neglected. Occasionally, during the day, you might hear the piano. After tea, when all were plying their needles, several in turn took their position at the piano; then a song, followed by a duet. After supper there was a continuance of the music; whilst a game of whist, chess, or draughts exercised the minds and skill of others until prayers. After which, those who felt inclined retired to their rooms, where all were expected to be by eleven o'clock. The gas is not turned off at night, as it is in some establishments, which I consider objectionable economy. Once a week there is a dance. There are hot and cold baths daily for those who choose. As for the ladies, the reason of their retirement was not a subject for general conversation. Sometimes it was mentioned in a quiet manner—for instance, one lady told me she never would have been so bad as she was had it not been for the servants who sat up with her to watch that she did not get

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)