

And Now We Will Hear From

“THE LADIES!”

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And Now We Will Hear From
“THE LADIES!”

Five years ago, there was a vote taken in this Province, on the question of selling liquor, and the result was glorious beyond our rosiest dreams. Men only voted, and two out of every three of them declared, that 21st day of July, 1915, that they were opposed to the sale of liquor for beverage purposes. They spoke out fearlessly, and unafraid, and with a certain finality that impressed the Government, not only of the Province, but of the whole Dominion, and of the world. Of course, women helped to bring about that result. No doubt they talked, reasoned, advised, and even prodded—but they did not vote. That was done by men, and men only.

Four years of prohibition has abundantly justified our expectations. Jail population has decreased, many places of penal servitude are closed for lack of occupants, and the dismal prophecies of grass growing in the streets of prohibition towns, seem to have come true only of jail yards, where now weeds and grass actually do grow unmolested. Bank savings have increased, school attendance also, of children of wage-earning age, who, under the old order would have had to supplement the family income. People, especially women and children, have been dressed better, and everyone lives better. There has been more meat sold, more ice cream, more candy. Theatres and other places of amusement have larger attendance, and indeed all legitimate channels of trade have been stimulated by the diverting of the thirteen million dollars which formerly went over the bars of Alberta.

Fundamentally, the principle of prohibition has resulted in the increased happiness and welfare of the people.

It Will Not Die Quietly!

But, of course, there have been failures and short-comings and evasions of the law, and subsequent criticism,—some just, some unjust. Let no one dream that the liquor traffic will be allowed to pass away without a struggle. It has brought ease and power and motor cars and idleness to far too many people, to be allowed to die without medical aid. Liquor-dealing represents a minimum of work with a maximum of profit, and so makes a tremendous

appeal to a certain type of mind: “We should be willing to put our last dollar into this fight,” one of the dealers is said to have stated at a conference of the Trade, held in 1915. “Do you know what it means if we lose? It will mean that every one of us will have to go to work!”

The attitude of these men is logical and easy to understand. They have lived long on the weakness of their fellowmen—and lived well. Their fellowmen still have the thirst—and the money! It does seem hard not to be able to supply the goods!

Besides this, the liquor man, from long years of ease and idleness, has grown flabby, soft muscled and corpulent, and the prospect of having to work is alarming.

The Divine Right to Grumble!

Some of the criticisms of the Act come from the natural perverseness of the human family. People love a grievance. Life is robbed of most of the joy, if they have not something to complain of, and there is not anything which makes such an ideal grievance as a Law! The Law is a schoolmaster, with all the schoolmaster’s unpopularity. Every one feels it is their Divine right to complain about the Law. If they can’t do that, their forefathers have bled and died in vain, that’s all. So the Prohibitory Law comes in for a great many fault-findings. It is a pleasant indoor sport, which we would deny to nobody!

The first year of prohibition was probably the most successful. The blow was so stunning, that it took the Trade about that long to develop any sign of returning life. Then it raised its head and began to search diligently for loopholes in the Law. It found some, and began operations, quietly, and using underground methods only. The tiny leaks began, with gentle droppings, increasing in speed, until a steady stream was breaking through the dyke. The temperance people appealed to the Government, and after considerable discussion the Government got busy and put a patch on the leakiest place.

Murmurings!

But the real pinch came in May, 1918, when the Dominion Government prohibited the inter-provincial trade, and men who had been in the habit of sending to other provinces, found their orders could no longer be filled. Then there arose many voices of weeping and bitter murmurings. Then the vital spark of British “freedom and liberty” seemed in danger of extinction.

In a country neighborhood of Alberta, was one of the devoted followers of John Barleycorn, whose soul was hot within him—hot and dry! “It’s no

country for white men," he cried, "if I knew where I could find a free country, I wouldn't stay here a minute; but the whole world is gone crazy—there's no safe place any more—what is the world coming to. I'd like to know? Here am I—I work hard—I earn money—why shouldn't I have some amusement from it? When I sent my sixteen dollars to Saskatchewan,—it came back, with a letter saying there could be no more liquor shipped until the law was changed. This is the kind of thing that causes war! No man of spirit is going to stand for tyranny like this! I never knew before how true it is that money cannot buy happiness!"

His wife, who stood behind him, said nothing until he had gone out. She had stood looking at us, with one eye shut, and with a gleam in the other one which, in some occult way, suggested to me that the evidence was not all in,—when he had gone, I heard further:

Mother Speaks!

"He works hard, all right—as he says—and what about it? What good has it done us?" she said. "I work just as hard as he does, and harder—so do the girls. . . . did you ever see a cow that gives a big pail of milk, and then kicks it over? That's what has happened here—that's why we are living in this little wart of a house, when every one else around here has a decent house. That's why my girls have to go to town to work in the winter, to earn clothes for themselves. It's not alone the money he spends, and loses—it's the foolish bargains he makes. . . . I was never so glad of anything in my life, as when the bars were closed. . . . and now that he can't get it by sending for it,—we may get along. He's mad, of course, but let him be mad! I've been mad all my life, I think, and daren't say a word. It's only a few months since he found out he couldn't get it, but already we're beginning to get on. I suppose you noticed the phonograph, and thought it looked queer in a shack like this. We got that since he couldn't get his liquor. He said he had to have some fun, so we all get the good of it now! He may rage—and he'll vote against it, if he ever gets the chance. Never mind me and the girls are with you,—we can't say anything—but we can vote!"

That's the blessedness of the present campaign. The people who cannot say anything—can vote! We are going to hear from the silent ones who heretofore could only suffer. That's the beautiful thing about a vote, too,—it is so dignified, quiet, ladylike, and serene, so free from excitement or unpleasantness of any kind, and yet so powerful.

The Premier's Statement

Let us make no mistake about the vote which will be taken October the twenty-fifth. Let no evil power fog the issue with us. The Premier of Alberta has said that if we give an overwhelming majority in favor of Prohibition, it will mean a bone-dry Province. He then will know that we want a sober people, that we want a reform of the drug-stores and a cleaning out of the iniquitous system which has debauched many of our doctors into mere bootleggers. The vote of October 25th will express the will of the people, and show the Government their duty so plainly that the most unconcerned and dull among them will feel the impact!

Get Busy!

But to bring that about, every one of us must begin to work. Great results are brought about by persistent, unremitting effort. They do not "just happen."

Register

We must begin now to talk about October the twenty-fifth, and prepare for it. According to the provision, at the last session of Parliament, the voting at this referendum is to be on entirely new lists. In towns and cities of 1,000 population and over, these lists will be prepared by registration. This means that all qualified to vote must register in person. The proclamation will indicate when and where the registration is to take place. In villages of less than 1,000 population, and in rural districts, a house to house enumeration of voters will be made. If you are a town or city dweller, watch for the proclamation announcing the date and place, and be sure to register. The Registrar will explain the qualifications for voting to any who are in doubt. If you reside in a village or rural district, see that you are not overlooked by the enumerator. If there is any uncertainty on this matter, watch for the posted lists of the enumerator, and if your name should not be there, you will have opportunity to apply and have your name entered, at a time and place to be duly announced. This is very important, for neglect of this matter might rob you of the privilege of the franchise.

Good Wishes Are Not Enough!

The exact wording of the ballot, as soon as it is known, will be sent out in the campaign literature, with instructions for marking. To the initiated, all this may seem trifling and unnecessary, but we know from experience that both men and women often spoil their ballots, and no matter how good the

intentions are, how pure and undefiled the heart, unless the cross is put in the right place, it profiteth nothing.

No one could doubt the faithfulness of the bride who endorsed the first cheque given her by her husband, by writing on the back, in carefully shaded letters, “your loving wife, Edith,” but it didn’t go at the Bank! We need knowledge as well as zeal.

Get the “X” in the Right Place

In a recent test, when twenty-five women were given ballots and asked to vote on Prohibition, with the ballot worded as it will be in all probability, seven spoiled their ballots and three voted against, although it was their intention to vote for it. These things convince us that the present campaign must be one of education.

Stupid or Heartless

The greatest enemy to be overcome in this campaign is indifference. Not many people are actually wicked—but very many are unconcerned about matters of public welfare. “It has never hurt me,” they say, seeing in that fortunate circumstance an excuse for being indifferent to the welfare of others. Surely the people who say this do not realize how utterly heartless and stupid this sounds, in the face of the record of the liquor traffic in the past.

If any person offers this as a reason for their indifference, or an excuse for not voting, I would strongly advise the canvassers not to spend too much time in trying to dispel this mental darkness. Better leave it, and pass on to more fruitful fields. You may argue, reason, agonize, and entreat, spending much precious time, but when the day of voting comes this vote will probably not be polled—the trouble is too deep-rooted and ingrowing to be removed by mere human hands like yours and mine. Only the grace of God can change a heart that is dull and selfish enough to have escaped being hurt by the sorrows of humanity.

But there are simple cases of indifference which yield easily, and to simple treatment. To them we must direct our efforts.

Talk!

There is no better way to create sentiment and generate enthusiasm than by talking. We are pretty nearly sure to be talking of something. “Generally speaking, a woman is generally speaking,” is the motto that I see before me

as I write. So, in the days that are coming, let us turn the streams of conversation toward the coming referendum, in our family circles, and group gatherings.

All reforms have begun and been carried along on the strong tide of talk,—common talk, which flows easily—and fits into every angle of life. Let us set the idle word to work as it has never worked before, and in order that the casual word may be loaded with significance and be sure to bear fruit, let me urge a careful reading of all the campaign leaflets. The evidence is all with us! But we must make use of it. Let us be intelligent talkers! We might just as well.

The Old Drinker

Let us, in our canvassing, deal gently with the Old Drinker. There is something very pathetic about the old man who has always been accustomed to his liquor. It has become his rainbow trail to Paradise—his only way of reaching the heights. Every one craves exaltation,—no one wants to go skulking through life, and when a man has received his exaltation from a black bottle for twenty or thirty years, he is incapable of any other kind. Alcohol kills man from the top down—the finer qualities go first, and so, although his physical powers may remain, the brilliance of intellect and the fine qualities of the soul are soon worn away.

The Old Drinker, facing a long, dry, unilluminated road, commands the sympathy of all thinking people. So, also, do his family, for his depression will know no lifting, and his sour face will darken the family circle. “If you had to live with my father,” one girl said to a temperance worker, “you wouldn’t be so dead sure about things. The only time we get a civil word is when we get a prescription for him. No, I won’t vote for Prohibition—we get so fed up with his grouchiness, we are ready to break the law to get relief. You don’t know what it’s like,—we just can’t live with him!”

The “peace at any price” policy is not heroic—but it is human.

Comparisons!

Heroism is a strange thing anyway. It is hard to apply it in small things. Many a man has let his dearly-beloved son go to fight, bravely and magnificently, self-forgetful in the common good, and yet, although he does not deny that prohibition is the best thing for the country, he refuses to vote for it because he is too fond of his own pleasure. Queer, isn’t it? Something like the strange standard of values of the colored girl who brought her

jewelry to a friend's house the night she was married, because "She didn't want to leave valuables lying around with a strange nigger in the house."

Old Accounts Coming In!

A campaign like the present will bring out strange phases of human thought, but the great outstanding feature of it is—We are going to hear from the women! They have a long-standing account to settle with the liquor business—there are heavy accruals of interest—for the payment has been long deferred. It has been a weary time of waiting, and some have had to pass on without delivering a vote. They couldn't wait for polling day—with many of them the weight of woe was too heavy, but to us who are left, they have given their proxies.

I am thinking of one of them now whose proxy I hold. I met her at the time of the big parade in Edmonton, just prior to the 1915 vote. She was a little old lady, very thin and frail, like a piece of Irish beeleek, who came on her crutches, and took her place in the line of march.

We had had some difficulty in getting people to march,—it was not dignified—it was not necessary—it would do no good—two miles was too far. Besides, nearly all our people had afflictions. Military inspection does not reveal more imperfections than a call for a parade. Perfectly well-looking people, men and women who bravely show a smiling face to the world, are really suffering, if we only knew it, from fallen arches, knock knees, flat knee, corns, bunions, and other varieties of hoof diseases. For these we provided cars.

But when the little lady on the crutch declared her intention to march, saying she was glad to be able to do something, at last, there was a great exodus from the cars—and the line of marchers grew and grew.

She did march—the whole two miles—with not a sign of fatigue. She told me she had waited long for a chance to do something that might help. And it did help, for all the way the rhythmic thud of the old lady's crutch on the pavement rang louder than the blare of the bands, and carried a heavier indictment of the liquor traffic.

When it was all over I got her story. It was a common enough one—just the usual story of bright hopes blighted, and ambitions that withered in the blossom and a love that died, died hard, and very, very slowly.

Don't Forget Your Proxies!

Prohibition has come too late to help the old lady of the crutch. So has the vote—she will not be here to use hers—but I think I know how she would like her ballot marked!

I believe that when the day comes, the women—the women of today, with their votes in their hands, will leave their homes and come forth in their might and power and register their undying enmity to the liquor business.

The Day!

October the twenty-fifth is a day of destiny, for which many have worked and hoped and waited. It is not just an ordinary day, though it will be bounded by a sunrise and a sunset, and split into forenoon and afternoon by whistles and bells, just like any other day. But it isn't the same. It is like the blood-red blossom of a century plant, which, although no handsomer than a poppy, has more of what Eastern people call "background."

October twenty-fifth is a culmination of many efforts, many prayers, many tears. It is the day we settle our account—in part measure at least—with the liquor traffic, and knowing the women as I do, I predict that there will be very few slackers among them. They will remember the evils they have seen with their own eyes, for all who have eyes have seen them the unhappy homes, the shabby women, the frightened children. They may even recall a lonely grave, a vacant chair. . . and sorer thoughts still that can never be healed. . . and thinking of these, I believe the women will make their crosses very deep, and very black, for deep and black has the liquor traffic, all these years, laid its cross on them!

—NELLY McCLUNG

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *And Now We Will Hear From "The Ladies!"* by author]