

BALLOTS AND BULLETS.

MADAM PRESIDENT:—In presenting my theme of Ballots and Bullets before this convention, I realize the magnitude of my task, as I rise to perform the most irksome, and yet the most necessary duty that has ever devolved upon me since the beginning of my public career in the interest of woman's enfranchisement.

It is an easy matter to address an assembly like this along the lines which custom has made comparatively popular. But necessity now demands a deviation from established usage; and it has become the duty of, an humble leader, coming from the confines of the far Pacific, whose experience has compelled her to discover that the present lines of action, as approved by a majority of our beloved and respected co-workers on the Eastern border, is not the policy for the great National Woman Suffrage Association to pursue to win. For this reason that humble leader must sound an alarm. She sees that our ships are being scuttled; and she would be recreant to every duty to which her sacred obligation calls her did she hesitate to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; and that is what I shall do tonight, so help me God!

I confess that I enjoy a controversy with an enemy. I like to puncture his pet prejudices and play havoc with his hoary sophistries, but, when I am called by the sacredness of my trust, to differ from friends whom I love, and show them that their zeal is out-running their discretion; that their efforts are acting as boomerangs to batter down our own breast-works and lay them in ruins at our feet, I realize the peril of my position, and would gladly delegate my duty to another, if one could be found who would undertake to perform it.

You are all aware that the cause of woman's enfranchisement prior to the year 1884, had made more rapid advancement in the Pacific Northwest than in any other portion of our great national balliwick. When my work began, in 1871, there was not within all our borders a married woman who had a legal right to own the clothes that formed even her bridal trousseau. It is true that the pioneer women of the whole of Oregon had enjoyed, from 1850 to 1852, the privilege of acquiring and possessing in their own right—when married—from 160 to 320 virgin acres of the public domain; a right granted them under the specifications of a congressional act known as the Donation Land Law. And to this law, from whose benefit many men and women possess homes today, who would otherwise be homeless, we doubtless owe much of the spirit of freedom among our women, as well as much of men's respect for our inter-independence with themselves which, until recently overthrown by a new idea, was bringing us to the ballot box as rapidly as Legislative wheels could revolve.

Oregon is the mother State of the Pacific Coast, and originally embraced the present States of Washington, Idaho and much of Montana. School suffrage was granted to the women of Oregon, Washington and Idaho almost without the asking prior to 1883, when full suffrage was given to the women of Washington Territory by legislative enactment, amid almost universal rejoicing.

It is a matter of history that for 15 years prior to that enactment, your humble speaker had traveled alone over Oregon, Washington and Idaho, enduring toll, hardship, privation, ridicule, sneers and vituperation, and steadily overcoming all sorts of obstacles. It was through these experiences that I learned the necessity of using the same tact in dealing with men, in all our work for ballots, that Nations had long before learned to exhaust, when dealing with each other, before resorting to force, or the argument of bullets.

Every woman knows she cannot rule her own husband. The man who would consent to be ruled by his wife would be so poor an excuse for manhood that she wouldn't consider him worth corraling in the chimney corner after some body had driven him home. What is true of men in the abstract is equally true of men in the aggregate. Learning this fact, I proceeded, very early in my public career, to make the most of it; so I said everywhere, "Gentlemen, in our demand for the ballot, we are not seeking to rule over you. We only ask for our enfranchisement because we desire freedom for ourselves. We recognize your right to liberty and the pursuit of happiness, with yourselves as the only proper judges of your own methods in that pursuit. And we most earnestly and respectfully demand a like recognition on your part, of our right to the pursuit of liberty and happiness for ourselves, by methods of our own choosing, so long as they do not conflict with your prerogatives."

The Declaration of Independence and the Preamble and constitution of the United States formed the basis of my many sermons through all those weary years. If any other line of argument had been pursued, we should have made no headway with our voters; for you must yet learn to bear in mind, my sisters, one fact of which most women seem strangely to have lost sight; we can only secure our right to vote by and through the consent of voters; and we have only gone ahead in the prosecution of our case when we have succeeded in gaining men's consent. Whenever our demand for our right to vote is based upon an alleged purpose to take away from men any degree of what they deem their liberties, or own right of choice we simply throw boomerangs that recoil upon our own heads.

Every woman who stands behind the prison bars of her present political environment, reaching her manacled hands to men who hold the key to the locked gates of constitutional law, through which she alone can gain her liberty, and says to them, "Give us the ballot, and we'll put down your whiskey!" only arouses a thousand men to say by their votes, "Very well, we won't give you the ballot, and that will settle it! You shan't have it at all, if you are going to use it as a whip over us."

And right here, in the face and eyes of the temporarily fashionable fad of prohibition, I declare that, as a temperance woman, I am opposed to prohibition on principle, and always have been. I have raised to manhood a large family of sober sons, who have wasted their way to school and office, past the drug store and the doggery, all their lives. I never preached prohibition to them and never talked temperance in their hearing, except occasionally to say, "Boys, you know that if you should go astray the world would say it was your mother's fault. She has dared to deviate from established custom by publicly advocating woman's right to equality with man before the law. Men say boys are what their mothers make them, and I accept the verdict. If you go wrong, your mother will bear the full blame for her failure to make you what you ought to have been."

Madam President, that was always argument enough! My boys needed no prohibitory law to keep them sober, nor will the son of any woman whose guiding star is liberty and self-dependence. I have always left money, wastebags and other things that other people's children might be tempted to steal within my children's reach. I would say by word and deed, "I trust you," and they were proud to prove worthy of the trust. It is liberty that the mothers of children need; then responsibility and self-dependence naturally follow. But I recognize the right of others to hold different views, even if wrong; and their right to exercise their opinions is as sacred to me as my own, so long as they do not, by a mistaken policy, overthrow a greater work through their excess of zeal.

At the time the women of Washington Territory received enfranchisement on the 23d day of November, 1883, when Governor Newell signed the suffrage bill amid the mingled halloos of Olympia's guns and bells—the Woman's Christian Temperance Union was of recent origin upon the Coast and was looked upon by the mass of our voters in the Pacific Northwest as being quite as harmless in its way as the average woman's prayer meeting. Its rank and file were not suffragists. They had never lifted voice or finger to secure their right to vote, but had often sat in the sanctuary singing "Where Is My Wandering Boy Tonight?" when the little hoodlum was kicking up a rumpus at my suffrage meetings.

A constitutional amendment for extending the right of suffrage to women was pending in Oregon at the time the women of Washington were enfranchised, and great caution was needed, lest by excess of newly awakened prohibition zeal we should scare the voters into ambush, where, behind the coverts of the law, they would be on the alert to strike us down. I had already scented the lurking danger that menaced us from the coverts of the liquor power—not liquor sellers, for their numbers are limited, but liquor buyers and drinkers, who comprise everywhere the very large majority of the voters. So I came over here to our National convention in 1884, and by the co-operation of our suffrage forces organized a "still hunt" campaign of our own, through which I verily believe we would have been successful at the June election of that year. If it had not been for the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, which, though feeble in Oregon, was reinforced by lecturers from the East, who held suffrage meetings of their own in the interest of prohibition agitators, which nullified our "still hunt" method, and quite naturally aroused the ballot-handed liquor league and its constituents, the voters, against us almost as a unit everywhere.

I had previously made arrangements with the Republican and Democratic Central and county committees of Oregon by which, if the W. S. A. would furnish the ballots ready printed they would handle "yes" tickets in such a way that fair play could be secured for us at the ballot boxes, and these committees in turn authorized the local committees of both parties to furnish bands and halls for the immense meetings of the campaign that awaited me at county seats all over the state. I remember such a meeting at Pendleton, one of our principal Eastern Oregon towns. A crowd had gathered at the opera-house, the band was in attendance, vocal music by local talent was provided, and when the lecture hour came I made my way with great difficulty through the throng to the platform. There I was met by the excellent wife of the Congregational minister, president of the newly organized local W. C. T. U., who had never attended a suffrage meeting before in her life. This lady informed me that Mrs. Mary Clement Leavitt was there; that she had been speaking for several evenings in the church to a small W. C. T. U. audience, and she wanted her to be heard before leaving the town by the general public. Though I knew that I would not at that time have been allowed to speak on the W. C. T. U. platform at all for fear I should say "ballot," I could not afford to violate a principle of liberty by checking freedom of speech on a suffrage platform. So I asked Mrs. Leavitt to the seat beside me. Then after an hour's talk by myself on the fundamental principles of a republican form of government, during which men frequently tossed their hats to the calling in token of their appreciation of our cause, I introduced Mrs. Leavitt as "a distinguished round the world ambassador of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union who hailed from Boston." The dear little one-eyed woman came to the front and said: "The Woman's Christian Temperance Union, which I have the honor to represent, is not a woman's suffrage association. The vast majority of our women are vehemently opposed to woman's suffrage. They claim our work is devotional and religious, while the woman's suffrage work is, as you know, political. But our leaders have learned, to our sorrow, that we can do very little toward securing prohibitory legislation before Congress or Legislatures because women do not have votes. So we are gradually learning to accept woman's suffrage as a short cut to prohibition."

When the speaker took her seat the band began playing, and the crowd filed out, leaving that great audience of voters two-thirds of whom were probably full of whisky to their heels, to organize against us secretly, which they did to such purpose, all over the state, that when election day came, a few weeks later, every man who could be bought, cajoled or prejudiced against our amendment was voted, by their orders, against our unballoted hosts, while we sat with "our hands on our mouths and our mouths in the dust," in powerless despair, our work of years overthrown in a day, while the Woman's Christian Temperance Union remained as benignly, and self-righteously oblivious to the ruin it had aroused the enemy to bring down upon our devoted heads as Mrs. Leary's cow.

But we still had hopes for Washington Territory, where the women had secured full suffrage before its W. C. T. U. was out of its swaddling clothes. Women were voters in that territory for three and a half years, notwithstanding the fact that repeated unsuccessful attempts to defeat them were made by men—attempts which nobody could parry but those who were acquainted with all the leading politicians, and knew every inch of the ground. It is needless to say to this convention that the attempts of leading men and women to secure a constitutional convention of woman suffragists was frustrated at this critical period by the untimely invasion of Mrs. Clara G. Colby and other self-imported Eastern suffragists, who created a "hurray" campaign that completed the ruin the W. C. T. U. had begun.

In January of 1886, when Washington was on the eve of statehood, a Legislature met which had been chosen at the election of 1885, largely by women's ballots. Both political parties had endorsed woman suffrage during the campaign, and the security of the measure seemed permanent. But in the meantime, the prohibition wave that had arisen in the East had swept over the women and preachers of the churches, and designing politicians, the kicked-outers of other political parties, massed themselves among them as its leaders. Clergymen who, by the very nature of their calling, are generally as full of impracticable business methods as inexperienced women, combined their forces all over the territory; and they said to the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, whom they baited, petted, paid and praised, till it was no wonder it thought itself holier than the women suffragists: "Women are voters! Now is the time to show the world what you can do with the ballot!" forgetting that no ballot is in force in any state at this stage of human development unless there is a latent bullet behind it.

The Legislature convened at Olympia in the very midst of this excitement, and the Woman's Temperance Union, led by an enthusiastic little old maid lecturer from Pennsylvania, and backed by the National Liquor League, which worked hand and glove with it (though it did not know it), had no difficulty in securing just such prohibitory legislation, as it asked for, while the men who wanted it chuckled over their success as strategists.

At that time my own home was overclouded by the trailing shadow of the wing of Arahel. My beloved only daughter was in the last stages of a fatal illness, and my duty kept me at my darling's bedside. Women, wives of the members of the Legislature in some instances, wrote to me, saying "The cause of woman suffrage is being driven into a trap. Come over and help us to protest against this prohibition movement, which, in the guise of local option, will surely destroy our suffrage if it is not checkmated." I answered, "Now is your time to lead! Checkmate this movement while there is yet time! I cannot leave my post at home!" But the husbands of these women would not permit them to act, unless I would lead them, and receive in my own breast all the barbed arrows of the combined whisky and prohibition elements. And, as I could not leave my post at home, and no other woman could be found who was willing to meet the crisis, women's freedom went by default, and the frenzied friends of prohibition were made the cat's-paw of the liquor league at its will.

Need I tell the result? In every precinct, no matter how the vote on local option went, the women got the blame. If a precinct went wet, prohibition shriekers cried "There, don't you see that women will not vote our way?" If a town went dry, the men who opposed prohibition would say: "There, we told you so! The women and the preachers are all fanatics together!"

In the Spring of 1886, seeing the danger that threatened women's ballots at the next territorial election, I went to Walla Walla to sound the alarm. But I found a boycott against me in all the churches. So I was compelled to go to the residence of the widow of a brewer, from whose husband I had in former years often rented an opera-house for suffrage meetings, before church pulpits had been opened to women at all.

The brewer's widow at first indignantly denied my request. She said, and mark you, Madame President, there is a lesson here: "When we came to Walla Walla, the town was little, and it was dead already, but my husband brought with him ten thousand dollars. I earned more than half of that money myself, a washin' for miners at Canyon City. But that money was not mine! De women had no rights! So my husband, he started a brewery. He buy the people's barley; he subdivide to churches and bridges and schoolhouses, and by and by he build this brewery. I scolded, for I don't like the business! It is a nasty business! But what could I do? Women had no rights. By and by he die, and leave me a mortgage of forty thousand dollars. You know he helped you for de woman's rights when the churches wouldn't! When the law was made I, too, was glad; but now comes prohibition! Women's votes will shut up my business. Interest will come due, I cannot pay. Taxes will come due, I cannot pay. By and by comes dot sheriff and turns me and my children in the street. You calls dot Christianity! I calls it robbery! No, you can't help my hall!"

I assured the woman she greatly mistook the spirit of Christian women (as I then understood it), if she believed that they intended to raid or loot her means of livelihood. I told her we would gladly help her to pursue a different business, if she would let us; and I added: "Come out tomorrow night and hear me speak in your hall, and I will present your side of the question to the women!" She answered like a flash: "You would not dare! Women would ostracize you! You don't know dot spirit!"

I assured her that I had dared greater things, and after a little parley I hired her hall for two nights. On the first evening the hall was packed, in spite of opposition meetings held by prohibitionists in all the churches. My theme was "Woman's Opportunity." I told the new voters that the present conflict was forced upon them by the combined efforts of their friends, who were blinded by zeal, and their enemies, who, alert from self-interest, were determined to load their ballots into a trap. In telling the story of the brewer's widow I added: "Last night, after I had left her house, I paused on the sidewalk, under the blooming locust trees, and looked up at the moonlight, glimmering through the leaves, and lying in lambent sheen on that brewery, a great pile of mortar and masonry, held down by that woman's mortgage; and I thought 'here is woman's opportunity.' If, instead of joining men in this conflict for prohibition, which, even if successful at the ballot-box, cannot be enforced except by bullets, you will utilize your newly acquired power by forming a corporation to buy or lease that great building—if you will convert it into a cannery, or creamery, or both, and will give employment to that woman and her children, and to the wives and children of all the men in your midst, whose means of livelihood are now in jeopardy, the fame of your philanthropy and common sense will go out to other portions of our goodly country and the success of our business methods will inspire the voters of all other states and territories to emulate the example of the man who gave you the ballot. Then, in due time, under the happy environment of a free motherhood, a race of men will spring up who will not be slaves to appetite, and prohibition will die a natural death."

This proposition took immensely with the women that night, but the next morning's papers, after being interviewed by prohibition agitators, contained awful criticisms under glaring scare heads, accusing me of pandering to the liquor interests; and all the women of the churches, except the leading suffragists, whose protests were lost in the clamor, accepted the story of a whisky-soaked, red-mouthed prohibition agitator from Portland, who said: "Mrs. Dunlavy has sold out to whisky!" And the prohibitionists cried, almost with one accord, "Away with such a woman from the earth!"

Dear friends, why prolong the story? That ex-brewer's widow still runs her dead husband's "nasty business." The men voters of Oregon and Washington still drink intoxicating liquors whenever so inclined, as they always will, whether women vote or not; and the women voters of Washington find themselves with the iron gates of a state constitution shutting them out from the exercise of their liberties, where they are left to chant mournfully: "Whisky recovered from the fight; it was woman's vote that died!"

As I conclude I must crave your indulgence while I repeat an illustration often used by myself in that memorable struggle, because I feel that its potency is yet to be required in other places, perhaps for years to come, ere women learn the ins and outs of one-sex politics, against which they seek blindly to do battle with their own hands in manacles.