

WOMAN SUFFRAGE.

An Enthusiastic Advocate of the Subject.

LIBERTY, NOT PROHIBITION.

Address by Mrs A. S. Dantway Before the Idaho Constitutional Convention, July 17.

Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Convention:

I deeply appreciate the honor you confer upon the humblest member of the otherwise unrepresented class when you permit one of us to come before your honorable body to join you for even one brief hour in the consideration of those topics which vitally interest all the people of our commonwealth.

Although what I have to say to you to-night will differ materially from the utterances of other women whom you have graciously accorded a hearing, I think you will all concede before I have finished that women are learning to express their differences of opinion in a spirit of tolerance toward one another such as would have been beyond their power to exhibit before they began to be imbued by the spirit of liberty.

Just as in the infancy of the government of the United States the people who lived beyond the Rocky Mountains and the valley of the Mississippi formed never any broader conception of the fundamental principles of liberty under the plastic conditions of their new environment than had been dreamed of by their ancestors, so in the proposed incoming states, in which I am proud to claim a permanent interest, the people of a new generation are forming yet broader conceptions of the glorious heritage in store for them and their children than their ancestors even anticipated.

I realize as I stand in this honorable presence that we, the people of Idaho, are making history. For although the class I represent is not otherwise represented in this body, the fact that you, gentlemen, have now for the second time convened to give woman a hearing, is proof that the world is moving in the right direction. Without attempting to consume the time of this Convention in rehearsing facts of history with which it is conceded you are all well acquainted, I will at once take up the subject which your chivalry has permitted us to consider, namely, the fundamental principles upon which the government of the United States is founded. The fact that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed is no longer disputed by any set of law makers; nor is its logical sequence disputed—that taxation and representation are co-existent factors in all just governments.

You, gentlemen, have already occupied a fortnight in convention assembled, combining your wisdom, erudition, eloquence and logic in the incubation of a state constitution, to be presented to your electors—not woman's unless by your permission—in the forthcoming month of October.

So far as you have yet gone in the completion of such parts of your work as has come under the observation of women in lonely stock rancho cabins (like ours in the Lost River wilderness) it has seemed to most of us that you have legislated wisely and well.

We cordially approve the public spirit you have manifested in considering the just claims of the executive and the judiciary as well as the legislative departments of a state government to such constitutional protection as shall best insure the proper administration of public and private affairs among men.

We also cordially and heartily approve your manly determination to permit no alien or theocratic power to arise among us to wield our ballots and control our offices while bearing allegiance to a dynasty of priests. And, although there is a diversity of opinion among women upon one question which we have sought to place before you, to-wit: the trite one of prohibition, to which less than 2 per cent of the women of the Territory or of the Nation adhere, there is a remarkable unanimity among us concerning our own enfranchisement. Women, like men, are rapidly outgrowing the idea that prohibition is a reformatory measure. When first the idea was placed before them by press and pulpit large numbers of them grasped it as a sort of providential compromise between their own growing mentality and their desire to do something which all men might pet and pat and praise them for attempting. They soon discovered, also, that as an ally of the church they had not only found an avenue to fame and honor, but to emolument also. These facts, and more especially the last named, so stimulated their long repressed and naturally emotional sensations that it was not difficult for political cranks who had been kicked out of the old parties to secure their campaw services in raking chestnuts for themselves from the fires of political controversy.

It is the easiest thing on earth to make a political speech. Anybody can recount the horrors of drunkenness and the evil influences of the saloon. And many a woman who had never before fangled a coin in her pocket that she could call her own found an easy avenue for making money in this new departure. I am not blaming them for earning money. I am simply stating facts. Money is the motive power that moves the world. It is more potent than religion and more powerful even than love. No organization can long exist without it. It is as potent a factor with the church as with its adversary the saloon. We all know it is not lost sight of by the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, and I may frankly add that the Woman Suffrage Association, as well as this honorable body, is obliged to admit and consider its claims. I am not complaining, but simply stating facts, that you may see that women are not blinded to the financial situation. Liberty

these opportunities have been sadly circumscribed in money matters, and it is not to be wondered at that they have sought willingly the first avenues that have opened to them for making money by methods wherein they might work and travel, and at the same time receive the pay and plaudits of men. Multitudes of the great rank and file of prohibition women are not to be included in this category. It is of the leaders I speak, and I beg you, gentlemen, to remember that in pursuing this hobby and never losing sight of its emoluments, they are only following the example of men engaged in the same business. Be patient with them. They have plenty of material in sight in every town they visit upon which to expend their eloquence; nor can you expect they will cease to harp upon it as long as they can make it pay.

Of the philosophy of prohibition I need say but little. Every thinking man or woman who analyzes the subject closely reaches one conclusion, and that is that coercion, or any species of arbitrary law, never yet restrained any man in his vices. The stale argument that compares horse stealing, against which we have prohibitory laws, by common and undisputed consent, with liquor selling, about which there are many differences of opinion, is most unfair, since there are no laws against horse selling—provided the purchaser is ready with the cash, and the horse offered for sale is all its owner claims for it. In like manner is the comparison about the prohibition of murder unfair, since the sale of guns, knives and ammunition is not prohibited except under certain conditions; nor are humanity and horses forbidden to exist because some men are murdered and many horses are stolen.

Of the evils of intemperance and the suffering of its victims I need not speak, since I could not hope to teach or edify you on these points. If I were the omnipotent power, I should not hesitate with my finite conception of things, to prohibit everything that is evil. I would like to prohibit want, woe, poverty, excessive riches, murder, arson, slander, lust, covetousness, gluttony, lying, robbery, theft—everything that debases our community. But, since I can't, and God in His wisdom plainly teaches me He won't, I have no desire, nor has the very large majority of American women whom I have the honor to represent, the remotest wish to run a tilt against omnipotence. Clearly, the prohibition movement is dying out. Need I instance Michigan, Massachusetts, Vermont, Oregon, Rhode Island, Connecticut and Pennsylvania, where it has lately met with overwhelming defeat, in support of this statement?

Women, as well as men, have lost faith in it by the tens of thousands within the past few years. Many women in Washington Territory who had never lifted voice or finger to secure the ballot before it came to them, but who unwisely yielded to the counsels of women from the East, who sought them out on a handsome salary to induce them to use their newly found ballots as cat-paws in the hands of federalists and cranks, have discovered, under the humiliation of the great defeat that has deprived them temporarily of the ballots they had just learned to prize, that what women need for the purification of the race is not an arbitrary law for the coercion of men, but liberty for themselves that they may rise above the conditions of subjugation against which their forefathers rebelled, and under which they are now so often compelled to mother a progeny of drunkards.

In Wyoming, where the women had been voters long enough to learn wisdom before the prohibition craze became the fashion, better counsels prevailed, and no such innovation has been introduced to act as a boomerang against their ballots.

I am making no fight against prohibition per se, since I realize that everybody has a right to ride a pet hobby, even when riding it to its death, provided, of course, he doesn't strike down the principles of liberty with the hoofs of his hobby-horse. But I wish I might convince every man in this Convention that most women realize, as keenly as any of you do, the fact that every woman who sits behind the prison-bars of her present political environment, lifting her manacled hands to men and saying, "give us the ballot that we may put down your whisky," is not only telling an untruth, (since all the force of arms, to say naught of ballots, would never do it unless men should voluntarily put it down themselves), merely offers the strongest possible inducement to most men to answer, "Very well. We'll see that you don't get the ballot at all if you intend to use it as a whip."

What the women ask, gentlemen, the great majority of the women of the territories are asking for I mean; woman who have no time to spend in running to ice cream festivals to induce men to fill their stomachs with an indigestible compound for financial consideration—that sends them to the dramshop for an antidote; women who look upon the practical side of every subject and are not sent out as the paly representatives of any set of men or any political party, is that you will engraft into the fundamental law of Idaho a clause in your chapter on suffrage and elections, providing that other rights and qualifications being equal (except the right to bear arms which nature accords to man and the still more perilous right to bear armor-bearers, which the same inexorable power assigns to woman) there shall be no restrictions placed upon the suffrage on account of sex.

Do this wise and patriotic thing, gentlemen of the convention, and your constitution will be adopted by spontaneous combustion. You will put power in the hands of your wives and mothers with which as a home element they can level blows of irresistible strength at the demon of polygamy that now menaces their daughters in many sections of the southern and eastern portion of this rising commonwealth.

Concluded to-morrow.

WOMAN SUFFRAGE.

[Concluded]

While I can and do point to Wyoming where the women have voted for the last two decades, in proof that women's ballots will not bring prohibition, and also to Washington, where for three and a half years a majority of the women refused to use the ballot as a whip to coerce men into leading strings as though they were little children, I do say, without prospect of contradiction, that women are quite as much opposed to drunkenness in husbands as men are opposed to drunkenness in wives. And when women are everywhere free and equal with men before the law, they will cease to rear children of such weak moral fibre that they are unable to resist temptation. Grant us the right of suffrage, gentlemen, and we will not only pledge to you our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor in aiding you to adopt this constitution, but we will, when it is adopted, feel so proud of you and of ourselves that we will proclaim the glad tidings of our freedom among all the cities and countries of the east; and by so doing turn the tide of immigration into Idaho just as we exultantly directed it to Washington during the period of three and a half years when we could do so consistently, because Washington was then "the land of the free and the home of the brave."

But, gentlemen! I well know there is no other dogma that dies so hard as tyranny. I know that many of you, if married, may delude yourselves with the idea that you are "heads of the family." I know how persistently your wives—cunning diplomats—persuade you that you are the supreme power in their household. Your vanity and self-love are fed upon this sophistry. For you are very human; quite as much so as ourselves; and we are by no means perfect. We know everyone of your threadbare arguments against our liberties by heart. You say we must fight if we vote; forgetting of pretending to forget that life's hardest battles everywhere are fought by the mothers of men in giving existence to the race. You say we do not wish to vote, when all the opportunities we have ever had to vote have been as freely utilized in that direction as your own.

You say if we wish the ballot let us ask for it, when we have been asking for it for lo, these forty years.

You say bad women will vote, when you well know that bad men vote, and claim the ballot for their protection, while you do not say them nay. You say we mustn't sit on juries, when ever and anon a woman is to be tried. May we not, gentlemen, look forward to the day when women may be tried by a jury of our "peers?"

I do not mean that all, or nearly all of you will say these harsh, illogical things. Quite a number of you I know to be in favor of woman's full and free enfranchisement; and I sincerely hope that all of you will be so convinced of the justice of our plea that you will not hesitate to make your names immortal as the first body of constitution writers under the sun who have ever dared to be wholly just to the mothers of the race. But, oh! gentlemen, if, in the extreme caution that induces other men to uphold their own prejudices in opposition to the aspirations of women, you do not dare to grant us the free boon of full enfranchisement, we have another plan to lay before you which we believe and hope will not fail to meet your unqualified approval.

Remember that we ask you, appealing to your chivalry, your sense of justice and patriotism; appealing to your spirit of liberty and honor, to grant us, as a part of the fundamental law, our free, unquestioned right to vote. But, if you will not grant this request, then we pray you, as a compromise with your consciences and with us, to put a clause in your chapter on suffrage and elections providing that the Legislature may, at any session, pass a bill extending the elective franchise to women on equal terms with men. Surely you will not compel your wives and mothers, under a Constitutional law of the State of Idaho, which you have denied us the right to any voice in framing or adopting; surely you will not compel us to go before the ignorant and prejudiced voting classes of men, with our hands on our mouths and our mouths in the dust; yes, clinging half-fledged boys, who have just attained their majority and have not ceased struggling with weak moustaches; or praying foreign-born voters, who cannot speak our language or comprehend the first principles of our free institutions—surely you will not so humiliate us, and so outrage our sense of justice as to remand us to these persons, only to be sent away, when we ask for liberty, with a brutal No, as has been so often done in older States when we asked these voters to amend their constitutions!

You have opportunity to so frame your Constitution, in the very inception of your government, that your picked men of the Legislature may be allowed to sit in final judgment upon our plea for ballots.

The eyes of the world are upon these Territories. The freedom-loving spirit of the West has long passed into a proverb. Shall we, the women of this border land, who have shared alike your trials and triumphs—shall we not be permitted to go up to Washington next winter, bearing aloft, like the women of our neighboring Territory Wyoming, the banner of our freedom? Shall we not have the power to proclaim everywhere the chivalry and honor of our own Constitution makers, and tell the world that they scorned to accept a right for themselves which they would deny to the mothers of men? Will you not so equip us with the watchword of liberty that we can inspire all the world to turn its eyes upon Idaho as the promised land—the land of free women and brave men?

What do you woman suffragists who are not prohibitionists propose to do with the whisky traffic? It is an excellent and harmless little woman who has worked hard for prohibition because she has had no other channel in which to work and thereby saved the struggling spirit within her.

We answer: Tax whisky and all other intoxicants as heavily as their traffic will bear, not as heavily as to amount to prohibition, for experience proves that the ends of justice are thus defeated, for then the dealers will sell and pay no tax at all. I know all the arguments against the whisky tax by heart. Time was when I supposed the tax on liquor was what men call it—a license. But study of the subject long ago convinced me of the mistake. Intemperance is among us like an overgrowing, dark, deep and pestilential river. Liquors are sold because men buy them, and the river of intemperance flows because it has a perennial fountain in the desire of the consumer. Men who drink immoderately are not the chief source of its supplies. But no matter whence the supplies come, the river is always flowing, flowing. You may obstruct it here and there, but you cannot stop its flow.

At the mouth of the Mississippi there is an immense swamp, so dark and pestilential is it that yellow fever lurks in the marshes and a green slime crawls upon the top of the stagnant water among which reptiles play hide and seek.

"Prohibit the accursed thing," cries out the theorist. "Don't tamper or temporize with it, but put it down."

Vain hope, vain mandate, vain endeavor. If you cover the slum and slime with a prohibition plaster, be it ever so strong, the virus will exude; or worse, it will burrow deeper and deeper into hidden places, marking its track by desolation and death.

Then, what is the remedy? Science says "Build levees upon its banks." And so says common sense. Regulate what you cannot destroy. Confine the stream to a limit as narrow as will contain its flow, and keep the dykes high and in order.

This is "high license" falsely so called. It is a levee upon the banks of the stream, of which even those who use the stream for financial reasons can recognize the need. Give us the levee, gentlemen. And oh, give woman the ballot with which to build it high and strong and we will help you build right royally.