

## Equal Rights for All.

By Abigail Scott Duniway—Revised  
and condensed.

"MR. PRESIDENT AND MEMBERS OF THE CONVENTION; GENTLEMEN AND LADIES—Although much of what I have to say in your presence tonight will differ materially from the utterances of other women who have been honorably accorded a hearing before your Honorable Body, I think you will 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 had begun to be imbued with the desire for liberty which now inspires them.

Just as in the infancy of the government of these United States, the people who lived beyond our Rocky Mountains, and beyond the valleys of the Ohio and the Mississippi Rivers formed newer and broader conceptions of the fundamental principles of a true Democracy than had been dreamed of by their ancestors across the Atlantic seas, so, in these yet newer states of the Pacific Northwest, the people of a new generation are forming broader conceptions of the glorious heritage in store for them and their children than their ancestors ever anticipated.

Although there is a wide diversity of opinion among us upon one question which women have sought to place before you, at a former hearing—I allude to the trite one of prohibition, to which less than two per cent of the women of this Territory, or of the Nation adhere—there is a remarkable unanimity of sentiment in our ranks concerning the justice of our plea for our own enfranchisement.

Women, like men, are rapidly outgrowing the idea that prohibition is a reformatory measure. When the idea was first placed before them by press and pulpit, a good many grasped it as a sort of providential opportunity for a popular compromise between their own long repressed mentality and their desire to perform some public act for which press, people and pulpit would praise and pat and pet and pay them. These facts, and more especially the last named, have so stimulated the repressed ambition of a few women that it has not been difficult for political cranks, who had previously been kicked out of the old parties, to secure their cat's-paw services in raking chestnuts for themselves from the fires of political controversy.

Mr. President: It is the easiest thing on earth to make a prohibition speech. Anybody can recount the horrors of drunkenness and berate the evil influences of the saloon; and many a woman, who before had never jingled a coin in her pocket that she could call her own, has found an easy avenue for making money by engaging in this agitation.

I am not blaming women for earning money. I am simply stating a fact. Money is the motive power that moves the world.

No woman, especially one who works for prohibition in a professional way, is blind to the financial contingent, as any business man or church, or newspaper realizes when responding to the constantly recurring demands for money that invariably accompany her efforts.

Women have been servants without wages for centuries; and it is not to be wondered at that they have sought eagerly to enter this avenue of prohibition, the first that has opened to them wherein they might collect money, enjoying notoriety and travel, and at the same time receive the plaudits as well as the pay of man.

I do not mean that the rank and file of resident prohibition women are to be included in this category. It is of the itinerant 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 voters engaged in the same business. Be patient with them. You ought not to expect that they will cease to harp upon their chosen theme as long as they can make it pay.

And this too, in spite of the fact that no attempt at coercion, or the enactment of any sort of arbitrary legislation has ever yet restrained any man in his voluntary desire to indulge his vices.

The stale argument with which you have recently been regaled, that compares horse stealing, against which we have prohibitory laws by common and undisputed consent, with liquor selling or buying, 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 he wants to buy is all its owner claims for it. In like manner is the comparison between the prohibition of liquor selling and the prohibition of murder unfair, since the sale of ropes, knives, guns and ammunition is not prohibited except under certain conditions to which all law-abiding people agree; nor are humanity and horses forbidden to exist because some men are murdered and many horses are stolen.

I frankly confess that if I were the Omnipotent Power, with my finite conception of mundane things, I should not hesitate to prohibit everything that I believe to be evil. I would like to prohibit every form of intemperance, self-righteousness, woe, want, war, poverty, excessive riches, murder, arson, slander, fever, contagion, lust, covetousness, gluttony, lying, robbery, cruelty, theft—everything that debases any element of our humanity; but since I can't, and God in his wisdom plainly teaches me that this is not his plan, I have no desire, nor have the very large majority of women—I mean the self-poised liberty-loving women whom I have the honor to represent—the remotest desire to run a tilt against Omnipotence. Clearly, the prohibition movement is dying out. Need I instance Connecticut, Oregon, Michigan, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Vermont and Washington, where it has lately met with overwhelming defeat, in support of this statement? Women, as well as men, have lost faith in its efficacy as a reformatory temperance method, by tens of thousands, within the past ten years.

There were in the year 1896, a few women in the Territory of Washington, who, after they had gotten the ballot, which came to them unawares and unbidden, became unduly intoxicated with their new possession. And these women unwisely yielded to the counsels of a few peripatetic women from the East, who, learning that Washington's women had been endowed with ballots, sought them out (on a handsome salary) and induced them to permit idealists and cranks to use their ballots as catspaws, in a vain attempt to rake their own chestnuts from the fires of politics. But the majority of even these women long ago discovered, under the humiliation of the great defeat that followed, which naturally deprived them, and through them all women, of their right to vote, which they had just learned to prize, that what they need for the purification of the race, is not an arbitrary law for the coercion of men, but liberty for themselves, that they may gradually rise above the conditions of subjugation against which their forefathers rebelled, under which, as servants without wages, taxed without representation and governed without consent, so many mothers are compelled to rear a progeny of drunkards.

In Wyoming, where the women had been voters long enough to learn a modicum of political wisdom before the prohibition craze became the fashion, better counsels prevailed, and no such innovation exists, to act as a boomerang against their ballots as destroyed the suffrages of Washington's women.\*

I am making no remonstrance against prohibition, per se. I realize that everybody has a right to ride a pet hobby, even when riding it to its death, provided, of course, that he doesn't strike down other people's liberties 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 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 say—

\*This is equally true today of Colorado, Utah and Idaho, where women are voters, now.

"Give us the ballot and we'll put down your whisky," is not only telling a falsehood (since all the force of bullets, to say naught of ballots, would never do it unless men should voluntarily put it down themselves) merely offers to most men the strongest possible inducement 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. We don't propose to let women carry a whip hand over us!"

What the women are asking, gentlemen, I mean what the great majority of the women of the Pacific Northwest are asking: women who have no time to spend in getting up ice-cream festivals to induce men to fill their stomachs with an indigestible compound—for a financial consideration in the interest of the W. C. T. U. fund; festivals that send them to the dram shop for an antidote; what women are asking who study the practical side of every question; women who are not sent out as the paid representatives of any set of men or women, or of any political party, is that you will engraft into the fundamental law of this commonwealth, a clause in your chapter on suffrages and elections, that, other things being equal (except the right to bear arms, which custom accords to men, and the far more perilous right to bear armor-bearers which nature imposes upon women) there shall be no restrictions placed upon the right of suffrage on account of the incident of sex.

While I can, and do point to Wyoming, where women have voted for two decades, in proof that women's ballots will not bring prohibition; and also to Washington, where it is now known that the majority of women refused, at the election of 1896, to use the ballot as a whip to coerce men into leading strings as though they were little children, I must say that women are quite as much opposed to drunkenness in husbands as men are opposed to drunkenness in wives. But never, until mothers, everywhere, are free and equal with fathers before the law, can they cease, every now and then, to produce a man of such weak moral fiber that he is unable to resist temptation.

Oh, gentlemen! When you grant us the right of suffrage, we will be so proud of you, and of ourselves that we will proclaim the glad tidings of our freedom among all the states and cities of the East, and by so doing we will turn the tide of immigration into Idaho, just as we exultantly turned it into Washington during the three and a half years of her greatest prosperity, when her women were voters; just as we will do again for Washington when she again becomes "the land of the free and the home of the brave," as she was known to be before her women's ballots were beaten down by the inevitable recoil of prohibition boomerangs.

Too well I know there is no other attribute of our humanity that dies so hard as tyranny. I know how prone many men are to delude themselves with the fancy that they are "heads of the family." I know how persistently many wives—cunning diplomats—foster this transparent delusion. Men's vanity and self love are fed upon this sophistry, although they fully understand that it is sophistry. Men are very human. God made them to match the women.

We know every one of our opponents' threadbare arguments against our liberties by heart. You say we "mustn't vote because we cannot fight," forgetting, or pretending to forget, that life's hardest battles, everywhere, are fought by the mothers of men in giving existence to the race. You say "women do not want to vote," when all the opportunities we have ever had to vote have been as freely utilized by us as by yourselves. You say, "if women want the ballot let them ask for it," when we have been asking for it, 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. Why deny protection to one class of human sinners and accord it to another? You say we "must not sit on juries," though ever and anon a woman is to be tried by a jury. May we not look forward, gentlemen, to the day when a woman may be tried by a jury of her peers?

Women who seek the ballot for liberty's sake are not proposing to govern men. We are seeking for an opportunity to govern ourselves. We appeal to your sense of justice, your chivalry, your patriotism, your honor, as we ask you to grant to us, as part of the fundamental law, our free, unquestioned right to vote.

The eyes of the world are upon these new states and territories of the Pacific Northwest. The freedom-loving spirit of our Western men is our proudest boast.

Shall we, the women of this border land, who have shared alike your trials and your triumphs—shall we not be permitted to go up to the national capital next winter, bearing aloft the banner of our freedom? Shall we not have the proud distinction of proclaiming to the older states of the union that the chivalry and honor of our fathers, husbands and sons outranks their own? May we not tell the world that these are the men who scorn to accept any rights for themselves which they would deny to their mothers, sweethearts, wives, sisters and daughters?

I pause just here to read a note, brought to me from the audience a moment ago by a page.

"What do you woman suffragists propose to do with the whisky traffic?" asks the writer, an excellent and earnest little woman whom I recognize as one who has worked hard for prohibition because she has had no other channel in which to work, and thereby ease the struggling spirit within her, which is clamoring for something practical to do. Equal suffragists answer: "Tax whisky and all other intoxicants, as heavily as their traffic will bear. Control and regulate that which you cannot destroy." I know all the arguments against the liquor tax by heart. Time was when I supposed it was what men call it, a license. But study of the question long ago convinced me of my mistake.

Liquors are sold because men demand them, drink them and pay for them. This demand is a perennial fountain, rising in the desires of the consumer. The liquor traffic is like a mighty river that is always flowing, flowing, obedient to a cause. You may change its channels 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 its murky edges and a green slime crawls upon the top of the stagnant water, among which poisonous reptiles play at hide and seek.

"Prohibit the accursed thing!" cries out the theorist. "Don't tamper, or temporize with it in any way, but put it down! Stop its flow!"

Vain mandate, vain prescription, vain endeavor! You may cover the slum and slime with a prohibition plaster; but, be the plaster ever so strong, the virus will still exude; or, worse still, it will burrow deep and yet deeper into hidden places, marking its track by increased desolation and death.

"Then, what is the final remedy?" is asked by questioning ones, who are not yet willing to be convinced that they can err in judgment.

"Build levees upon the banks of the liquor traffic," says Science, and so says common sense. Regulate what you cannot destroy. You build houses to shield yourselves from the cold and heat. You prepare safeguards against fire and flood, and you must protect yourselves against intoxicants by confining their traffic to a margin as narrow as will contain their flow. You must 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 engaged in the traffic, who use the current for financial reasons, can recognize the need; and they will help you to maintain the dykes.

Give us this levee, gentlemen; and above everything else, give us the ballot, with which to help you build it high and strong, and we will help you build most loyally.

Our plea is against prohibition of the gravest sort; a prohibition which prohibits us from using our right to vote.

We ask you to remove that disability, to prohibit us from voting no more forever.

We ask for nothing but our right to use our voice in making the laws under which we, as well as you, must live; laws which we are taxed to maintain, to which we, equally with yourselves, are held amenable.

Here, gentlemen, we rest our case. In the serene belief that the dawn of the Twentieth Century will witness the full and free enfranchisement of every law-abiding woman of this great galaxy of new and vigorous young states of the Pacific Northwest, which need claim no higher distinction than to be forever known as the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave. \*