

*Notes for comments by Ian C. MacLeod at Clan MacLeod
(Greater Vancouver) Society AGM on November 6, 2011*

MY GRANDMOTHER and the W.C.T.U. "EVILS OF ALCHOHOL" SPEECH

My grandmother, "Tena" (Morrison) MacLeod held some very strong views on the evils of alcohol. She wrote and delivered a speech to the Women's Christian Temperance Union entitled "Drunkenness Among the Lumberjacks", that was published in its entirety (starting on page 1) of a Sydney (Cape Breton), N.S. paper, probably dated sometime in the mid-1930's. While she is not in the above picture, given the speech, she probably could have been. The entire newspaper report and speech follows:

"Mrs. A. G. MacLeod Vigorously Assails the Drink Evil in a Fine Paper Before the Sydney W.C.T.U.

A vigorous arraignment of the drink evil was made by Mrs. A. G. MacLeod in a fine paper read by her at a recent well attended meeting held by the Sydney branch of the Women's Christian Temperance Union.

Mrs. MacLeod's paper reads as follows:

"Madame President, Officers and Friends, of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. As our subject for this evening is on the branch of our work in connection with sailors and lumbermen, I shall endeavour to bring to you some thoughts that have come to me on the subject, as well as on temperance work in general.

We all know that the common and the greatest enemy of both these classes, as well as all classes of men, and also sometimes, women, is strong drink. Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging, and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise." It is, I believe, for that reason that we are gathered together tonight, to fight against the rum traffic, that we may, in as far as it is in our power to do so, and as far as our influence will permit us, to fight the good fight with all our might until the rum traffic is no more, and our heroes of sea and forest, and of other walks of life as well, may be forever free of its baneful influence.

For this reason we are sometimes called Fanatics. The trouble with us is, I think, that we are not fanatical enough. Our British sisters fought like veritable demons to gain the franchise, and won out. Ours is a greater cause. I fancy I hear someone say, hello Mrs. Prankhurst, when did you come to town? But do not be alarmed, I shall not attempt to tear down any of our public buildings, nor shall I attack any of our public officials, from our worthy Mayor down to our Licence Inspector. Our seats of Government, both Federal and Provincial, are also quite safe. What I wish to emphasize is that we are not as zealous as we should be in this matter. We have been waiting long and patiently for those in authority, and whose duty it is, to put an end to this despicable business, but in vain. I am convinced that the reason for its continuance is, not that those who drink it are so fond of it as a beverage that they cannot do without it, as to the fact that the human sharks who are engaged in it find it a veritable gold mine, and that some of the same gold

finds its way into the pockets of those who should be foremost in the fight against it, and who appear to be blind and deaf to its demoralizing effect upon Society.

I would like with your permission, to bring in two illustrations. The first is that of a gathering of young men and women, happy, carefree, good-naturedly, they mingle together, not a thought of evil to mar the innocent jollification. Some games are played, some songs are sung, a little old-time dancing is indulged in, refreshments are served, after which the happy company, after good nights have been said in the midst of fun and laughter repair their homes and to their beds to sleep and to dream, pleasant dreams, perhaps of another such gathering in the near future.

Second illustration -- some time elapses, they meet again anticipating another pleasant evening together, but alas, another element creeps in which is antagonistic to everything that is fair and innocent and beautiful, ***he of the cloven foot and forked tongue is there, he offers for sale that body and soul destroying liquid called rum, call it that, or call it whiskey or booze, call it any name you wish, but I think the proper name for it is the devil's firewater; but, the name matters naught, it is the effect that appals.*** In an incredibly short time that company of men are transformed from peaceable, sober, fun-loving men, into fighting demons.

The Curse of Rum

The friends and neighbours of but a few short hours ago are at one another's throats. Eyes are bloodshot, coats are off, sleeves are rolled up, a blow is struck. The fight is on. One young lad, seeing one who is bound to him by ties of blood, being brutally beaten, makes an attempt to separate the combatants; he is told to stand back. Impotently he stands there knowing full well that he is no match for the man who has commanded him to stand back. In a frenzy of horror and grief at the sight before him, he snatches the first weapon at hand and deals a blow. At any other time, under natural conditions, this man would not dream of injuring any man. Oh the cruelty of it, the man falls in his tracks, and now, the youth overcome with horror and remorse, and with a drunken mob at his heels, flies to his home. But there is no place there. Even Mother is powerless. The victim dies, what now, stony grief and remorse. Two homes at one fell stroke are robbed of peace and happiness, but that is not all, the law must take its course, the offender must be brought to justice, he must suffer punishment for this crime, and rightly so.

But what of the man or men who are morally responsible for all this, are they to have their freedom, and their fling, for all time in this iniquitous business, going up and down like ravening wolves among their fellowmen, making criminals, blasting homes and breaking hearts: 'A Revenue of blood and tears, and of broken hearts and mothers' fears, is this to be our lot?'. But, what of broken-hearted fathers and mothers, what of young men sent to the gallows or to languish behind stone walls and iron bars with every hope in their young lives ruined forever. We must have money, we must have revenue, what, I ask, in the name of all that is reasonable, what is the matter with our men and our laws, have we any where this thing is concerned, or is the very word a mockery and a farce.

God has given us a fair land in which to dwell, bountifully he has bestowed upon it beauty of sky and mountain, river and plain and sea. Every prospect pleases and only man is vile. Oh, that man whom God made in his image, should lower themselves to such a level as to engage in this lowest of all traffics, for it brings all things which are low and despicable into the train.

Women of Sydney, arise and put your armour on, fight this great fight with all your might until Victory is won, and this Country of ours, will indeed be a fair, safe and fit place in which Sailors, Lumbermen, and all classes may dwell as God intended that they should, in peace, harmony, happiness and propriety.”

POSTSCRIPT

My Dad, a clergyman, was the second youngest of six boys. Bill, the oldest, was a free spirit, Innis (#4) was a lawyer and respected and honoured senior bureaucrat and Donald (#6) was a well known doctor in Illinois. The brothers were extremely close to each other all of their lives, trying to get together as often as they could. The other brothers treated Dad with the highest degree of respect and deference for his calling as a clergymen, perhaps, in part, due to their strict church upbringing.

I don't recall ever seeing Dad touch alcohol, a trait not shared by his brothers (or his three sons).

Mom tells of the four surviving brothers getting together at Bill's home in Cape Breton and Bill, Innis and Donald sneaking down to the basement for a before dinner drink because, even in their 70's and 80's, and the somewhat exalted positions of Innis and Donald and contrariness of Bill, they wouldn't drink in front of a clergyman even their brother!
