

CONSCIOUSNESS OF DUTY.

The following is a summary of the address delivered on Franchise Day to the Waimate W.C.T.U. gathering by Mr Geo. Dash:—

Mrs Graham and Ladies,—When your deputation assured me that what was wanted from me was not so much a history of the franchise movement as an outline of what is from my point of view the work before you and the need of the immediate future, I felt called to come and deliver a message that burns in me.

It is enticing on this Franchise Day to review the past and fight again the battles which led to triumph. It is tempting to pause to rejoice in the victories now crowning the work of our sisters in America, and to sympathise with the army of English womanhood that fights so strenuous a battle in the Home lands. Of that battle the true account will perhaps never be accepted when it comes to be given. The misrepresentations of the cable news and the use made of opportunity by the hoodlum and incendiary element ever present in large cities, have done much to mislead and to slander.

Turn we to the future, remembering well Lowell. " 'Tis as easy to be heroes as to sit the idle slaves of a legendary virtue carved upon our fathers' graves."

The call of the present is for a consciousness of duty. Willingness to do our duty is of little avail without a knowledge of when the occasion is calling. Duty is neglected because it is not recognised. We learn to recognise the flower only and fail to destroy the young shoot of evil. We need a better grounding in the life history of the evils we attack, and this would help us to recognise each occasion for action. This is the need of the hour. Duty is placed upon a pedestal, and the pedestal is so far from us that we fail to recognise duty when it comes to our door. Duty has become a word, and not a fact. Many there are, prepared to sacrifice much on the altar of duty. Many are earnest and sincere. We are surrounded by associations of well-meaning people. Churches increase in number. Organisations succeed organisations, each seeking to do good, and make for the advancement of a nation. Your own Union among the most worthy. Your presence here to-day is evidence of your earn-

estness and sincerity. Yet I say that with all this there is much that has called in vain in this year of grace for those whose duty it was to act. And the calls would most certainly have been answered had they been recognised. This is the pity of it; that the hour arrived for the blow to be struck, and the striker and the weapon were ready, but the signal failed. In this we all have failed. I myself am not claiming exemption. The need of the moment then is a consciousness of duty. How shall we attain it? First, we must have a creed of duty. A statement of our stand. Perhaps this—it is my duty to encourage good and oppose all that is evil. To oppose all that is evil is not to destroy the flower only and leave the root untouched. To this end I must understand that which I attack. I must know its life history, and learn to recognise the flower, the leaf, the branch, and the root. I must learn to know each evil not only by its results, but by its processes. Then shall I miss no opportunity of striking at that evil, then shall I never permit it to gain a hold in my territory. However insidious its advance, however harmless its appearance in its early stages, I shall know it, and smite it. Let me illustrate. Gambling, say, is an evil. Why, because it leads some men into crime? Because men steal to pay gambling debts. These are but the poisonous flowers of the evil. Nip off these flowers, prevent the formation of their bloom, and still gambling is an evil. We must go deeper, and learn that the gambling evil kills out the spirit of thrift. It destroys the spirit of persistent industry, and substitutes the get-rich-quick-anyhow desire. A nation is only built up and developed by industry, by the spirit of work, the creative effort of a people. Destroy or weaken that spirit of industry, and you destroy and hinder that nation. Understanding this, my consciousness of duty is that I must attack gambling at any time or place. I must destroy any rootlet of gambling that seeks to take hold in the soul of my country. It is my duty to voice my opposition to gambling whenever and wherever the spirit of gambling shows itself. If any association to which I belong seeks to raise funds by means of alleged art unions or the like it is my duty to protest, to be outspoken in my condemnation, and to decline membership if

the course is persisted in. If any church to which I belong seeks to initiate anything in the nature of a lottery or raffle it is my duty to make my protest known, silent withdrawal will not suffice. If any institution to which I do not belong seeks to raise money by evasion of the Art Union Law of this country, it is my duty to draw the attention of the Minister of the Crown in charge to the matter. I should never attend a gathering where gambling is recognised as a part of the proceedings, and I should never buy tickets for lotteries, art unions, or the like. My protest should be no silent one. My silence may mislead others. Considerations of social preferment, advancement, or business profit should not deter me from doing my duty.

In all this I must remember that I am working for the good of my nation against that which is an evil clog to its upward progress.

I do not claim this as a perfect statement of the case, but it will serve to put my thought before you. As I have treated the gambling evil, so should each evil be treated. It should be understood and systematically opposed. The social evil, the liquor evil; all attacks on our liberty to upward development, and all the insidious attempts to lower the moral tone of our nation should receive a like treatment. With knowledge comes recognition, and recognition of duty will mean duty done.

Much, very much harm is being done in these days of lack of protest. Lack of protest implies acquiescence, and is so read. This laxness is permitting a host of evils to extend their roothold, and we shall later have a bitter crop as the fruit of our lack of consciousness of duty.

This lack of protest where protest should sound is not merely individual; it is the sin of unions and associations, and of Parliaments and churches, of political parties, and of prominent persons.

Notice how unfashionable it is just now to criticise the militarism movement in New Zealand. Praise is the order of the day. Yet in its administration there is a contempt for liberties won at much cost and a contempt even for law.

No sane free man was for any reason hitherto deprived of his franchise. The mightiest fact, the strongest act of freedom, is the free man's vote,