

A DAY IN THE STREET GETTING SIGNATURES TO THE SIX O'CLOCK CLOSING PETITION

(A Paper read at Wellington Central Union by Mrs McDonald.)

After listening for some time to the remarks passed by the citizens as they came up, or were invited to come, to sign our National Petition, I thought we might learn more of the mind of the people by their remarks than by their signatures; so with an ink pencil, I put a word or two here and there in my note book to bring the remarks to mind when the day was over.

"Here, Bill, wot's this? Close hotels at six o'clock; s'help me, they'll want to stop our blooming breath presently."

Seeing a lady standing near, I went over with the intention of handing her one of our "Points for Patriots," but she waved it aside. "Look here, dear, you'll do more harm than good. I'm a boarding-house keeper, and if they don't get it in the hotels, they will take it up to their rooms, and you don't know what a mess there will be for me to clear up." While she was speaking I had caught the eye of another lady passing, and drew her over to the petition. "Do you know," she said, "Bishop Langley always said it was my petition that closed the hotels on Sundays in Sydney. I had to do Redfern, and my petitions came in last, and it was one of them that we presented to the House." Now, Bishop Langley, of Sydney, is brother to the dear kind vicar of my girlhood, who is now Bishop of Bendigo, and in a flash I got all the encouragement for the work of the day that I needed. What a great thought this is. We come in contact with a personality, and years after, words they have said are like an electric flash, illuminating and encouraging.

We were busy taking signatures, when a man popped his head over and said, "What's doing here?" "Petition for closing hotels at six o'clock during the war. Will you sign?" I replied. "I'll be jiggered if I do." "Then take this little paper and read it over." "Anything to oblige a lady." Just let me say here, as near as I can recollect it was about eleven o'clock; at half-past twelve that man came back. "I read the little paper

'Points for Patriots,' and here I am to sign your petition. If ever you have one for closing hotels altogether, there's my name and address. Call on me, and I'll sign it also." I was pretty busy, as my helper was away at lunch, or I should have liked a further talk with that man. I cannot now remember what "Points" it was I gave him that convinced him so quickly and thoroughly. A minister passed by, and I drew his attention. In a very cold, measured voice, he said, "I haven't decided one way or the other." I wish he could have heard the two ladies who next were invited to sign. "Gladly," one of them said. "I know a soldier's mother who came from the country to see her only son, a lad of nineteen, off. She found him confined to barracks. He went into town some evenings later to see her, got into a hotel on the way, and the end of it was he was carried on board the troop ship drunk, and his mother never saw him. She is now broken-hearted, and I dare say the lad (who neither drank nor smoked, and was a real good boy before he enlisted) is no doubt more heart-broken still, for a lad does not become bad all at once." A gentleman came up to sign and said: "This is a thing I must do. My partner and two managers died in drink."

One man argued that the Military Authorities should find out the men who drank to excess and stop their leave. "That paper's not going to do any good you are only wasting time." "My opinion friend is as good as yours and we are out to Win; sooner or later the hotels close at six o'clock like other business houses."

We placed one table just beside the War Bulletin and seeing a man very intently reading I thought "Here's a chance some father with a boy at the Front; he'll be glad to sign." But he politely waved me off, "My eyes are too bad to see."

"Do you take me for a damn fool" was another remark. That and another angry man who tried to fill up the front of the table with his bulky form, "I wish you'd go home and mind your own business" were the only rude remarks I got all day; rude looks occasionally, and from quite young girls we had to survive a few of. An offset to the "Mind your own business" remark, a gentleman who came up to sign as it was being made said, "Our friend forgets, I

think, that what he calls minding your own business would be much more profitable to you than standing here."

This is really the gem of the day: A smart business man said as he was signing, "This I gladly do. Ten years ago I was the biggest drunkard in Wellington. The Salvation Army got hold of me, with the result I have not touched drink during that time. I have a good business and a good balance at the bank. I wish I could shut up the whole liquor business. Good luck to you." Needless to say, I do not remember a single name that is attached to any of these little stories I am telling you.

A soldier I knew slightly, said, when he signed, "The sober man has to do the work of the drunken soldier." A sailor, quite young, came along, "Yes, I'll sign if only to save some other chap. Look at me, I'm a weak fool; I cannot resist the stuff. I've signed on for deep sea sailing to try and rid myself of the curse." As he passed I looked at his signature, a fine bold handwriting. In an instant I had called him back. "Don't you ever say you have a weak will while you can write like that," I said, laying my hand upon his arm. "You are an educated man, with life just in front of you. Because you have made a mistake through ignorance are you going to let it spoil your life? It isn't the fall it's the lying there that's the disgrace. Every morning I will pray that you may be strengthened in your wish to be a sober man, able to resist your evil tendency, and I feel sure you will overcome it. May God bless you." I wish I could have had the minister who could not decide one way or the other stand by as this lad spoke to me, and then go to his study, and take for his text next Sunday, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

"I'll sign for what I have suffered myself," said a tidy-looking woman. "Oh! do close them altogether."

"I'm from Scotland," said a bonnie-faced girlie and will sign if you will let me." Mrs Port and myself were so taken with her lovely face and manner, that until she was out of sight we did not notice the address she gave was "Inverlochy" and nothing more. But really her presence was quite a benediction, and it is not often women admire each other as spontaneously as our hearts went out to the gracious Scotch lassie. A