

The Right to Drink: Battling the Dunkin Act 1877

Editor's Note: The recent fire that destroyed Lakefield's New Commercial House adds timeliness to these clippings found in the Martha Kidd Collection. The letter was not published by the *Lakefield News*, but found space in the *Peterborough Review* which opposed the Dunkin Act, the law which permitted localities to prohibit alcohol sales. Our second item also fits our temperance theme quite nicely.

I

Peterborough Review, Friday, 21 December 1877, front page

WHERE SHALL WE GO?

To the Editor of the Peterborough Review:

Dear Sir: – Please find enclosed a communication which has been refused insertion in our village paper, the proprietor being too bigoted to allow free discussion in the columns of his journal.

Yours, &c

VILLAGE MECHANIC

Lakefield, Dec 17th 1877

To the Editor of the Lakefield News:

Dear Sir, – Frequently during the Dunkin campaign in Peterborough, and in an address delivered in this village at a Dunkin meeting last week, the Rev Mr Willoughby warned our young men of the awful consequences of spending their evenings in the bar-rooms. I would like to ask the Revd gentleman if he is perfectly sure that his warning is addressed from the right quarter and to the right quarter?

Has he ever reflected and decided where our poor young men of our villages and towns are to go to spend their evenings? Does he know by any experience how dreary, dark and cheerless most boarding houses are? Has he considered what if any sports, gayety or amusements are offered in this great Christian community to the poor young men who have no money in their pockets; yet in whose nature his Maker has implanted a desire for society and merriment at this period of his life.

What free reading rooms, reading concerts are provided to attract the young men away from the bar-rooms? Millions are freely subscribed to convert the heathen of the south seas but where are the gifts of the wealthy, the pious and the Dunkin advocates to furnish our growing up citizens with entertainments which will make them more temperate, more moral and more home-loving? When the early darkness of the winter nights veils their

habitations, have the youths of the laboring classes the satisfaction of knowing that their more fortunate fellow Christians have remembered their wants and provided for them reading rooms, amusements and other similar places wherein to spend their evenings? No, Christianity nineteen centuries since the death of the poor Nazarene, has not yet reached the comprehension of its duties. What is the young man to do? The bar-room offers him warmth and comfort, it is brilliant with light, he can read the papers, he escapes from his cold, lonely home, if home it can be called, and he finds company and gaiety. Now they are trying by the passing of the Dunkin Act to drive him from respectable hotels into the street, or worse still, to the haunts of vice and woo which are to be found in every community. It will be time enough for the sleek minister and lawyer to denounce the poor man's refuge and resort when they have provided him with a better one.

VILLAGE MECHANIC
Lakefield, Dec 8th , 1877

II
Peterborough Review, Friday, 23 November 1877

(Written for the Review)

DUNKIN MEN AND THEIR BANNER / BY A USER BUT NOT ABUSER

Peace I admire, and wrangling disdain
Such kept me silent through the last campaign
I would keep silence and not lift my pen
But for the doings of the Dunkin men

Some voted Yes but Nay leaked through the mask;
Their breath smelt strongly of the whiskey cask
Others stood boldly to reveal their votes,
Flasks primed with whiskey in their overcoats.

The news has spread alike o'er the land and sea
Of that xxx banner waving in the breeze,
No Christopher Dunkin there for victory waits
They – Christ and Satan – placed as candidates.

Disgraceful motto – blasphemous, profane
Wild imaginations of the Dunkin brain!
'Twas no strange language – Hebrew, Greek nor Latin –
But in plain English: "Vote for Christ or Satan."

Vote Yea for Christ. Shame, Dunkinite, on you;
Your candidate you never loved or knew
If you had sat one moment at his feet
That motto ne'er would have disgraced the street.

Your banner draws the great dividing line –

Parts the satanics from the Dunkin kine;
Things in the past you wallowed in the mire,
Vote Yea: you safely will escape the fire.

So say the hot-heads of the Dunkin stamp,
With shining glasses – Captains of the camp
Would that they loved their candidate more dear
Then self-presumption would not shine so clear.

Etc.