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Rights, Justice, Power: Gendered Perspectives on Prohibition in Late Nineteenth-Century Canada

Dianne Hallman

Abstract

This paper places within a broad social context a debate on the merits of prohibition between two highly respected Victorian Canadians: Agnes Machar (1837-1927), an established author, and J. A. Allen (1814-1900), a retired cleric. The debate was published in 1877 as a series of formal exchanges in *The Canadian Monthly and National Review* (a journal devoted to promoting nationalism). The nature of, and basis for, gendered perspectives on rights, justice, and power are investigated through an analysis of gender in temperance/prohibition discourse in three ways: the articulation of rights and responsibilities, the conception of what constitutes justice, and the appeal to conventional imagery of women and men.

The temperance and prohibition movements in late-nineteenth to early-twentieth-century Canada were sites where large numbers of mainly middle-class Canadians asserted a collective voice in the country's political affairs and, in the case of women, developed claims to complete citizenship. Debate in Canada relied heavily on ideas elaborated in the United States and England, and was roughly divided between those who supported regulation for the public good and those who held that regulation denied individual rights. Discussions on both sides were suffused with standard representations of gender based in, and turning on, unequal power relations between men and women. Through a close reading of one particular debate which appeared in *The Canadian Monthly and National Review*, a journal in which Canada's leading English-speaking intellectuals promulgated their views and promoted nationalist sentiment, this paper investigates the significance of gender in temperance discourse in three ways: the articulation of rights and responsibilities, the conception of what constitutes justice, and the appeal to conventional imagery of women and men which both reflected and reinforced asymmetrical gender relations. This debate between two of Ontario's highly respected intellectuals — Agnes Machar (1837-1927), an established author, and J. A. Allen (1814-1900), a retired cleric — took place over a six-month period in 1877.

This particular debate was not necessarily significant to a resolution of the temperance question; neither Machar nor Allen was a key player in the campaigns. Rather, in this paper, I take an approach similar to that of Edward Said to get at the "dialectic between the individual text or writer and the complex collective formation to which his [or her] work is a contribution." Machar and Allen exchanged ideas from within a circle of intellectuals who generally knew each other or each other's work; men and a few women who had read the same books and cited one another and their Greek and Roman forebears when asking and answering the same sorts of questions. Their views on the subject of temperance were quite typical of those

expressed in American and British periodicals such as *Scribner's Monthly* (New York), and the *Fortnightly Review* and the *Contemporary Review* (England) to which literate Canadians with the leisure to read subscribed. Their debate is situated within a wide historical and intellectual context to show the ways it reflected prevailing views.

Biographical Background

Agnes Maule Machar was born into a family of high social standing in Kingston, Upper Canada, in 1837. Her father, Rev. John Machar, was minister of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church and one of the founders and principals of Queen's College. Her mother, Margaret Machar, was a model of energetic philanthropy which Agnes emulated in her own active commitment to voluntary public service.³ The young Agnes acquired much of her education in "Papa's study," the preferred method of educating daughters among the upper middle classes in this era.4 Moreover, Papa's was no ordinary study. The library of Rev. John Machar enhanced the early education of some of Canada's most prominent statesmen, including John A. MacDonald and Oliver Mowat. By reason of her sex, Machar did not have an opportunity for the university education that many young men of her class, including her younger brother John, enjoyed. Nonetheless, through disciplined and primarily self-directed study, she was accepted into and held her own among a wide intellectual circle. While she subscribed to the common view that marriage and motherhood were women's happiest destiny, she never married. And, despite Margaret Machar's initial reservations about her daughter's pursuit of a literary career, by the mid-1870s, the younger Machar had established herself as a woman of letters with several published novels, memorials, poems, and essays. 6 She was a frequent contributor to The Canadian Monthly, often under the name "Fidelis," a pseudonym that witnessed her faith and hid her female identity. Her defence of Christianity against the charges of empiricists and sceptics, and her promotion of a revitalized Christianity, centred in "loving our neighbour as ourselves," identify her as an early proponent of the social gospel.7 Although women of the middle classes were increasingly energetic workers for temperance, and in 1874 they had created the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.) to direct that work,8 Machar was, as far as can be determined, the only woman to tackle the temperance question in The Canadian Monthly.9

J. A. Allen (1814-1900) was born and spent his early years in Ireland. He attended university in Dublin and London although he did not get a degree. Apparently, he "showed no formal scholastic bent... but read omnivorously with a preference for science." Upon his arrival in the Canadas in 1842, he was ordained an Anglican priest, and shortly thereafter married Catherine Anne Charlotte Grant de Longueuil, daughter of a prominent Loyalist family. For some years, he took charge of Trinity Church on Wolfe Island, part of the property of his wife's family. He resigned his ministry in 1861 when he decided that he could no longer fully support the creeds of his church. After sojourning in the United States, Europe, and England for the benefit of his children's education, he returned to Kingston to take up residence in Alwington, an estate which had served as the seat of government during the brief period that Kingston was capital of the Canadas, and which now became "a mecca for many learned and cultured folk." ¹⁰

Allen's search for truth had led him to credit scientific theory over theology, and like his son Grant Allen (who would soon be highly regarded as an evolutionist and a novelist), he disseminated and interpreted the theories of science to the layperson.¹¹ With a mutual interest in the relation of science to religion and assiduous self-education in both fields of study, Machar and Allen were peculiarly situated to offer informed perspectives on the scientific and religious suppositions that undergirded the issue of prohibition.¹² J. A. Allen enjoyed a position of privilege and prestige, as did Machar. In fact, they were related by marriage. Allen's daughter Catherine was the wife of Machar's brother John. However, despite their similar class status, Machar developed a very different notion from Allen of the responsibilities that attended privilege.

Rights: Of You, Me, and the Rest of Us

In 1877, the Temperance Act of 1864, commonly called the Dunkin Act, still regulated the sale of liquor in Ontario. This act recognized the principle of licence but also conferred power on municipalities to prohibit the sale of liquor and the issue of licences locally. The plan to have a local option vote in Kingston — a vote from which women were excluded — may have supplied the impetus for Machar to share her thoughts on the subject. Indeed, Machar's first article was a plea for "cordial support" from "all lovers of their country" for the Dunkin Act, and she further asserted that complete prohibition would be even more effective, and, as she put it, "cut the Gordian knot." 14

Machar, as "Fidelis," opened the debate with an article published in April 1877, arguing that restriction of the sale of liquor was the central issue of the temperance problem. She stated that "man has the fundamental right to practise any industrial calling unmolested as long as this does not conflict with the rights of others." The sale of liquor did not fall within the realm of natural rights simply because it *did* interfere with the rights of others: "[the] rights of wife and children for protection of husband and father; rights of employers to faithful service; [and] rights of quiet and sober citizens to live in unmolested security to life and property." ¹⁵

However, rather than following this statement with a discussion of how the rights of others were violated — an approach which might have forestalled or at least re-directed Allen's opposition — Machar instead moved to a slightly different plane. She emphasized the destructive influence of the liquor trade on the common good of society rather than the actual or potential infringement of the rights of individuals. Thus, although she referred to a causal relationship between intemperance and "wives and children maltreated and murdered," she stressed the overall negative effect of intemperance on society with reference to its relation to insanity ("the production of idiots and imbeciles"), hereditary disease, pauperism, crime, and the truancy of children.¹⁶

Machar was not alone in her preoccupation with the damage done to the whole community by excessive drink. The general tone of discussions in temperance societies, W.C.T.U. meetings, and the Presbyterian General Assemblies indicates that intemperance was widely viewed as a matter, not only of individual sin, but of broad social concern.¹⁷ Moreover, the effort to determine the nature of the relation between intemperance and the assorted ills of society would exercise the mind and test the empirical skills of many a commentator throughout the latter part of the century. Select parliamentary committees and Royal Commissions collected evidence which, for instance, compared the total and per capita consumption of alcohol with convictions for offenses, committals to insane asylums, and expenditures to maintain the poor, in an attempt to test a causal connection.¹⁸ Machar relied on such statistics to make her case, citing from testimony given before a Select Parliamentary Committee as well as data gathered from other nations.¹⁹ Allen gave his opinion of the kind of statistics most generally published (and by implication the kind that she used) as "pitchforked at us in slovenly round numbers of millions, ... statistics I know not how compiled, possibly in the interest of the theory to be established, by some zealot, who, having received a mental bent through religious or social influence, has, like the leaning tower of Pisa, never been able to grow straight again—for such statistics — ... I have the smallest possible respect." Allen then pitchforked out not a few of his own.20

In her bid for prohibitive measures against the liquor trade, by accentuating general damage to society over specific infringement of individual rights, Machar promoted the view that society then had the right to place limits on its citizens for the sake of the common weal, and to remove "gratuitous evil influences whose natural result would be to increase immorality just as malaria and miasmic germs increase disease and mortality." The reference to disease was not coincidental. Machar accepted and promoted the idea that intemperance was not only responsible for the spread of diseases like cholera, 22 but that it was itself a disease, and thus restrictive measures to prevent its spread were justified in much the same way as the

quarantine was used to prevent the spread of contagious diseases.²³ By drawing this kind of analogy, Machar underscored both the right and obligation of society to protect its corporate body. Allen was not swayed, asserting that restriction in the case of smallpox was warranted as contact with smallpox germs in the public thoroughfares would certainly be unavoidable and harmful, whereas contact with liquor was a choice and only harmful if taken in excess.²⁴

Moreover, in Machar's estimation, intemperance was more than a disease: it was a crime against society, and the liquor seller was "an accomplice before the fact." To prevent a crime against its corporate body, "society stands in for the intemperate man, and thus has right to restrict traffic." In other words, since men did not always exercise self-control to prevent harm to society, society must exercise self-control to prevent harm to itself. In this way, society is personified as an individual with its own set of rights and tacit responsibilities, a troublesome concept for Allen.

In his first response to Machar, Allen argued that "it is the essence of liberty that every one may do as he pleases, so long as his doing so does not collide with the equal right of every other man to do as he pleases." Allen refused to grant or even acknowledge Machar's assertion that the exercise of the liquor trade infringed upon the rights of others — specifically, as she reminded him thrice, the rights of women and children, employers, and quiet and sober citizens. However, Allen recapitulated her argument for the restriction of the liquor trade as if it had been framed from the perspective of benefit to society rather than harm to others. Within his own frames of reference, he would have had to acknowledge that harm to others was unacceptable, but he argued with considerable acumen that anticipated benefits of temperance, demonstrable or not, were not sufficient to warrant limitation of what he believed to be a fundamental and self-evident liberty — in other words, a man's right to eat and drink what he pleases.²⁷

Other contributors to *The Canadian Monthly* were of a similar mind. In fact, the language of indignation ignited by the threat of curtailment of that right resulted in some of the journal's most sexist and invective copy, of which the following is a mild example: "But a number of busybodies, well-meaning old women of both sexes, and a lot of intemperate total abstainers perverted men's minds and had Tom's glass dashed from his lips because Dick had a mind to let *his* travel that way too often." And yet, legislation prohibiting the sale of liquor to Aboriginal peoples had been in place in the North-West since at least 1862. While Machar applauded this legislation, protest over the curtailment of some peoples' liberty was conspicuously absent from anti-prohibitionist contributors to *The Canadian Monthly*. Allen's writing both evoked and reflected a fear of the tyranny of the majority, something (if little else) that he had in common with J. S. Mill. In Allen's thought, this fear was linked to a deep distrust of what he referred to as the "doctrine of the paternality of Governments." Canadian the liberty of the individual, and of all interferences with our natural rights. Such are simply usurpations, whether the usurper be a despot or a number of despots calling itself a majority, or the State."

Allen frequently reiterated the idea that society had no inherent rights and no power beyond that possessed and delegated to it by the individual: "Government is but the creature and representative of you, of me, and of the rest of us. . ."33 Presumably by "individual," he meant a white male person of the propertied class since franchise at the provincial and national level at this time was limited to those propertied men whose race and/or ethnic origin did not disqualify them. Women in the Canadas had specifically been disqualified from voting in 1849.34 Just as the individual had no right to interfere with the liberty of others, neither had government: "A majority have no right to act against right, though they may have the power." While he granted that it was the main duty of Government "to see that A does not injure B, and *vice versa*," the nature of this duty was likened to a constable of the peace who says: "'Gentlemen, you must not tread on one another's toes." The treading on the toes of women and children was not admitted.

The subsequent history of the prohibition movement in Canada underscores the irony of Allen's fear of the tyrannical rule of the majority. While results of several provincial and dominion plebiscites indicated that the majority favoured prohibition, it took over fifty years of concerted agitation to bring it about, succeeding finally in 1916. Ten years later the ban was lifted. As historian Malcolme Graeme Decarie stated: "Prohibition ended its career as it had spent so much of it, wanted by a majority of the electorate but rejected by their political leaders." ³⁶

While Machar argued that women had rights that were being usurped by the liquor trade, she defined these rights, in the main, as the right of wives and children to be provided for and protected by their husbands and fathers, a position closely aligned with that of the W.C.T.U.³⁷ Had Machar framed her argument around the violation of individual rights, she would have met Allen on the same ideological ground but it would have been difficult to sustain a convincing argument when women and children were customarily seen as having no legal rights. Husband and wife were one person under the English common law which operated in Canada except in Quebec, and, for all intents and purposes, that "one person' was the husband."³⁸ It was 1884 before married women could control their own property and 1897 before they could sign contracts.³⁹ Indeed, one of the concerns expressed by anti-prohibitionists was that prohibitory legislation might lead "husband and wife to break the marriage vow by testifying against each other."⁴⁰ While Machar championed the rights of women and children regardless of the limitations placed on them under the law, her reliance on the seemingly surer ground of community good is not surprising.

Justice: Of Right and Belonging or Duty?

Allen's conception of justice was thoroughly grounded in the principle of individual right. Justice was thus quite distinct from expedience, a distinction that Allen brought home in this story:

And here I call to mind a short story from the Cyropaedia of Xenophon... His grandfather, the king, had told Cyrus that he must go back to Persia to learn justice. But, grandfather, said the boy, I have a most exact knowledge of justice. How so, said his grandfather. Thus, said the boy. A big boy at our school with a little coat, took a big coat off a little boy and gave the little boy his own small coat. Of this the little boy complaining, the master called upon me to act as judge. Whereupon seeing that the small coat of the big boy fitted the little boy, and that the big coat of the little boy fitted the big boy, I gave my sentence for the big boy's retaining the big coat and the little boy's retaining the little coat. But for this, added Cyrus, I got whipped, my master adding that, if called upon to judge which coat fitted each boy best, my decision was a good one; but that was not the point at all, but a quite different one, to wit of *right* and belonging. So you see, grandfather, I have a strict knowledge of justice.⁴¹

Machar had never had a schoolmaster but was well schooled in another conception of justice. For her, justice was grounded in the principle of the highest good of the whole community and articulated in the language of Christian duty: "The highest good of the whole community is and must be, the only true basis of social legislation, and all the so-called 'rights' that conflict with this, are simply not rights at all." She reminded her readers that the law provided for a man's liberty, and even his life to be forfeited ("as every death sentence testifies") if he acted in conflict with the good of the community. For Machar, duty was the obverse of rights; in fact nowhere in her writing on this or any other social issue does she invoke the language of rights without simultaneously considering the obligations co-ordinate with those rights. Drinking intoxicants was not a matter of conscience between man and God, for man had no right to disable himself from performing his duty. Foremost among the duties that Machar would ascribe to men (and one on which

Allen was silent) was adequate provision for their wives and children. She was prepared to restrict individual liberty to enable "our brother" to perform this duty, and this restriction was cast in the language of duty: "if we ... can do anything to shield the poor victims of this terrible temptation from their destroyer — anything to protect the poor women and children who are the deepest and most helpless sufferers — it is our bounden duty, as Christians to do it."45

For Allen, doing one's duty fell far short of being one's brother's keeper and the kind of willing sacrifice of liberty that such implied. It was enough to strike a pose worthy of emulation and to encourage the slow process of evolutionary reform through an occasional friendly chat with the less fortunate: "Hence it becomes the duty of every one of us [the more advanced on the road of progress]... to try, by the exhibition of a good example, by gentle appeals to the conscience and emotional nature, by arguments addressed to reason, by kindly words of warning and Christian treatment, to elevate those with whom we are brought in contact, and to seek to strengthen them in habits of self-control, and all this in a kindly, natural and genial way."⁴⁶

Allen likened the Prohibitionists' "rough-and-ready" method to those who thought the best way to preserve religion was to "destroy the misbeliever and thus silence his heretic tongue."⁴⁷ The linking of Prohibition with religious persecution was a common enough analogy. For example, F. Blake Compton, a contributor to *Rose-Belford's Canadian Monthly* (the successor of *The Canadian Monthly*), facetiously argued that if one accepted Prohibition on the grounds that it was beneficial, than one could make an even better case for religious persecution by the dominant sects since eternal welfare rather than merely temporal welfare was at stake.⁴⁸

Allen read both the absence of prohibitory law against fermented drinks in the Bible and the examples of Jesus drinking wine as sufficient justification for a continued absence of prohibitory law:

And surely it must strike the Christian advocates of prohibitory laws as singular and stumbling, that throughout the whole course of the Dispensations, neither Patriarchs, nor Lawgivers, nor Prophets, nor Apostles, nor the Founder of their Faith, ever dreamt of such a system — a system which is wholly subversive of our simplest ideas of the principles on which they acted and by which they were actuated, and that one of their greatest difficulties to-day lies in the precepts and practice of Christ himself, against which all their arguments break and recoil upon them, like the baffled waves of the ocean against the granite cliffs.⁴⁹

Christ was not the only granite cliff that baffled the waves. Allen's views were strongly influenced by the popularizer of social Darwinist theory, Herbert Spencer. Legislation prohibiting the sale of liquor was suspect, according to Allen, because it "tends to defeat, by artificial obstruction, the great winnowing processes of nature to sift out the weak." With lengthy references to Spencer, Allen contended that prohibitory legislation would only aid the "unworthy to multiply." This judgement, Machar responded, if applied at all, would have to be applied to "all philanthropic movements" including hospitals, asylums, and hygienic reforms. Machar argued that the "survival of the fittest" doctrine was opposed to the example and bidding of Christ, whose ministry she cited as one of uplifting the poor and the weak:

This is not to preserve the weak as *weak*, but to tenderly nurture them into strength; not to propagate their weakness and uncontrol by leaving them to sink under temptations which they are as yet powerless to resist, and then transmit to their children natures burdened with the fatal hereditary craving; but to place them in circumstances in which, no longer under the pressure of chronic intoxication, appeals to the sense of right and self-preservation shall have some chance to work, and a constitutional habit of sobriety shall be formed in the absence of over-mastering temptation.⁵²

Men had to be freed from the tyranny of drink before they could be raised up by moral means, and the prohibition of liquor was the most effective way of achieving this goal. For Allen, the remedy was "[n]one but 'the relentless forces of Nature,' eliminating the weak, and the general presence of truer and higher principles, and a different and higher teaching, and—time." The problem of men's over-drinking would apparently diminish over time as their brains became more specialized and thus sensitized to the "myriad slight ictuses of mental, moral, and aesthetic beauty," thereby reducing the need for coarser stimulants. 54

Assumptions about proper gender relations were embedded in Spencerian sociology. Terry R. Kandal has pointed out that Spencer, in his 1851 Social Statics, put forward a vision of sexual equality in marriage and argued for women's rights to political power. By 1865, for reasons that remain "a puzzle," Spencer's view of female nature had changed dramatically.⁵⁵ He had come to believe that basic physical and psychic differences existed between men and women and were the result of adaptations to their different reproductive functions. The differences placed women lower than men on the evolutionary scale. Women's intellectual and emotional faculties, especially their sense of justice, were seen as peculiarly deficient, a point emphasized by Allen in his repeated reference to the "grand old Pagan schoolmaster" whose lesson in justice privileged individual right and belonging over what was appropriate to the social context.⁵⁶ If it was the most powerful and ruthless men who were the "fittest" and who thus survived, then it followed that the women who survived and reproduced were those who acquiesced to male power. According to the premises of evolutionary functionalism, all that was granted as "natural" to women — their submission to authority, their maternal instinct to care for the helpless, and their undeveloped sense of justice — made them unfit for public life or political power because, had they such power, they might interfere with the evolutionary process by helping the weak to survive and reproduce. Compassion, constructed as a peculiarly female trait, was considered a hindrance to evolution.

Images of Womanly Women and Manly Men

At the same time as Allen pointed to the dangers of women's "natural" altruism, he also invoked the dangers of women's "natural" frivolity. In a clearly sardonic but nevertheless stinging argument, he equated state intervention to prohibit the liquor trade with the enactment of sumptuary laws to control women's consumption, since "women's love of dress and show and trinkets, has, physicians tell us, taxed their husbands' brains to their utmost tension and beyond it, rendered their lives a miserable struggle and cut them short in mid-career, plunging them into drinking and gambling, brain-softening and insanity. . ."⁵⁷ An analogy between man's passion for drink and woman's passion for dress appears frequently in contemporary commentary on temperance.⁵⁸ This style of reasoning was picked up in a "Round The Table" discussion by an unknown participant who took Fidelis to task for her comparison of the licensing of liquor sellers to "legalizing the office of *tempter*."⁵⁹ The writer made the point that "tacit license" of the dry goods salesman and the jeweller to flaunt their wares, and thus tempt women to spend more than their husbands or fathers could afford "... is at the root of an amount of social and domestic misery immeasurably greater than that caused by drunkenness."⁶⁰ Ironically, the scorn heaped on women for their alleged preoccupation with fashion and dress was occurring at the same time that women seeking the privileges of higher education were being judged critically for their mannish looks and dowdy clothes.⁶¹

In her 1877 temperance essays, Machar viewed women mainly as the victims of intemperance. However, while it is doubtful that she would have agreed with Allen that it was women's love of excitement that promoted a decay of nerves and prompted men to seek replenishment in alcohol,⁶² she also subscribed to commonplace notions that women were to blame for male intemperance.⁶³ She urged women to make their homes attractive to men so as not to drive them to seek solace in the pubs. In a later essay, she recommended the implementation of cooking classes for "working men's wives" to remedy the craving for drink induced

in men by "unpalatable meals," an approach taken both by the W.C.T.U. and, much later, the National Council of Women of Canada.⁶⁴

The debate between Machar and Allen also played on identifiable nineteenth-century conceptions of manhood. The man that appears between the lines in Allen's pages is remarkably free from any family ties or obligations. Allen was profoundly silent on the question of a husband's and father's duties or responsibilities. In his view, self-control was the quintessential expression of manhood and the solution to intemperance. Instead of "abandoning their children to others to be educated," parents were advised to teach young men "that *uncontrol*, instead of being masterful and manly and the sign of a high spirit, is, in very deed, the proof of a very feeble and degenerate and unmanly nature." In her study of the mid-nineteenth-century temperance movement, Jan Noël has further substantiated the idea that self-control in a man was associated with control in the economic, political, and cultural realms, so that an appealing argument for young men to control their drinking habits was the promise of worldly success for the temperate.

Self-control was inextricably linked to notions of individual right and autonomy. Allen's parting words for young men were to consider "that one of the greatest duties in life is this, 'to guard the individual of whatever grade against trespasses upon his individuality'." They were to let "pure principles, not probable consequences" be their guide. In other words, they were not to be swayed from an absolute adherence to the principle of individual right, and certainly not by anything as capricious as compassion.

Machar countered Allen's conception of the individual man by invoking a patriotic and Christian standard of manliness, asking what man worthy of the name could not give up his ale for the sake of his neighbour. If men could be prevailed upon to lay down their lives for the good of their country, then surely they could lay aside their daily dram for the same good: "How then, by any manly man, the privation of a mere luxury, unnecessary in ordinary health, and so often injurious even in what is called moderation, could be for a moment placed in comparison with the rescue of thousands from overpowering temptation ending in utter ruin, it is indeed difficult to understand!"⁶⁸

Standard representations of gender were not confined to abstract women and men but also appeared in the authors' assessments of each other. Throughout his two essays written in response to Fidelis, Allen damned her work with faint praise, calling it "impassioned" and "eloquent" but fundamentally lacking in "logic, reason, and sense." Readers heard of how "the emotional in our nature becomes a disturbing element in the intellectual judgements we come to" in reference to Fidelis' position on prohibition, but of the "clear and manly and powerful reasoning" and "masculine sense" of a contemporary male anti-prohibitionist. Some *Canadian Monthly* readers may not have been aware that Fidelis was a woman, but Allen would have known. These comments seem deliberately construed to slight her. For her part, Machar was very careful to separate "Mr. Allen" from the "sensual, selfish, mercenary, and reckless" opponents of prohibitory law, to accord him the "utmost respect," and to evoke images of the gentleman and fair play in her description of him as "so able, courteous, and generous an opponent," and "so fair an antagonist." Only in her final essay did her graciousness sharpen to mild rebuke when she chastised him for misrepresenting her meaning on several occasions and she found fault with the structure of his arguments ("...Mr Allen will not surely maintain that 'premises' are identical with 'corollaries'").

State Intervention: What's Gender Got To Do With It?

Allen and Machar were grappling with an issue that still raises hackles over a century later; that is, what is the authority and power of the state to restrict individual freedom for the public good? The role of government in regulating the activities of the governed was tested and contested in a number of different areas during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and what was condoned as rightful government protection in one area may have been rejected as unnecessary interference in another.⁷³ For Allen, almost any

instance of state restriction, especially that which might impinge on him — a white, propertied adult male — was thought to open an irreversible and ever-widening breach. He was particularly incensed with having to pay for the privilege of having a wrong done to him. Here he was referring to the cost to taxpayers of implementing and enforcing prohibition, but he went so far as to regret the cost to taxpayers of employing government inspectors in bakeries to assure that loaves of bread were sold at the proper weight, saying that such measures encouraged folly in consumers as they came to rely on the judgement of the state rather than being obliged to develop their own. Hy contrast, a primary focus of women's reform organizations was increased state intervention to protect consumers. As Sharon Cook has illustrated for Ontario, this was part of the W.C.T.U.'s broad scope of reform, even more so for the later Women's Institutes and the National Council of Women and its local affiliates. To

For Machar, state restriction of the liquor trade was held to be the lesser of two evils. She was aware of the class prejudice inherent in prohibitory legislation, admitting that the *Canadian Dunkin Act* was more restrictive toward the poorer classes, a fact highlighted by Allen in his description of the careless ease with which a gentleman in comfortable surroundings, "amid his grapes and walnuts, sipping his wine," could vote away his poor neighbour's glass of beer. While Allen would allow the "self-controlled" poor the safety valve of an occasional drink, Machar resorted to the age-old justification that "it is for their own good that they are restricted."

Despite the differing positions that Machar and Allen took with respect to the role of the state, their writing consolidated their own identities as separate from and more powerful than those they studied. In fact, their public debate exemplified the shift highlighted by Andrew Holman's study of Victorian temperance reform: "By the 1870s. . . only the social and political power of the middle class could solve what came to be seen as all of society's problem." Both Allen and Machar took for granted a hierarchical ordering of society. Allen dressed old-guard ideas of traditional class relations in fashionable Spencerian garb; Machar leaned more toward human perfectibility and progress in what was predominantly a spirit of *noblesse oblige*. While a sense of moral guardianship was also present in Allen's discourse, the ideas of evolutionary functionalism predominated.

To state their views on gender relations somewhat simplistically, Allen maintained that men must be free to do what they pleased and he implied that women and children must simply bear the consequences of that freedom; Machar contended that men must put aside their drink to protect women and children and that women and children must make homes that men would want to protect. Both Machar and Allen appealed to widely-accepted constructions of gender and assumed relations of unequal power between men and women.

Some scholars have interpreted the temperance and prohibition movements as efforts, inasmuch as intemperance was seen overwhelmingly as a male predilection, to curb male violence against women, and to regulate male sexuality. Kathryn Harvey argues that the assumed natural sexual divisions in family relationships were being challenged by women having to abandon their maternal role to work outside the home in the face of the drunken husband's failure to provide. The prohibition campaign is thus seen, in part, as an effort to shore up the doctrine of separate spheres for the sexes and to remove any cross-over of the boundary between the two. In particular, female wage-earning had to be fixed by re-asserting the primacy of the male breadwinner. Machar's insistence on the rights of women and children to be provided for by their husbands and the duty of husbands to provide lend credence to Harvey's interpretation; nevertheless, she was aware that married women at the time had no ready access to jobs and no legal right to their own wages. Indeed, women had few practical alternatives to the patriarchal family.

After the 1877 temperance debate, Allen no longer published in *The Canadian Monthly* or its successor. By contrast, while Machar's views on the prohibition question never again achieved national prominence, she continued to investigate a wide range of social concerns and advocated a broad platform of social reform throughout the 1880s and 1890s in articles on poverty, compulsory schooling, and female factory labour.⁸¹

In these articles, she continued to refine and promote a vision of a community based on inter-relationship and mutual obligations rather than individual autonomy.

The principles tested and contested in this nineteenth-century debate on the prohibition of the liquor trade — the rights and responsibilities of the individual and the collective society — reflected the period's prevailing views and continued to be relevant throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century. The role of the state in providing a social safety net is currently being argued anew in Canada and elsewhere and in ways that deploy normative concepts of gender. Moreover, the consequences of governments' withdrawal from publicly-funded services are experienced differently for men and women. Repair Allen's individualism and Machar's collectivism turned on received notions of masculinity and femininity that both revealed and reinforced asymmetrical power relations between men and women. While men may (and do) argue for collective responsibility and community rights and women may (and do) argue for individual rights and personal freedom (as Machar herself did in other contexts), the arguments in favour of one or the other have been and continue to be articulated in reference to gender ideologies. Allen's and Machar's voices echo and re-echo down the decades in the work of Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan, for example, in the debates and court cases based on Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and in the discourses that frame our daily news.⁸³

Notes

- 1 See Marilyn Flitton, An Index to the Canadian Monthly and National Review and to Rose-Belford's Canadian Monthly and National Review, 1872-1882 (Toronto: Bibliography Society of Canada/ University of Toronto Press, 1976), vii-xxi.
- 2 Edward Said, Orientalism (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 24.
- 3 United Church Archives, Biographical file, "Rev. Dr. John Machar," clipping; D. J. Macdonnell, "In Memoriam: Mrs. Machar," *The Canada Presbyterian*, 11/46 (November 1883): 732. For Agnes Machar's involvement in social reform work, see Dianne M. Hallman, "Religion and Gender in the Writing and Work of Agnes Maule Machar" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1994).
- 4 Deborah Gorham, The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal (London: Croom Helm, 1982), 21.
- 5 Donald Creighton, *John A. MacDonald: The Young Politician* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1952), 39, 83-4. See also R. W. Cumberland, "Agnes Maule Machar," *Willison's Monthly* 3 (June 1927): 34.
- 6 See Hallman, "Religion and Gender," Chapter 6; and idem. "Cultivating a Love of Canada through History: Agnes Maule Machar, 1837-1927," in *Creating Historical Memory: English-Canadian Women and the Work of History*, ed. Beverly Boutilier and Alison Prentice (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 1997), 25-50; Ruth Compton Brouwer, "Moral Nationalism in Victorian Canada: The Case of Agnes Machar," *Canadian Historical Review* 65, no. 3 (1984): 347-370; Carole Gerson, "Three Writers of Victorian Canada," in *Canadian Writers and Their Works*, ed. Robert Lecker, Jack David, and Ellen Quigsley (Downsview: ECW Press, 1983).
- 7 See Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), especially pp. 186-192; and Ruth Compton Brouwer, "The 'Between-Age' Christianity of Agnes Machar," *Canadian Historical Review* 65, no. 3 (1984): 347-370.
- 8 The American Woman's Christian Temperance Union was founded in 1874 during a Sunday-School teachers' institute in Lake Chautauqua, New York. That same year, Letitia Youmans founded the first local union of the W.C.T.U. in Picton, Ontario, followed in 1877 by the Ontario provincial W.C.T.U, and in 1885 by the Dominion W.C.T.U. See Sharon Cook, "Through Sunshine and Shadow": The Woman's Christian Temperance Union, Evangelicalism, and Reform in Ontario, 1874–1930 (Montréal and

- Kingston: McGill Queen's University Press, 1995), 18. Whether or not Machar was a member of the W.C.T.U. has not been ascertained; she gave occasional lectures and published in its journal.
- 9 Marilyn G. Flitton, *An Index to the Canadian Monthly*, 139. Twelve articles on temperance appeared in *The Canadian Monthly* and its successor *Rose Belford's CMNR*: three were written by Machar, one was written by an unknown person under the pseudonym "Sordello," the others by men. The lively discussions on temperance in the "Round The Table" section were generally anonymous.
- 10 See *A Standard Dictionary of Canadian Biography: The Canadian Who Was Who*, vol. I, ed. Charles G. D. Roberts and A. L. Tunnell (Toronto: Trans-Canada Press, 1934), 8-9. On his son Grant Allen, see ibid., vol. II, 7-11.
- 11 Allen's other contributions to *The Canadian Monthly* promoted the work of Herbert Spencer and George Romanes (the son of a former professor of Classics at Queen's University). See, for example, Allen, "The Jelly-Fish: Notes of Recent Important Discoveries in Rudimentary Biology," *The Canadian Monthly* 11 (April 1877): 407-411.
- 12 For Machar's views on religion and science, see Brouwer, "Between-Age' Christianity." For Allen's thoughts on science and religion, see his reply to John Watson's critique of Spencer, "The Evolution of Morality: A Reply," *The Canadian Monthly* 11 (May 1877): 490-501.
- 13 A by-law prohibiting the sale of liquor and the issue of licenses might be submitted to a vote of the electors on the initiative of the municipal council. See the *Report of the Royal Commission on the Liquor Traffic in Canada* (Ottawa: S. E. Dawson, 1895), 135, and Appendix, no. 130, p. 966. For the main details of the Act which regulated the issue of licenses, i.e., the Crooks Act of 1876, see Appendix 128, p. 960. Unmarried women with property qualifications had municipal franchise recognized in 1884 by the Ontario legislature; for many years thereafter women were still excluded from voting in some municipalities. Catherine Cleverdon, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950), 21-2.
- 14 Fidelis, "The Temperance Problem," *The Canadian Monthly* 11 (April 1877): 376-7. The Dunkin Bill failed in Kingston.
- 15 Ibid., 370.
- 16 Ibid., 372-3.
- 17 See Cook, "*Through Sunshine and Shadow*," 86-90; T. R. Morrison, "'Their Proper Sphere': Feminism, the Family, and Child-Centred Social Reform in Ontario, 1875-1900," Part 1, *Ontario History* 68, no. 1 (March 1976): 45-63, especially 52-60. See the Reports on General Assemblies in *The Presbyterian Record* for 1888 and 1892.
- 18 For information on Select Committees see Janet Virginia Noël, "Dry Millennium: Temperance and A New Social Order in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Canada and Red River" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1987), 431; and idem. *Canada Dry: Temperance Crusades before Confederation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995); *Royal Commission on The Liquor Traffic*, 1895, 21, 140-145.
- 19 Fidelis, "The Temperance Problem," The Canadian Monthly 11 (April 1877): 372.
- 20 Allen, "The Temperance Question: A Reply," *The Canadian Monthly* 12 (July 1877): 26. See pp. 27-9 for statistics on the implementation of a system of prohibition in Sweden.
- 21 Fidelis, "The Temperance Problem," The Canadian Monthly 11 (April 1877): 371.
- 22 See Fidelis' later writing on this subject, "Cholera and Alcoholic Stimulants," *The Woman's Journal* (December 1884).
- 23 Fidelis, "The Temperance Problem," The Canadian Monthly 12 (August 1877): 188.
- 24 Allen, "The Temperance Problem," The Canadian Monthly 12 (September 1877): 288.
- 25 Fidelis, "The Temperance Problem," The Canadian Monthly 11 (April 1877): 373-4.
- 26 Allen, "The Temperance Question: A Reply," The Canadian Monthly 12 (July 1877): 24.

- 27 Allen, "The Temperance Problem," *The Canadian Monthly* 12 (September 1877): 283-4, 289. See the comments supportive of this position expressed in the "Round The Table," *The Canadian Monthly* 12 (October 1877): 419-422.
- 28 "Round The Table," *The Canadian Monthly* 12 (September 1877): 300, emphasis in original.
- 29 See the *Royal Commission on the Liquor Traffic*, 1895, p. 148; and Fidelis, "The Temperance Problem," *The Canadian Monthly* 12 (October 1877): 372.
- 30 J. S. Mill, On Liberty and Other Writings, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989 [originally published in 1859]), 8. On how and why society became opposed to the individual in Mill's thought, see Gertrude Himmelfarb, On Liberty and Liberalism: The Case of John Stuart Mill (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), 15-22.
- 31 Allen, "The Temperance Question: A Reply," The Canadian Monthly 12 (July 1877): 25.
- 32 Allen, "The Temperance Problem," *The Canadian Monthly* 12 (September 1877): 285, emphasis in original.
- 33 Allen, "The Temperance Question: A Reply," The Canadian Monthly 12 (July 1877): 31.
- 34 Diane Lamoureux, Citoyennes? Femmes, Droit de Vote et Démocratie (Montréal: Les édition du remueménage, 1989), 93; Constance Backhouse, Petticoats and Prejudice: Women and Law in Nineteenth-Century Canada (Toronto: Osgoode Society/Women's Press, 1991), 424, note #2.
- 35 Allen, "The Temperance Question: A Reply," The Canadian Monthly 12 (July 1877): 26, 31.
- 36 Malcolme Graeme Decarie, "The Prohibition Movement in Ontario, 1894-1916" (Ph.D. diss., Queen's University, 1972), 337.
- 37 Fidelis, "The Temperance Problem," *The Canadian Monthly* 12 (October 1877): 371. Kathryn Harvey has noted that "[i]n the lexicon of temperance, manliness and provider were synonyms." See "Amazons and Victims: Resisting Wife-Abuse in Working-Class Montréal, 1869-1879," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* (Kingston, 1991): 136; see also, Wendy Mitchinson, "The WCTU: 'For God, Home, and Native Land': A Study in Nineteenth-Century Feminism," *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada*, 1880s-1920s, ed. Linda Kealey (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1979), 151-167.
- 38 Backhouse, Petticoats and Prejudice, 177.
- 39 Alison Prentice, Paula Bourne, Gail Cuthbert Brandt, Beth Light, Wendy Mitchinson, and Naomi Black, *Canadian Women: A History* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), 176.
- 40 Goldwin Smith, "In Opposition to Prohibition and Coercion," pamphlet comp. Goldwin Smith (Toronto: University of Toronto Robarts Library), 29. The notion of marital unity was an impediment to women taking legal action against their husbands because one cannot sue one's own self, and furthermore, assault and rape within marriage were theoretically impossible. See *Petticoats and Prejudice*, 178.
- 41 Allen, "The Temperance Problem," The Canadian Monthly 12 (September 1877): 288.
- 42 Fidelis, "The Temperance Problem," *The Canadian Monthly* 12 (October 1877): 371, 370. For a strong rebuttal, see Sordello, "Prohibition," *The Canadian Monthly* 13 (June 1878): 652-659, especially 653-4.
- 43 See, for example, Fidelis, "Higher Education For Women," *The Canadian Monthly*, 7 (February 1875): 144-157, especially 150. Machar's view is close to that of John Clark Murray, Chair of Moral and Mental Philosophy in Queen's College from 1862-1872, who argued rights are derived from obligations. See the introduction by Leslie Armour and Elizabeth Trott to John Clark Murray, *The Industrial Kingdom of God* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1982), xxviii. For the official Presbyterian position on individual right and societal good, see *The Presbyterian Record* 1, no. 2 (September 1877).

- 44 Fidelis, "The Temperance Problem," The Canadian Monthly 11 (April 1877): 373.
- 45 Fidelis, "The Temperance Problem," The Canadian Monthly 12 (August 1877): 184.
- 46 Allen, "The Temperance Question: A Reply," The Canadian Monthly 12 (July 1877): 28.
- 47 Ibid., 24.
- 48 F. Blake Crofton, "The Taboo of Strong Drink," Rose-Belford's Canadian Monthly and National Review 7 (November 1881): 489-490.
- 49 Allen, "The Temperance Problem," The Canadian Monthly 12 (September 1877): 290.
- 50 Allen, "The Temperance Question: A Reply," The Canadian Monthly 12 (July 1877): 25.
- 51 Allen, "The Temperance Problem," *The Canadian Monthly* 12 (September 1877): 286. For the link between theories of degeneration and drink, see Cheryl Krasnick Warsh, "Oh, Lord, pour a cordial in her wounded heart': The Drinking Woman in Victorian and Edwardian Canada," *Drink in Canada: Historical Essays* ed. Cheryl Warsh (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 84ff.
- 52 Fidelis, "The Temperance Problem," The Canadian Monthly 12 (August 1877): 186.
- 53 Allen, "The Temperance Problem," *The Canadian Monthly* 12 (September 1877): 291. See also Howe, "In Opposition to Prohibition and Coercion," 4.
- 54 Allen, "The Temperance Problem," The Canadian Monthly 12 (September 1877): 286-7.
- 55 Terry R. Kandal, *The Woman Question in Classical Sociological Theory* (Miami: Florida International University Press, 1988), 45.
- 56 Allen, "The Temperance Problem," The Canadian Monthly 12 (September 1877): 288.
- 57 Allen, "The Temperance Question: A Reply," *The Canadian Monthly* 12 (July 1877): 27. In another argument that turned on a male-centred construction of female nature, Joseph Howe had denounced Prohibitive legislation because it would be like denying men the pleasures of women because of the suffering and sorrow women might cause them. See "In Opposition to Prohibition and Coercion," 3-4.
- 58 See as examples, F. Blake Crofton, "The Taboo of Strong Drink," 491; and Christine G. J. Reeve, "Dress and Extravagance," *Longman's Magazine* 11 (November-April 1888): 425. Mariana Valverde argues that prevailing rhetoric equated working-class women's finery with sexual promiscuity and designated the fallen woman as the morally-degenerate equivalent of the working-class drunken man. Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885–1925* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991), 148-9. Modesty in women's dress was vigorously promoted by the American and Canadian W.C.T.U.: see Cook, "*Through Sunshine and Shadow*," 93-4.
- 59 Fidelis, "The Temperance Problem," The Canadian Monthly (August 1877): 184.
- 60 "Round The Table," The Canadian Monthly 12 (October 1877): 421.
- 61 See Agnodice, "Letters on the Education and Employment of Women," *The Canada Education Monthly* 6 (1879): 202-5, reprinted in *The Proper Sphere: Women's Place in Canadian Society*, ed. Ramsay Cook and Wendy Mitchinson (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1976), 135-9; and Mrs. Fawcett, "The Old and New Ideals of Women's Education," *Good Words* (1878): 853-861, esp. 856.
- 62 Allen, "The Temperance Problem," The Canadian Monthly 12 (September 1877): 291.
- 63 The view that women were largely responsible for male intemperance was still in evidence in Donald Creighton's interpretation of John A. MacDonald's drinking problem. See Creighton, *John A. MacDonald*, vol. I, pp. 260-1. See also, Barbara Roberts, "They Drove Him to Drink': Donald Creighton's Macdonald and his Wives," *Canada: A Historical Magazine* 3, no. 2 (December 1975): 51-64.
- 64 See Fidelis, "A Pressing Problem," Rose-Belford's Canadian Monthly 2 (April 1879): 463. See Ontario W.C.T.U Report (1886): 50-51; and N.C.W.C. Report (1894): 165.

- 65 Allen, "The Temperance Problem," *The Canadian Monthly* 12 (September 1877): 291, emphasis in the original. In his early teens, Allen's own son, Grant, was sent to King Edward's School in Birmingham, England, while his parents returned to Canada. *Standard Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. II, p. 7.
- 66 Noël, *Dry Millennium*, 127-9 and passim. With respect to French Canada, temperance was linked to national survival. See Noël, "Dry Patriotism: The Chiniquy Crusade," *Canadian Historical Review* 71, no. 2 (June 1990): 190-207, especially 200-3.
- 67 Allen, "The Temperance Problem," *The Canadian Monthly* 12 (September 1877): 291, emphasis in the original.
- 68 Fidelis, "The Temperance Problem," The Canadian Monthly 12 (October 1877): 372-3.
- 69 Allen, "The Temperance Question: A Reply," The Canadian Monthly (July 1877): 26.
- 70 Allen, "The Temperance Problem," The Canadian Monthly 12 (September 1877): 282, 289.
- 71 Fidelis, "The Temperance Problem," The Canadian Monthly 12 (August 1877): 183-4.
- 72 Fidelis, "The Temperance Problem," The Canadian Monthly 12 (October 1877): 373-4.
- 73 For discussion of the increased state regulation of doctors, see Wendy Mitchinson, *The Nature of Their Bodies: Women and Their Doctors in Victorian Canada* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 23; and for industrial workers, see Gregory S. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism*, 1867–1892 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980).
- 74 Allen, "The Temperance Problem," The Canadian Monthly 12 (September 1877): 282.
- 75 Cook, "Through Sunshine and Shadow", Chapter 3; Prentice et al., Canadian Women: A History, 182-3; Terry Crowley, "Madonnas before Magdalenes: Adelaide Hoodless and the Making of the Canadian Gibson Girl," Canadian Historical Review 67, no. 4 (1986): 78-81; Naomi Griffiths, The Splendid Vision: Centennial History of the National Council of Women of Canada, 1893-1993 (Ottawa, ON: Carleton University Press, 1993), passim.
- 76 Allen, "The Temperance Problem," *The Canadian Monthly* 12 (September 1877): 289-290.
- 77 Fidelis, "The Temperance Problem," The Canadian Monthly 11 (April 1877): 375.
- 78 Andrew Holman, A Sense of Their Duty: Middle-Class Formation in Victorian Ontario Towns (Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's, 2000), 149.
- 79 Cook, "Letitia Youmans," 329; Backhouse, *Petticoats and Prejudice*, 180-1; Valverde, *Age of Light, Soap, and Water*, 59; Morrison, "Their Proper Sphere'," 60. Machar recognized the problem of female drinking by casting such characters in her novels, but she did not raise the issue in the debate with Allen.
- 80 Harvey, "Amazons and Victims," 135-6.
- 81 See, as examples, "A Pressing Problem,"; "Compulsory Education," *Rose-Belford's Canadian Monthly* 7 (August 1881): 174-178; and "Healthy and Unhealthy Conditions of Woman's Work," *The Week* 13 (27 March 1896): 421-423.
- 82 See, for example, Shelagh Day and Gwen Brodsky, Women and the Equality Deficit: The Impact of Restructuring Canada's Social Programs (Ottawa, ON: Status of Women Canada, 1998).
- 83 Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); Sherene Razack, Canadian Feminism and the Law: The Women's Legal Education and Action Fund and the Pursuit of Equality (Toronto, ON: Second Story Press, 1991); and Paula Bourne, "Women, Law, and the Justice System" in Canadian Women's Issues, vol. 1: Strong Voices, Twenty-five Years of Women's Activism (Toronto: Lorimer, 1993), 321-365.