

distance. Who are we to blame them? Better to be glad they have made the distance a little less for us.

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A Woman With A Purpose. The Diaries of Elizabeth Smith 1872 - 1884. Edited with an introduction by Veronica Strong-Boag. *Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980. Pp. 298.*

Pictured in a 1917 issue of *Saturday Night* in an article on military training in the schools, is a middle-aged woman. Her expression is serious, her dress sensible, her views patriotic. This is Mrs. Adam Shortt, described in the caption as "A prominent Ottawa . . . who was a practising physician before her marriage . . . well known in philanthropic and civil movements." At the time of the newspaper story, twenty-four years had elapsed since Mrs. Shortt, at the age of thirty-four, had given up her medical career to devote her time to family responsibilities and to social reform work. Speaking on military training in schools, she used the opportunity to present her views on the three major problems of Canadian society: drunkenness, disease and feeble-mindedness. Patriotism, she claimed, aimed at the highest level of human efficiency, a goal which could not be reached as long as children's physical welfare was left "to parents, to nature and to chance." Their moral and mental development, she pointed out, was controlled by schools and churches; their physical welfare should be similarly monitored. Stopping "the supply of degenerates" at its source, possibly through sterilization, was, to Mrs. Shortt, an essential component of any plan to improve human efficiency.

Veronica Strong-Boag described Mrs. Shortt as uncompromising, embittered, disillusioned, her mood soured and her confidence shaken in the battle for social change and women's rights. The young woman who emerged from Elizabeth Smith's diaries was also determined and outspoken, convinced of the superiority of her Anglican deity, her middle class birthright and her liberal politics. Unlike Mrs. Shortt, however, Elizabeth was optimistic, fun-loving, flirtatious, passionate, a girl who bent and broke many of the rules which constrained Victorian womanhood. It is hard to believe that Elizabeth Smith and Mrs. Adam Shortt were the same person.

In her introduction to *A Woman With a Purpose*, Strong-Boag noted that the transformation which Elizabeth Smith experienced was not uncommon among feminists in the 1920s. Today, we recognize the same pattern - we call it burnout. Perhaps it is naive to expect youthful optimism and *joie de vivre* to survive into adult life, but one must agree with Strong-Boag that the disappearance of the vivacious and sensitive young woman of the diaries is a cause for regret.

Elizabeth Smith began writing her diaries in 1872, at the age of thirteen. In the ensuing years, she completed her training at normal school and spent some time teaching in rural Ontario. At the age of eighteen, the young teacher - "A Woman With a Purpose" - set out to gain admission to the medical school at Queen's University. Her last diary entry was made when she was twenty-five, at the start of her career in medicine.

Initially, Elizabeth's diaries served as a daily record of events, although even her notes as a thirteen-year-old were scattered with reflective asides. As she matured, the self-evaluative function of the diaries became more salient. The result, however, was not the tediously introspective soliloquy which one might expect from a young woman whose high religious and personal standards left little room for human failings - a young woman who agonized over her

friends' moral lapses and religious backsliding. The reader might grow impatient with Elizabeth's constant soul-searching, particularly on the topic of her enjoyment of public praise and attention, which she evidently considered one of her major weaknesses, but this tendency is relieved by her irrepressible wit and optimism. In the privacy of her diary-writing, she was free to report her triumphs without the required veneer of feminine modesty, and to rage at the injustices of a patriarchal society which expected women to be grateful for the few crumbs thrown in their direction.

In the realm of personal relationships, Elizabeth's diary entries were especially captivating, revealing a side of Victorian womanhood which rarely surfaced in the more formal autobiographies of her female contemporaries. Conforming to the "letter of the law" regarding proper relations between the sexes, Elizabeth's assertiveness was, nevertheless, unusual for her day. Her physical attractiveness, which she freely acknowledged, resulted in an abundance of suitors wherever she went, relieving the loneliness and monotony of rural teaching and the emotional and intellectual burdens of life at Queen's. As well, Elizabeth treasured her friendships with other women, and the solidarity which developed among the first three women at Queen's Medical School was crucial to their survival. From time to time, however, Elizabeth seemed overly conscious of what she perceived as rivalry and jealousy on the part of women who envied her attractiveness and the male attention it generated. At the same time, she was self-righteously critical of the "Hoydenish" behaviour of some members of her sex towards men. At a time when convention made more open communication between young men and young women difficult, the preoccupation with physical appearances was, perhaps, not surprising. This is not to suggest that the situation is markedly different today.

There is a timelessness about some of Elizabeth's experiences which the reader will probably recognize: her doubts that she could ever "be content to live with one man for life" (p. 109); her dilemma upon receipt of an earnest confession of love which she did not reciprocate; the disillusionment she felt when her "ideal love" revealed his usual share of human failings; and, finally, the realization that she had learned from these experiences - she had become a woman, no longer "that unsettled irregular immature young person who thought she loved, and like thousands of others misused the term." (p. 297). It would be fitting, but inaccurate, to report that Elizabeth Smith and Adam Shortt lived happily ever after. Strong-Boag makes passing reference to Elizabeth's disappointment with the marriage, but provides no details. Further publications from the Smith Shortt Papers, or a full biography of this exceptional woman, would be welcomed by those of us who remain puzzled by the "disappearance" of Elizabeth Smith.

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