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The Liquor Traffic Once More

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THE LIQUOR TRAFFIC ONCE MORE.

There is a great diversity of opinion as to the best methods to be used in dealing with the evils, which every intelligent person knows, arise from the traffic in liquors. Only as there is agreement and united action can any real success be expected.

A traffic which turns from useful channels of trade one billion two hundred million dollars of the people's money annually, equal to five times what we spend for cotton goods, six times what we spend for boots and shoes, and is more than ten times what we spend for public education and missions, I hold is great enough to worthy of sober consideration by every American citizen.

To-day, the liquor power is acknowledged to be the most potent factor in American politics; it is a serious affair when two hundred and forty thousand rum-sellers, dictate legislation for over sixty million people.

This trade according to the estimate of as conservative a man as Chauncey Depew takes the lives of eighty thousand of our people yearly. That is, demands for raw material eighty thousand boys and girls, to be worked up to the finished product of common drunkards.

For these reasons, I ask you to consider with me, this traffic, not with a view to regulation or restriction, but for complete annihilation by the most direct method.

First, ^{let} let us consider the many and varied ineffectual methods

by which the people have sought to diminish the evils resulting from this traffic, without destroying the traffic itself.

The most important of these is license. License always implies the legalization of a portion of the liquor traffic. It aims also to repress a portion of that traffic. Thus it contains both a sanction and a condemnation of
of the saloon.

In the days of America's conflict with slavery the government treated slave-holding as a crime north of the Mason and Dixon line. All the power of government was brought to bear against it there. One hair's breadth south of that line slavery changed its character and was to be permitted. All the power of government was to be exercised to defend it there. Under a license system the government treats the liquor traffic just as it did slavery. The license fee is the Mason and Dixon line, without a license government condemns the traffic. With a license government defends it. These principles are self contradictory. *Amnesty.*

Lincoln once said, "No nation can continue half slave and half free," I wish to affirm to-day that no state or nation can continue half drunk and half sober.

Some people consider the revenue from license a redeeming feature, while in reality the expense which the traffic ^b brings upon the

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community far exceeds the revenues derived from it but this fact is

overlooked by the ordinary voter, and worse still the greater part of the money comes from the working man and means misery and want for his family.

License, high or low, is thus not only vicious in principle, but we shall find that it is powerless as a remedy. In Rhode Island for example, license is notoriously a failure. According to official statistics, the amount of drunkenness and consequent crime, is daily increasing.

A significant fact, is, that liquor leagues and fraternities are universally in favor of license, and especially high license. Their business thrives best under the legal protection and sanction of the state. This fact alone condemns the policy.

The most contradictory phase of the policy of license is that of local option. This term simply means that the question of granting licenses is to be decided in a locality by a vote of the people. One of the most conspicuous defects lies in the fact that local option like license makes revenues local, but expenses general. Thus a town votes on the Sale, levies its license, collects its police fines, while its heavy criminal docket, pauperism, almshouses, and fearful residuum that always follows the traffic, weighs like an incubus on the State and counties at large. Whoever carefully studies the subject cannot fail to perceive the inconsistency and immorality of a policy by which one year, the citizens of a community condemn the saloon as a curse to human

ity and outlaw it, and the next year for a money consideration stand by and sanction, legalize by license, protect and patronize it.

An ineffectual method that is attracting some attention of late is state control. It is evident from the object lesson in South Carolina that such a law is not only unreasonable but illegal. From the decision of the U. S. supreme court we learn that a state has no right to conduct a traffic for profit that is forbidden an individual citizen. And again, a state has no right to bargain away the public health, and morals of its citizens.

While such a law meets with even more opposition than prohibition its ultimate aim is only to conduct the business in a better way, and I undertake to say that if the saloon were open with prayer in the morning, and closed with benediction at night, it would still be a curse to humanity, and a menace to good society.

In view of the fact that a question is never settled until it is settled right, let us now consider the end and aim of all temperance legislation, which is prohibition.

It is of first importance to note that prohibition deals with the traffic in liquors, not with the active drinking. I make this distinction because the act of drinking a glass of liquor may effect no one but the man who drinks it, while the offering for sale is a public act, and subject to public control. Thus the idea that prohibition is an invasion of one's personal liberties which we so often hear, is

wholly false. Prohibition in no wise says what a man shall eat or ~~dr~~ drink; it simply aims to protect society from the pernicious influence of trade which is a social institution; in no way do its advocates interfere with the private liberties of an individual until these private liberties create public nuisances. All that prohibition means is, that the public facilities for the gratification of this appetite must cease. Its aim is not to coerce morality but rather to protect society.

Now with a definite idea of what prohibition is, let us next see what it does; for example what it did in Rhode Island in 1886. While during the last six months under license drunkenness increased at the rate of eighteen per cent, during the first six months under prohibition drunkenness decreased more than forty-two per cent. There were only one half the commitments to the work-house. The tin kettle trade entirely disappeared from the streets in the cities, and families that had never seen a penny the father had earned now received the full wages.

Such were the immediate benefits even when the law was ^{fully} enforced. But Rhode Island was doomed to be the victim of the combined liquor leagues of New England, which devoted thirty-one thousand dollars to bribing certain officials of both parties then in power, and to hiring local papers to fight prohibition. So in 1889 the law was repealed. This act was an acknowledgement of the supremacy of the liquor power, and it was an evidence that it was able to defy a law,

which three fifths of the citizens had placed on the statute books.

In Maine, after trying prohibition for twenty years, the question was submitted to the people, and they voted three to one in favor of embodying it in the constitution. To-day there is not a brewer or distillery in the state of Maine, while under license there were seven distilleries in the city of Portland alone.

Probably the states of Kansas and Nebraska offer the best opportunity to compare the effect of prohibition and license. During eleven years trial, from 1880 to 1891, in Kansas, under prohibition the number of barrels of beer sold has decreased from thirty two thousand to two thousand five hundred; while in Nebraska, under high license, the sale of beer has increased from forty thousand to one hundred and forty-six thousand. Of the total value of spirituous liquors sold in both states in eleven years, which is eighteen million four hundred thousand dollars, Nebraska has sold seventeen million seven hundred thousand, and Kansas seven hundred thousand. *prohibition*

Some people say a man can get drunk under prohibition if he wishes to, true; anyone knows that; but what we object to is, that under license thousands get drunk who don't wish to. - *advance*

Although we have been fighting the traffic in liquors for the last forty years with moral suasion, gospel temperance, and lectures on alcohol, this traffic, like a gigantic tree of evil has daily strengthened under this pruning treatment. We have trimmed its branches with

a pen-knife, instead of striking the roots with an axe. We have treated the scabby fruit with bi-chloride of gold instead of destroying the tree that bore such fruit.

At last=progressive temperance men have come to realize that as the liquor business is entrenched in law, it is only by outlawing it that it can be destroyed. This outlawing is called prohibition. These temperance men to the number of two hundred and seventy thousand citizens have banded together for the avowed purpose of destroying the saloons, and are called the Prohibition party. Just as surely as the Republican party was called into being to exterminate slavery, so the Prohibition party was called into being to exterminate the saloon; and not until its mission is fulfilled, will it cease to exert a powerful influence not only against the saloons, but every form of bribery and political corruption.

A strong movement in favor of prohibition has started in the colleges throughout the land. Prohibition clubs are being formed, and intercollegiate oratorical contests are being held between such institutions as Brown and Yale. This means that the best intellectual talent of the coming generation is enlisted against this demoralizing and degrading traffic.

If anyone thinks that the cause of prohibition is not advancing, let him note that Canada, after sending a commission through our states

to examine every phase of temperance legislation, has within the last six months voted for prohibition by an enormous majority.

Shall we let England be first to destroy the saloons, as she was first to prohibit slavery?

Will you any longer for a money consideration, foster a traffic which is the sworn enemy of all righteousness, which propagates every sin flesh is heir to? No! If the word home is dear to you, if the prayer of the suffering wife and child can move you, if in truth there slumbers within you one spark of the fire patriotism, you must stand ^{of} firm on this issue of prohibition, and vote for God-and home-and native land.

Finale

Ruben Wallace Peckham, 1894.