

Mr. Bryan's Bible Talks

A DRUNKEN KING HEARS HIS DOOM

By WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

BIBLE TEXT—LESSON FOR JULY 16

(Daniel v:17-28)

Then Daniel answered and said before the king, Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation.

O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour:

And for the majesty that he gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him; whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down.

But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him:

And he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses; they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will.

And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knowest all this;

But has lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know; and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified:

Then was the part of the hand sent from him; and this writing was written.

And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.

This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it.

TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.

PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.

With the advocates of wines and beer clamoring to have the manufacture and sale of these intoxicants legalized in this country, it is most appropriate that we consider at this time the Bible's greatest lesson against drink in any form.

It is set forth in one of the most graphic and famous chapters of the entire Bible.

But before we make application to the drink problem, let us consider the facts as they are related in this fifth chapter of Daniel. The great prophet never measured up more fully to the requirements of his high calling than on this occasion when, unabashed and unafraid, he interpreted to a trembling ruler the fateful decree of Jehovah.

Our text deals with the feast of Belshazzar, who knew full well the punishment visited upon Nebuchadnezzar, whom the text calls his father, for his sins. He had no excuse for his wrong doing—any more than the son of a drunken father has for drunkenness. He had even less excuse, because Nebuchadnezzar's punishment was followed by repentance and Belshazzar had this fact (as well as Nebuchadnezzar's sins) before him when he entered upon his lordship over Babylon.

HISTORY'S MOST FAMOUS FEAST

But Belshazzar was a worshipper of the body and yielded to all the temptations that come through the flesh.

On the night in question he had assembled a thousand of his lords at a great feast and "drank wine before the thousand." Excited by the alcohol in the wine, he commanded that "the golden and silver vessels which his father, Nebuchadnezzar, had taken out of the temple, which was in Jerusalem," he brought to the feast; "that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein."

No wonder this feast is the most famous in history; it has made the name of Belshazzar a synonym for wild debauches and wicked dissipation.

There was the king, surrounded by his princes and his nobles, his wives and his concubines, drinking wine out of the sacred vessels that an idolatrous king had taken by force from the house of God in the Holy City. As these wine-bibbers drained their cups they praised the gods of gold and silver and brass, of iron and wood and stone. Sacrilege was added to bestiality; men made in the image of God had descended as low as man could fall. Excess was added to excess until

nothing was left undone to prove degeneracy. But the hour had struck—punishment was at hand.

A DRUNKEN KING'S TERROR

"In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaister of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote."

Drunken as he was, he had intelligence enough left to be awed by the moving hand that, reaching down from the unseen world, traced the verdict from which there was no appeal.

"Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another."

He called frantically for his astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers; he offered to give to any one who would interpret the handwriting on the wall clothes of scarlet, a chain of gold and the third place in his kingdom. But the king's wise men were impotent; they could not read the writing, let alone interpret it. What was to be done?

As an Israelitish maid carried to Naaman, the leper's wife, news of Elisha's power, so at this moment the queen-mother recalled the fame of Daniel, who had not only interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream but recalled it to the king when he had forgotten it. She begged Belshazzar to send for Daniel and Daniel was called.

"THOU ART FOUND WANTING"

He listened to the plea of the frightened Belshazzar, who in his distress was willing to offer anything for an explanation. Rising to his full height, Daniel answered him:

"Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation."

Daniel kept nothing back. He reviewed the pride of Nebuchadnezzar and his punishment; he confronted Belshazzar with his sins—"And thou, his son, O Belshazzar, has not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this."

He pointed out to Belshazzar how he had lifted up himself against the Lord of heaven; how he had brought the vessels of God's house to the banquet hall that his lords, his wives and his concubines might drink wine in them; how he had praised the gods of silver and gold, of brass, iron, wood and stone, "which see not, nor hear, nor know," and had not glorified the "God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways."

And then Daniel announced the decree—"Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin—mene; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. Tekel; thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. Peres; thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians."

SWIFT FULFILLMENT OF JUDGMENT

The king had just time enough to issue a proclamation giving Daniel the third place in the kingdom—an empty honor, for "in that night was Belshazzar the king of Chaldeans slain. And Darius the Median took the kingdom." This prophecy was fulfilled at once; it scarcely was uttered before the "history written in advance," as prophecy is sometimes called, became the record of events.

Few passages in the Bible have been used more frequently, or with greater effect. Edwin Arnold puts the thought in verse:

There cometh forth a hand upon the stone,
Graving the symbols of a speech unknown;
Fingers like mortal fingers—leaving there
The blank wall flashing characters of fear—
And still it glideth silently and slow—
And still beneath the spectral letters glow—
Now the scroll endeth—now the seal is set—
The hand is gone—the record tarries yet."

THE "BIG BROTHER" OF WINE AND BEER

It is an appropriate temperance lesson, although its application covers all of life. It tells the story of the retribution that follows every kind of sin, as darkness follows the day. It is of special interest just now when the opponents of prohibition are insisting that wine and beer are innocent drinks and can be indulged in without harm to society.

The contention can hardly be made in good faith, because the present friends of wine and

beer were too often the former friends of the saloon as it was, with all its vile accompaniments. The bulk of those who, in the name of personal liberty, demand what they call light wine and beer, resisted every effort to lessen the evils of the saloon.

It required law to separate the gambling house and brothel from the saloon, and the separation could never be made when those interested in the liquor traffic were in control of the Government. Strong drink was "big brother" to wine and beer until the law stopped the manufacture and sale of whisky, and the family will be reunited if the advocates of wine and beer are ever able—God forbid—to carry out their policy.

THE BIBLE'S INDICTMENT OF WINE

The Bible furnishes us a sufficient indictment against wine, and the same argument is applicable to beer. It was wine that made Noah a drunkard, wine from his own vineyard. We are told that his sons in mortification took a garment and, walking backward that they might not see their father's nakedness, spread the garment over him as he lay drunk in his tent. King Ahasuerus was "merry with wine" when he commanded that Queen Vashti be brought into the banquet hall that her beauty might be exhibited to drunken revellers. It was wine that David employed when he sought to conceal his own great sin from the husband of Bathsheba. It was wine—bowls full of it—that contributed to the sins of those who were "at ease in Zion" when Amos thundered forth his rebukes.

It is the alcohol in wine and in other intoxicating drinks that puts them all on the same level and makes them injurious to man. Prohibition is the greatest moral reform that was ever won by the ballot; it has brought the greatest change in this country ever wrought anywhere by law.

According to Prohibition Commissioner Haynes, it has led many millions of our people to stop drinking; it has saved for better uses \$2,000,000,000 a year formerly spent for intoxicating liquors; it has reduced the arrests for drunkenness throughout the nation over 60 per cent; it has given to the women of the land a larger percentage of the family income for family expenses than they ever had before, and to the children better treatment; it has changed the habits of the people from the White House to the humblest home.

THE GATEWAY TO REFORMS TO COME

In times past the President served liquors to his guests, and intoxication among them was not a thing unknown. Now, everywhere except in a few wet centers, there is a decrease in drinking, and this decrease will become more and more noticeable as the law is more completely enforced and as the sentiment back of the law grows stronger with the years.

A saloonless nation does not mean a sinless nation, but total abstinence is the sure cure for the evils that come with alcohol. Drink has not only been the direct cause of a multitude of evils, but the indirect cause of many others.

Prohibition is, therefore, not only a reform itself but also the gateway to reforms that are yet to come, the next of which is likely to be the establishment of the single moral standard. So long as the saloon existed such a reform was impossible. With the saloon outlawed and woman suffrage here, every righteous cause will be triumphant sooner and more completely.

Just as the handwriting on the wall proclaimed the end of the rule of a wicked king, so whenever any great evil is ripe for overthrow, Jehovah's hand appears and traces the words of doom. When "the fullness of time" has come God sounds forth the "trumpet that shall never call retreat" and the world moves forward to a higher plane.

A STORY OF THE POWER OF FAITH

By WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

BIBLE TEXT—LESSON FOR JULY 23

(Daniel 6:16-23)

Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the dens of lions. Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee. And a stone was brought, and laid upon the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet, and with the signet of his lords; that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel.

Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting; neither were instruments of musick brought before him; and his sleep went from him.

Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions. And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel; and the king spake