

The Case Against Alcohol

Speech Delivered by Mr. Bryan at Carnegie Hall, New York, April 30, 1915,
Under the Auspices of the National Abstainers Union

This is the second central meeting in the interest of total abstinence held under the auspices of the National Abstainers Union, the first being at Philadelphia on the 15th of March last. The organization is non-partisan and non-sectarian, its purpose being to bring all of the people of our country without regard to politics, church, or race, into active co-operation in behalf of temperance.

Before presenting arguments in favor of total abstinence I ask your attention to certain figures and comparisons which will show the enormous amount expended in the United States for intoxicating liquors and therefore the great importance of the subject with which we are dealing.

As the body becomes insensible to pain when a certain degree is reached, so the mind ceases to comprehend the meaning of figures beyond a certain point. A thousand million, for instance, does not seem to us much more than an hundred million or even a million. I have tried, therefore, to translate into every day language the figures that set forth the cost of intemperance.

COMPARISONS USED AT PHILADELPHIA

At Philadelphia I used four comparisons, based upon an expenditure of the sum of two and a half billions of dollars a year—that is, an average of twenty-five dollars per capita or one hundred twenty-five dollars per family. The comparisons then used showed (1) that there is daily spent for drink in the United States one-tenth of the sum expended for the carrying on the war now raging in Europe; (2) that the amount expended for drink in the United States would build six Panama canals each year; (3) that the amount annually spent for drink is more than three times the entire amount spent for education in the United States; and (4) that the amount spent for drink is almost double the annual expenditures of the federal government.

I shall tonight present four other comparisons which can not fail to impress you with the heavy burden that the use of intoxicating liquor throws upon our population.

DRINK BILL VS. COTTON, WHEAT AND CORN

First: According to the statistics compiled by the department of commerce, the value of three of the great agricultural crops, on the first of December 1914, was as follows: Cotton, \$520,000,000; wheat, \$878,000,000; corn, \$1,700,000,000. (These crops vary in value from year to year; in 1913 the cotton crop was worth \$825,000,000 and the wheat crop only \$610,000,000; I have used the last year.)

Consider the land employed in the raising of cotton, the amount of labor required and the number of persons interested, and then remember that we spend for liquor, each year, more than four cotton crops. Survey the broad wheat fields of our land, estimate the number of persons engaged in the production of this staple of life, and then remember that we expend almost three wheat crops a year for intoxicating liquors. Corn is grown in every state and is the largest single source of wealth; it yields more than the wheat and cotton crops combined, and yet we annually spend for liquor nearly fifty per cent more than the value of the entire corn crop.

EQUALS ONE-FOURTH OF PRODUCT OF WAGE-EARNER

Statistics show that 268,000 manufacturing establishments in this country employ over 6,500,000 wage earners, and that these wage earners add \$8,500,000,000 to the value of the material used in industries in which they are employed. They do not receive that sum in wages, but they create that amount of wealth. It gives some idea of the amount spent for liquor to know that during the year we spend for drink more than one-fourth as much as these 6,500,000 wage earners produce. Would not national prosperity be largely increased if the amount spent for drink was expended for food and clothing and homes?

IF LIQUOR MONEY SPENT FOR GOOD ROADS

Second: As we are all interested in good roads I have made a computation to ascertain how far the amount spent for liquor would go toward the building of good roads in the United States. I find that the average cost of a macadam road, sixteen feet wide and seven inches thick is about

\$6,500 per mile. This is the estimate furnished by the office of public roads in the department of agriculture; but to be sure that we are liberal in our estimate, let us put it at \$8,333 per mile—or three miles for \$25,000. This enables us to make our computation in round numbers. If \$25,000 will build three miles of macadam road, then \$2,500,000,000 will build 300,000 miles. If we count the distance from ocean to ocean at 3,000 miles, the annual amount spent for drink would build 100 macadam highways across the continent; and these, counting the width of the country north and south at twelve hundred miles, would give us a highway every twelve miles. If, the second year, we built 300,000 miles of highways running north and south we could, in two years have the United States grid-ironed with macadam roads twelve miles apart so that every citizen would be within six miles of a good road, which would put him into communication with every other part of the Union. In less than eight years time every mile of public road in the United States could be macadamized with the amount spent for alcoholic liquors. The amount now expended in paving the road to perdition would, if spent for good roads, soon lift the mud embargo from the entire country. Calculate, if you will, the change that would follow the investment of the nation's drink money in paved highways—the increase in comfort to the farmer and his family—the increased attractiveness of country life, and the commercial value of these good roads to the towns and cities of the land.

WOULD DUPLICATE RAILROADS IN EIGHT YEARS

Now let us proceed to the third comparison: According to the statistics furnished by the interstate commerce commission the railroads pay out each year to their employes \$1,373,422,472—or only a little more than one-half the amount expended for alcoholic liquor. Take a railroad map of the United States, trace the lines east and west, north and south, and the diagonal lines, and then estimate the number of men required to operate them—the engineers who keep faithful vigil while the passengers sleep—the conductors who, ever alert, direct the trains—the men who, at the switch, on the road and in the stations, are required for the traffic, passenger and freight—this great army receives for this work, indispensable to the nation's prosperity, but a little more than one-half of the amount that is paid for the drink which unfits men for any responsible position.

The railroads of the country are capitalized at \$20,247,301,257, of which \$8,680,759,704 represents capital stock, and \$11,566,541,553 represents bonded indebtedness. A considerable portion of this capitalization is water and does not represent actual value; the commission is now at work collecting information as to the physical value of these roads, and we shall know in a few years what it would cost to reproduce them, but, taking them at their book value, it would only require eight years to duplicate these railroads if the annual amount spent for liquor was devoted to railroad building. Does not this comparison give you some idea of the importance of the liquor question to the nation?

WOULD CAPITALIZE ALL BANKS IN TWO YEARS

Fourth: As New York is the financial center of the country and is destined to be the clearing house of the world, you may be more interested in the fourth comparison: The statistics compiled by the treasury department show that there are 7,581 national banks in the United States with a capital stock of \$1,065,951,505, and a surplus of \$726,935,755—or a total capital and a surplus of a little less than \$1,800,000,000. Is it not appalling to think that the amount spent for drink each year would duplicate all the national banks in the country, supply them with their present capital and surplus and then leave a balance of \$700,000,000 to be invested in other ways?

There are in the United States 19,240 banks other than national—that is, state and private banks—having a total capitalization of \$1,073,881,738, and a total surplus of \$991,147,876; or a total of capital and surplus of a little less than \$2,100,000,000. The amount spent for liquor

each year would furnish the capital and surplus for these more than nineteen thousand banks, and leave a balance of \$400,000,000.

In other words, the amount now spent annually for drink would in two years, duplicate all the banks of the country, state and national, furnish them with capital and surplus equal to that which they now have, and leave a billion dollars for other investments. Is it not worth while to give some attention to the liquor question? Imagine, if you can, the effect upon the home life of the country if the amount invested in drink were invested in bank stock, and what do you think would be the effect upon business if the capital and surplus of the banks were doubled in two years?

THE CASE AGAINST ALCOHOL

If I may now assume that you are sufficiently impressed with the magnitude of the evils of intemperance we may proceed to a discussion of remedies. When we come to consider the liquor question we find that the remedies proposed follow one of two lines—namely, moral suasion and legislation. All who labor in the cause of temperance seek to lessen the use of intoxicating liquor—some by persuading people not to drink, some by urging laws which will prevent the manufacture and sale of liquor, while still others divide their energies between the two lines of work. As for myself, while I have definite views as to the means that should be employed for solving the legislative problem presented by the liquor traffic, I shall confine myself tonight to the first line of argument, and appeal to those present, and to those whom I may reach through the press, to take their position as individuals on the side of total abstinence; for whatever difference of opinion may exist as to the relative merits of different legislative remedies, no one will deny that the total abstainer, to the extent of his influence, lessens the use of alcohol, and by so doing both reduces the evils of intemperance and lightens the task of the legislator.

Why should the individual abstain entirely from the use of intoxicating liquor as a beverage? That is the pledge which we urge upon each and all. Why?

INTOXICATING LIQUOR BRINGS NO ADVANTAGE

First: Because both experience and investigation show that no advantage of any kind—physical, mental or moral—is to be gained from the moderate, or even occasional, use of intoxicating liquor. This reason ought in itself to be sufficient, for the intelligent man demands a reason before he undertakes anything which affects his own welfare or his relation to others. If it can not be shown that the use of alcoholic liquors is beneficial, then the money spent upon it is unwisely spent, for man can not afford to waste money upon that which does him no good.

INJURES BODY, MIND, AND MORALS

Second: But the case against alcohol does not, however, rest upon negative arguments. The use of alcohol is distinctly and undeniably harmful; it impairs the strength of the body, even when taken in small quantities; it injuriously affects the mind and it undermines the morals. Scientific investigation has demonstrated beyond the possibility of a doubt that alcohol is a poison and that its introduction into the system weakens man's power to resist disease, and reduces his capacity for intelligent and useful labor. As evidence, I cite the fact that its use is prohibited in schools and that the laws of every state provide severe penalties for the sale of intoxicating liquor to minors. If, by common consent, we try to protect the young man from the use of alcohol until he is twenty-one, is not the presumption strongly against the use of alcohol after one reaches maturity? This presumption is supported by the laws forbidding the sale of liquor to drunkards—laws unanimously supported by public sentiment. But we are not left to presumption—proof is conclusive. The tables of mortality of insurance companies show that the use of intoxicating liquor appreciably shortens life. At thirty the expectancy of abstainers is three years and eight months longer than the expectancy of the non-abstainers—an advantage of 11 per cent. The man who drinks commits suicide by degrees—the rapidity of his decline being proportioned to the amount of alcohol consumed, and what is even worse, he visits his sins upon future generations—commits a crime against descendants, those who are both innocent and helpless.

ALCOHOL LESSENS CAPACITY FOR BUSINESS

Drink leads to idleness. The business men of our country are year by year drawing the line