

The Last Defenses

[Winning oration in the Nebraska State Prohibition Oratorical Contest, at Bellevue College, April 14, 1916, by Miss Hazel Parks, Hastings College.]

Abraham Lincoln has said "Nothing morally wrong can be politically right or expedient." Advocates of prohibition arguing from this viewpoint would justify a prohibitory law solely on moral grounds, for they contend that any institution which propagates squalor and crime, which debauches millions, which promotes vice, poverty and corruption, is anything but morally right.

But many will hold that the morality of the question is accidental, that arguments for prohibition must be founded not on principles of morality, but on principles of political economy and social welfare. If then it can be shown that the liquor traffic results in a great burden of taxation, in a decrease of efficiency, and in the loss of human life, and that all this entails grave social damage and economic loss, then what further defense remains for the existence of this institution?

There was a time when the prohibition cause was championed by so called eccentrics or persons of one idea, but now the greatest editors, scholars, and statesmen are acknowledging the mighty import of this issue, and today the question of the liquor traffic is involving the existence of nations. Russia has been quick to realize the need of drastic measures and now has national prohibition, France and Germany have enacted wise prohibitory laws; in England the extreme gravity of the problem was revealed by Chancellor Lloyd George when he said, "We are fighting Germany, Austria and drink, and so far as I can see the greatest of these three foes is drink." If the enormity of the liquor traffic is so evident in Europe, is it not equally detrimental to America? Let us examine the evidence at hand.

It is estimated that \$2,500,000,000 are spent annually for intoxicating liquors. This is approximately three times what we spend for education, six times the cost of the Panama canal, and twice what we spend annually for all the salaries of public officials from the President down, plus the expenses for law enforcement, plus the expenses for the departments of interior and agriculture. But before we condemn this vast expenditure of money for liquor let us consider the returns. An institution is judged not by its magnitude but by the contribution it makes to social and economic life. What then does the saloon contribute?

First, inefficient workmen. The increasing demand for total abstinence by employers is ample proof for this contention, but we have more direct evidence. It is the universal verdict of modern psychologists and scientists that liquor contributes vastly to inefficiency. The Russian minister of finance says, "I assure you that since the adoption of national prohibition the productivity of every class of workmen in Russia has already increased from thirty to fifty per cent." Never before in the world's history has the question of efficiency been of such momentous concern. In these days of complex industrial organization the presence of one sluggish individual not only retards the efforts of scores, but often endangers the very lives of hundreds. Certainly a truly potent nation must be an efficient one.

But what more does the saloon contribute?—a vast army of defec-

tives, dependents, and delinquents. Our state and municipal governments are spending stupendous sums in maintaining institutions to care for the victims of the liquor traffic. From 1909 to 1914 the cost to the state of Connecticut for courts and institutions, humane and penal, increased from \$1,308,000 to \$2,577,573. Fifty per cent of this increase was directly charged to the liquor traffic. Governor Byrne of South Dakota, who has given most careful attention to the prison population of the United States, reports that seventy per cent is directly due to drink. We find from the federal mortality statistics, compiled dispassionately, that from 1901 to 1910 approximately 207,000 Americans were murdered by the liquor traffic under such circumstances that the plea of not guilty was impossible. Surely these products are of vast significance.

But let us be quite sure that the detrimental products are in such preponderance as to outweigh the so-called beneficial ones which are frequently attributed to the saloon.

We hear the statement that were it not for the liquor trade thousands of men would be without employment. In making this assertion these advocates forget that every year thousands are thrown out of work through inefficiency resulting straight from the saloon. From the statistical abstract of the United States government we find that whereas \$1,000,000 invested in normal business employs 308 men, the same amount invested in the liquor trade furnishes employment to only 77 men. But suppose these figures proved the contrary, suppose that four times as many wage-earners were employed in the liquor business relatively speaking as in other lines of work—we would only contend the more strongly that the employment argument of the liquor traffic is absolutely false, for we do not produce in order to furnish employment, we employ for the purpose of producing what is useful.

Let us next consider the validity of their most vital contention, namely, that the liquor business reduces the tax rates and virtually supports the communities. Driven from every other vantage ground the liquor traffic intrenches itself behind what it considers an invincible plea,—revenue. Do you know that for every dollar received in revenue from the saloon we are forced to pay \$16.00 to care for the awful results of this business? Is it profitable to sanction an institution which though yielding a small revenue at the same time makes it necessary for us to spend sixteen times that amount in order to support the increased police forces, charity institutions, prison and insane asylums which would not be were it not for the liquor traffic. This is not mere theorizing. The late Carrol D. Wright, recognized governmental statistician, will bear us out in these statements. But we have more than statistics upon which to base our contention. We have the unbiased testimony from states and countries where prohibition has been put into actual practice. The reports from the police officials of Arizona, of Alabama, and of Kansas, reports from the capitol of Des Moines, Iowa, statements from Judge Rucker of Denver, from the director of prosecutions in Regina, Canada; from the city clerks of various North Dakota towns; from the Russian government, and scores of other sources all prove that there exists a direct correlation between saloons and asylums, police courts, prisons and char-

ity homes, and that the small revenue from the liquor business in no way compensates for the enormous expense that the maintenance of these various institutions demands.

But most convincing of all that prohibition is absolutely essential to a nation's social and economic well being is the fact that now, when practically all Europe is at arms, there has been felt with tremendous force the need of prohibition as a means of conserving material wealth, human resources, and national spirit. If prohibition is so essential in time of great conflict, it is equally so in time of peace. Will it take the ravages of war to open our eyes and arouse us to action? We believe not.

With the great object lessons of Europe before us we can not believe that the United States will fail to see that if America would be supremely great she must exterminate this institution which has failed so utterly to justify its existence. The liquor traffic attempts no vindication upon moral grounds, and now we have overwhelming evidence that the long cherished revenue argument is absolutely fallacious; that instead of being an economic asset the saloon is a huge, incalculable burden, while in the social realm it is a loathsome cancer eating out the very vitals of society. Where then is there to be found justification for the saloon? Its vantage ground is lost. Its last defensive fortress has fallen and the victory will soon be ours.

SAYS BRYAN NEVER STRONGER
To the Dallas News.

Longview, Texas, April 24.—It is with regret that we note you have joined the crowd that is trying to "eliminate" Mr. Bryan, and that you are writing editorials trying to convince people that Mr. Bryan has lost his power. Mr. Bryan has never been stronger in the hearts of the people than he is today. Yours truly,
H. H. WATSON.

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(To be sung to the tune of "Brighten the Corner Where You Are," the song made popular by the Billy Sunday campaign. Composed by Mrs. Agnes D. Roberts, Omaha.)

There is work for every person in the state this year,

For the wets are very active near and far;

If you wish to win the fight and rid the state of beer,
Dry clean Nebraska where you are.

Chorus—
Dry clean Nebraska where you are,
Dry clean Nebraska where you are,
Someone seldom sober you may rescue from the bar;
Dry clean Nebraska where you are.

There are many saddened homes which you may brighten soon
Work with courage, let no fears debar;

You should never lose a chance to hit the vile saloon;
Dry clean Nebraska where you are.

Chorus—

There are many who oppose us in our cause of right—

What you do will either help or mar;

There are many voters needed if we win this fight;

Dry clean Nebraska where you are.

Chorus.
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