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The Liquor Question in Nebraska

The right of the government to regulate the sale of liquor can not be questioned, and the right to regulate includes the right to prohibit the open saloon. Some deny the right of the government to close the saloon; others insist that the government has no moral right to license the sale of liquor, but with a large majority it is a matter to be decided by conditions. The people, acting through the instrumentality of government, have, for their own protection, the right to determine the conditions under which liquor shall be sold in any community, county, or state, and it follows that the people of the nation have a right to act upon the question whenever they, in their wisdom, think it proper to do so, for whatever constitutional objections may be urged to any proposed legislation it must be remembered that constitutions are in the hands of the people, and can be altered whenever the people see fit to alter them.

Conditions differ in different states. In Nebraska we have a high license law—one of the best of its kind in the union—but there is a growing sentiment in favor of enlarging the unit of legislation. Under the existing law each city or village has the right to license or prohibit the sale of liquor, the minimum license and the maximum hours being fixed by statute. It is quite evident that a majority of the voters of our state favor a larger unit, and county option, such as Ohio, Missouri, Texas, Indiana, Kentucky, and a number of other states now have, has been suggested. What objection can be made to it? The county is the unit for the enforcement of the law, and as liquor drinking increases crime, it is only fair that the people who pay the taxes should have a voice in determining the system to be employed for regulating the sale of liquor.

At the international congress held in London in July, 1909, in which twenty-five nations were represented, Lord Alverstone, chief justice of England, stated that ninety per cent of the crime passing under his observation was traceable to drink; and Judge Pollard of one of the police courts of St. Louis, and Colonel McHardy of Edinburgh, Scotland, put the proportion at eighty-five per cent in their respective communities. Have the people who suffer from the crimes committed, and who bear the burden of prosecuting the criminals no right to be heard when the matter of regulation is under consideration?

To favor county option it is not necessary that one shall favor prohibition in his own or any other county. One's devotion to popular government ought not to depend upon his approval of any particular policy of government. Democrats, for instance, will not lose interest in free institutions merely because the republicans obtain control of the government. The people have a right to govern themselves, and

their right does not depend upon HOW they exercise that right.

No one doubts the town or city's right to act upon the liquor question, or the right of the precinct, or the right of the state. Why question the right of the county?

It is sometimes objected that prohibition by the act of the county suspends the right of the precinct or city to decide the question for itself. But this is not a valid objection. Every restraining statute suspends the right of the individual to do the thing prohibited. The larger group controls the smaller. The city being larger than the individual decides what the individual may or may not do, subject to the right of the state to decide what the city may or may not regulate; and the state in turn is subject to the provisions of the federal constitution. The people of the state, acting as a whole, fix the limitations upon the smaller groups, whether those groups be towns, cities, precincts or counties, and by the same logic the people of the county ought to be permitted to fix the limitations upon groups within the county, except as the county's power to limit is restrained by the state's superior authority.

It is also objected that county option is only a step toward state prohibition. This would not be a valid objection, even if the fact were admitted. If the people of a state have a right to prohibit the sale of liquor over the entire state they have a right to authorize the counties to prohibit within their borders. If the counties can justly claim the right to regulate the liquor traffic, in the absence of state prohibition, it is not just to deny them this right merely out of fear that the exercise of the right may lead to the adoption of state prohibition. A man must be very anxious to continue the open saloon to deny to the people of a county the right to act on the subject merely because he is afraid that the exercise of that right may lead the people of the state to ask for state prohibition. And, it may be added, it looks like a confession of weakness on the part of the liquor interests. If, as they contend, prohibition is a failure, the attempt to enforce prohibition by counties ought to make that fact apparent, and thus lessen the chance of state prohibition. And then, too, the liquor dealers ought to recognize that they can not logically oppose state prohibition if they oppose county option. If those interested in the sale of liquor insist that liquor should be sold in a county although a majority of the voters of the county object to it, how can they complain if their own logic is turned against them, and the people of the state insist that no liquor shall be sold in any county, even when a majority of the people of the county ask for it?

The present law requiring the saloons, wherever saloons are licensed, to close at eight o'clock, has worked well in practice and should be continued. A later hour might be more convenient for some, but many are injured by late closing compared with the few who are inconvenienced by early closing, so that the evils of late closing outweigh the advantages.

We have a law against treating in Nebraska, but it is universally ignored. We should have a statute placing the penalty on the saloonkeeper, and providing that it shall be cause for forfeiture of license if the saloonkeeper permits treating in his place of business. Treating is one of the worst features of the modern saloon, and no defense can be made of it. Those who desire to drink in moderation will, as a rule, favor this law, because they are often forced by custom to treat and to accept treats when they do not care to do so. Only those interested in the sale of liquor can find objection to it, and objection from such a source is an argument in favor of such a law rather than against it.

The liquor question has been made acute in Nebraska by the unscrupulousness of the liquor interests. Instead of the saloon of former days, owned by a resident and amenable, to

some extent at least, to the sentiment of the community, we have the branch saloon, owned and operated by a producer of liquor. This system adds the evils of the trust system to the evils of the saloon itself. Whenever a community attempts to deal with the saloon question, instead of having to deal with one of its own citizens it finds itself in a struggle with great corporations which operate over a large area, and have a pecuniary interest in cultivating the appetite for drink; instead of settling the question by consulting its own voters it must engage in a war with a foreign power.

The saloon—not every one, but as a rule—is in alliance with vice. It is constantly used to debauch politics, and to prevent the intelligent consideration of public questions. The liquor interests interfere in all matters that may even remotely affect their interests. They made themselves odious at the last session of the Nebraska legislature. The democrats had a majority in both branches for the first time in the state's history, and the splendid record of the legislature has but one blot on it, and that blot was put there by the liquor interests. They controlled enough of the senators to prevent the submission of the initiative and referendum. They were willing to deny to the people of the state the right to express themselves on any question, rather than risk the use of the initiative and referendum for the submission of the liquor question. Insolence, arrogance and impudence can not go farther.

The democratic party can not afford to act as the mouthpiece of the liquor interests. It can have nothing in common with the selfish, mercenary and conscienceless crusade that the liquor interests have organized against the home and the state—against private virtue and public morals.

IN THE PANAMA ZONE

While at Panama Mr. Bryan learned that he carried the canal zone by a large majority at a mock election held by the Americans on election day. There is considerable speculation as to the cause of this. Was it due to the fact that the employees are picked men? Or is it because they were free from the coercion practiced by the big corporations in the states? Or was it because their employers could take an unbiased view of the situation? Or should we credit it to the influence of the distinctively democratic member of the commission, the genial and popular ex-senator, Blackburn, whose resignation is so universally regretted by the employees?

MR. BRYAN IN THE SOUTH

We are approaching the Isthmus and I am expecting to find the Canal Zone full of interest. I spent one day in Havana and another in Santiago as I passed through Cuba. Havana is improving and will doubtless continue to improve, although the Cuban moves with the leisure which characterizes the tropics. The sewage system so badly needed is still "under consideration." The new administration has re-instated the lottery which President Palma refused to sanction. This is a great mistake; its influence is demoralizing and the small income derived from it by the government is infinitesimal when compared with the injury done to the population.

At Santiago I visited San Juan Hill—that part of "Fame's eternal camping ground" on which so many reputations were won. I was a little surprised at the diminutive appearance of a neighboring hill (named Kettle Hill because of two immense sugar kettles that are rusting to death there) which Colonel Roosevelt charged. I was surprised, I say, because it seems impossible that so much charging could have been done on so small an eminence. It is now owned by Mr. Tingley, the theosophist and will be included in the campus of the college.

The historic spots on San Juan are marked by monuments and a colored custodian supplies visitors with souvenirs of the battle fought there. I brought away an iron ramrod. It has a his-

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