

# The Challenge of Prohibition to College Students

By WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

["Young men and women, forget yourselves and attach yourselves to a great cause—among the greatest causes of this generation is the crusade against the saloon, against alcohol the greatest enemy man has today."]

The address by Hon. Wm. J. Bryan was the opening address of the convention on the afternoon of Thursday the 28th. The great audience which packed the auditorium to the limit accepted for themselves and for the college students of America the challenge of the present national prohibition movement which Mr. Bryan brought in his stirring address.—Intercollegiate Statesman.]

The college man exerts far more than an average influence upon the thought of the country. If you doubt it examine a list of the college graduates and compare the percentage of prominent men among them with the percentage of those who do not avail themselves of the opportunities offered by our colleges and universities. Any gathering of college men and women is, therefore, worth attending if one has a message to deliver.

## MEANING OF THIS CONVENTION

But this convention is made up of a select group of college students—men and women who by dedicating themselves to the work which your association has in hand has given proof of their freedom from an evil influence which can destroy the mind as well as the body. The delegates in attendance here are bound together by a strong and growing interest in an issue that is soon to be the dominant political issue in the nation—the prohibition issue.

I esteem it a privilege, therefore, to appear before you, to encourage you and to co-operate with you in your work.

It would be difficult to overestimate the influence which you delegates will be able to exert, first through the colleges from which you come, and then in that large sphere in which each of you will be a center of activity.

## TWO PHASES OF LIQUOR QUESTION

There are two phases of the liquor question. One deals with the habits of the individual and the other with legislation. I shall ask your attention to both phases, and we shall take up the most fundamental first, namely, the question of total abstinence.

I am more and more grateful as the years go by that I had impressed upon me in my youth a belief in total abstinence and in the signing of the pledge. I began signing when I was so young I can not remember my first pledge, and I have been signing ever since, and while I live I shall stand ready to sign with any one, at any time, and anywhere, a promise never to use intoxicating liquor as a beverage. If any of you doubt the value of a pledge, let me give you a part of the history of one pledge only little more than two years old.

## RESULT OF A PLEDGE

When I went home to vote at the election of 1914 I found that a neighbor had been drinking to excess. I asked him to sign the pledge with me and he consented to do so. I prepared the pledge in duplicate and we signed it together. It read:

"We, the undersigned, promise, God help us, never to use intoxicating liquor as a beverage."

I gave one copy to his wife and took the other with me back to Washington. As I approached Chicago I met a man who came out from Michigan with an invitation from the high school boys to address them at a meeting to be held near the end of the month at Ann Arbor. When I read the invitation I found that it began, "We, the undersigned." The fact that the first three words of the invitation were identical with the words used in the beginning of the pledge which I had in my pocket reminded me of the pledge, and I asked him whether there was any objection to my asking the boys to sign the pledge with me. He approved of the plan and I presented the pledge at the meeting. When a

large number of the boys indicated a willingness to sign it we circulated slips of paper containing the pledge and the boys took the slips home and obtained signatures. In a few weeks I received a book, one of the most precious ones in my library. It contains the names, ages and addresses of 8,200 high school boys in Michigan who signed the pledge with me. I learned soon afterward that these boys helped to make several counties dry, and last month they helped to make Michigan dry.

## MULTIPLIED 14,000 TIMES

Thus within three months' time that pledge had been multiplied 8,200 times. In the March following the pledge was presented at a great meeting in Philadelphia where 6,000 signed. Within six months the pledge had been multiplied more than 14,000 times. Soon after this Philadelphia meeting a lawyer of that city called to explain how in carrying out the pledge he found that his first convert was his own son, a student in the University of Pennsylvania.

## CASE AGAINST ALCOHOL

The case against alcohol is conclusive. The experience of the human race is all on one side. From the time when Daniel demanded a test, and when, the test being made, he established the superiority of water over wine, the evidence has been accumulating. You can take a hundred young men of equal promise in any country in the world, divide them into two groups and let fifty use alcohol and fifty abstain, and the fifty who do not use alcohol will take the prizes in the colleges and on the athletic field.

The government does not allow young men at Annapolis and at West Point to use alcohol while students there. Why? Because the government is interested in raising these young men to the maximum of efficiency, and alcohol impairs efficiency. How can any parent be less interested in a son than the government is in its wards?

## THE ECONOMIC WRONG

If alcohol injures the individual who uses it; if it reduces his capacity as a producer, and in addition menaces his morals, how can any community afford to permit the establishment of a saloon, that can not exist except as it lowers the physical, intellectual and moral standards of the community? We do not license men to spread disease among hogs. Why license them to spread disease among human beings? Why not raise man up to the hog level, and show as much interest in his welfare as we do in the health of our swine? Why license a saloon to make men drunk and then fine men for getting drunk? And why, when a saloon has made a man drunk, do we shut the victim up in the calaboose and leave the saloonkeeper free to intoxicate someone else? Why not compel the saloon to keep its drunkards in a cage behind a plate glass window until they sober up, so that the public can examine their handiwork and judge by the finished product the work that the saloon does? Why do we not compel the saloon to take care of the paupers, the criminals and the insane that graduate from it, as we compel stamp mills to take care of their tallings after they have extracted precious metal from the ore-bearing rock?

## THE MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

But the saloon is not only an economic wrong. It is a moral responsibility. Who is willing to become a partner with the liquor dealer, and share with him moral responsibility for the harm that he does? The saloon needs three things besides customers: First, capital to run the business; second, the liquor to sell, and third, the votes that permit the saloon to exist. And the votes are just as necessary as the capital or the liquor. The man who furnishes the capital receives a dividend or interest on his investment. The man who furnishes the liquor receives a profit on his product. What does the voter receive? He is a silent partner in the business. He draws no dividend, he receives no

profits; he simply has the disgrace of helping to create a business with which he is ashamed to have his name connected.

In addition to the knowledge that we have gained from science and from experience in our own country, we have the evidence furnished by the countries now at war. They have found that alcohol impairs their power to carry on war. Patriotism, that sentiment intangible, invisible, but eternal, which has led countless millions to offer themselves upon their country's altar, is no match for the appetite for alcohol. Allegiance to Bacchus and Barleycorn has been found superior to loyalty to King, Kaiser or Czar. The nations have been compelled to turn aside from war to fight a foe at home scarcely less deadly than the foe they meet upon the battlefield. Why not profit by their experience?

## THE COMING ISSUE

In a country like ours every issue becomes a party issue when it is ready for political action, because the value of the support of a party organization is everywhere recognized. A very considerable number of voters follow the party and support the platform. It is impossible, therefore, to keep the prohibition question out of politics when it really becomes an issue, and it has now become an issue. The question is not whether prohibition will enter politics. It is already in politics. The only question remaining is, which side will the parties take? There is only one side to a moral issue, and that is the moral side. No party can afford to champion the immoral side of any moral question.

Let me, therefore, advise you, young men, to take up the work in your respective parties. If you are democrats make it your business to use your influence within your party to put your party on the prohibition side in county, in state and in nation. If you are republicans, work in the republican party along the same line. I need not advise those who belong to the prohibition party, because with them prohibition is the central and controlling plank.

You will find that the politicians will dodge while dodging is good, but the same instinct of self-preservation that makes them dodge when they think dodging advantageous will make them take the prohibition side when the opponents of the saloon becomes as much in earnest as the representatives of the liquor traffic have always been.

From time to time crises arise in the political world, and these are the times when young men have an opportunity to come to the front. Old men are more apt to be timid than young men, and successful politicians are more apt to be timid than young men who are without entangling alliances.

For this reason every crisis brings into the arena of politics a new group of young and courageous men who are willing to risk their future on the righteousness of their cause. The prohibition question has already brought many new men into the arena of politics, and it will bring more.

Christ gave the world a great truth when He said: "He that saveth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life, for my sake, shall find it." This is an epitome of history. Those who think only of themselves lead little lives, but those who stand ready to give themselves for causes greater than themselves find a larger life than the life that they would have surrendered. Wendell Phillips presented the same thought in a little different language when he said: "How prudently most men sink into nameless graves, while now and then a few forget themselves in to immortality."

Young men and women, forget yourselves, and attach yourselves to a great cause. Among the great causes of this generation the greatest is the crusade against the saloon—against alcohol, the greatest enemy that mankind has today.

The objection is made to the plan of permitting the people to vote on the question of whether a nation shall enter war is that wars swoop suddenly down upon nations and are not matters that loom so far ahead that deliberate action thereon can be taken. The fact that there has not been a war in centuries where this is true, of course, does not enter into the discussion. Facts that interfere with jingo consideration do not enter into discussions where jingoes take part.