

Prohibition Legislation

[Abstract of address delivered by William Jennings Bryan before the Anti-Saloon League convention, Washington, D. C., Dec. 11, 1917.]

Before taking up legislation relating to the liquor question, allow me to say, by way of preface, that every enemy of the saloon should be a friend of woman suffrage and should do all in his power to secure the franchise for woman, for she is our greatest ally in the fight against alcohol. While some advocates of prohibition have not supported woman's suffrage and while some of the advocates of woman's suffrage have not supported prohibition, the vote on the two subjects is almost identical. At least seventy-five per cent of all the men who vote for one will vote for the other, and the per cent voting for both will in some places run to eighty or ninety per cent. Therefore, it is not out of place at an Anti-Saloon League meeting to urge the importance of an extension of suffrage to women in every state and by an amendment to the federal constitution. Woman's suffrage hastens prohibition, and prohibition ought to make woman's suffrage more certain.

Congress will have before it three propositions relating to the liquor traffic:

- (1)—The broadening of the law against advertising of intoxicating liquors.
- (2)—The suspension, during the war, of the manufacture of beer.
- (3)—The submission of a prohibition amendment to the federal constitution.

Let me spend a moment's time on the first and second propositions before taking up prohibition. It has recently been found that the law passed at the last session is not broad enough to prohibit the advertisement of beer and wine when the advertisement is of a general character without the mention of any particular brand of liquor. The law as it has been construed leaves the door open for wholesale subsidizing of the press, and advantage is already being taken of this construction. The brewers have entered upon an attempt to silence the press of the United States by advertising contracts which will be made with all the papers unscrupulous enough to accept the bribe.

The Detroit Times of November 28th contained a letter written by Mr. James Scherhorn, editor and owner of the paper, declining to enter into the advertising contract proposed, although three other prominent papers in Detroit have accepted the contract and published the first instalment which is a defense of the use of beer. The offer of five thousand lines of advertising matter at the regular rate is a very tempting offer, and the value of the advertising to the brewers is not in the conversions they expect to make, but in the silencing of the press, which will have a pecuniary reason for not speaking out against the beer crusade. I venture to suggest that a congress, which has in both houses a majority in favor of national prohibition, can hardly do less than broaden the law prohibiting the publication of advertising matter so as to include anything, no matter what its character, that is paid for by liquor interests and intended to affect either the use of intoxicating liquors or legislation on the subject.

Second. The arguments in favor of the suspension of the manufacture of beer during the war are conclusive.

The manufacturers of beer have been in the habit of using about twice as much of our foodstuffs as the distillers have been using in the making of whisky. If we need all the food grains for the table, as we certainly shall during the war, then if it is wise to prohibit the conversion of foodstuffs into whisky and thus save one-third, it is three times as wise to prohibit the manufacture of beer also and save the three-thirds. The order of the President reducing the alcoholic content in beer to three per cent and reducing by thirty per cent the amount of grain which the breweries can use, is a step in the right direction, but it does not preclude action by congress suspending entirely the manufacture of beer. On the contrary, it furnishes reason why congress should act. The President

went as far as he felt justified in going and was deterred from going farther only by the fear that the entire suspension of the manufacture of beer would divert beer drinkers to the use of whisky, of which there is a two-year supply on hand. But congress need not be deterred by any such fear because congress can, in the same law, prevent the consumption of whisky and other strong drinks now on hand.

Third. Submission of the prohibition amendment is by far the most important question before congress affecting the liquor traffic. If it were necessary to make a trade, the advocates of national prohibition might well exchange legislation on all other phases of the liquor question for votes necessary to submit national prohibition.

The arguments in favor of prohibition may, for convenience, be divided into three classes, viz., economic reasons, moral reasons and patriotic reasons.

The economic reasons show conclusively that the use of alcoholic liquors, even in moderation, lessen physical, mental and moral efficiency, impair productive power, shorten the life expectancy, and increase accidents and injuries, not to speak of the acknowledged effect of alcohol in producing crime, pauperism and insanity.

The moral reasons are also conclusive. The saloon is the center of vice and sin. It is a menace to the morals of a community. Over the doorway of the saloon might well be written, "Leave hope behind who enter here."

The saloon can not exist without votes, and those who, by their votes, bring it into existence or continue its life can not escape moral responsibility for the harm it does. The citizen of a community who votes for the license of saloons in his town is the moral partner of the liquor dealer, and must share with the saloon keeper moral responsibility for all the evil done by the saloon which his vote helped to bring into existence.

And the responsibility of the legislator is no less than the responsibility of the individual voter. We have reached the crisis in the fight against the saloon. Twenty-nine states have banished drinking places by constitutional provision or by statute, and six states will vote upon the question next year. Other states like Texas and Kentucky are trying to secure an opportunity to vote. Now an opportunity is offered to make the nation saloonless. This can be done by the adoption of an amendment to the federal constitution. The senate has already passed the necessary resolution by a vote of sixty-five to twenty-five—more than three to one. The vote is soon to be taken in the house. If two-thirds vote Yes, the question will be submitted to the states, and three-fourths of the states, by affirmative action, can make the amendment a part of our federal constitution. One vote in the house may determine the question. The man who votes no and thus throws his influence on the side of the continuation of the saloon can not escape moral responsibility if his vote helps to defeat the submission of the amendment.

But at this time the friends of the amendment are able to add patriotic arguments to the economic and moral arguments. The adoption of the amendment is the most effective way of saving for food the grains that might otherwise be converted into alcoholic liquors. The abolition of the liquor traffic will enable the nation to use one hundred per cent of its man power both in battle and in the field of industry. In this supreme moment we need to have our men at their best, whether they carry arms or produce food and ammunition for our soldiers.

Prohibition will not only strengthen those who fight and fall, but it will save from demoralization and for larger work at home those whose lives are spared.

Let me call your attention to an item of news that appeared in the press recently. The New York papers of Monday morning, the 3rd, carried long and detailed accounts of the arrests that were made at New Rochelle the Sunday night before. Conditions were described almost beyond relief. The bar rooms and dance halls were being conducted with a view to the ruin of

the soldiers and sailors who were drawn into them. This brazen assault upon our soldiers was being made on the very border of the nation's largest city, and the story was told by papers which have had no sympathy with the cause of prohibition. In other cities the authorities have been warned that army camps would be moved unless the municipalities compelled obedience to the laws made for the protection of soldiers.

But the most pathetic story comes from across the ocean. An American boy who went to fight under his country's flag in France has been court-martialed and hung by the American military authorities for assault upon, and murder of, a seven year old French girl. The government at Washington has approved of his execution. The excuse the boy gave was that he was under the influence of liquor. What supreme pathos in his fate! He goes to do a patriot's duty and ends his life upon the gallows as a penalty for a crime committed while he was drunk! And, yet, the man who for money furnished him the liquor that fired his blood is allowed to continue the infamous business of manufacturing criminals! Is it not time to lay the hand of the law upon the man higher up?

There are two arguments that ought to work powerfully in favor of submission of the prohibition amendment.

1. Nearly, if not all, the members of the house who are themselves opposed to prohibition, were in favor of the referendum when the District of Columbia bill was passed. And they were in favor of it in spite of the fact that there is no machinery in the district for the taking of a vote,—in spite of the fact that other questions, no matter of what magnitude, are not submitted to the voters of the district. Surely those who were anxious to give the people of the district a chance to vote on the saloon question can not refuse to give to the states of the nation an opportunity to vote upon the constitutional amendment. Every amendment which has been adopted is a precedent. What excuse can a man give for voting against the submission of the prohibition amendment after having voted for a referendum on saloons in the district?

But above and beyond all other arguments of a patriotic character is the argument that the submission of this amendment will help us to win the war,—not only by increasing the efficiency of both citizens and soldiers, but because it will declare to the world our faith in the democracy which we are trying to extend by the war.

The essence of democracy is the right of the people to rule, a right upon which the President has placed emphasis in his eloquent appeal to the German people. IT WILL STRENGTHEN US IN OUR FIGHT FOR DEMOCRACY ELSEWHERE TO RECOGNIZE THE CLAIMS OF DEMOCRACY HERE. More than a million men in uniform stand ready to give their lives for the promotion of democracy in Germany and Austria, and the people in the United States have already subscribed more than five billion dollars to support the government in its fight for democracy. In the light of what we are doing abroad, how can any member of congress oppose a resolution so thoroughly in harmony with the democratic spirit of our country and of the age as the resolution which submits to the states of the Union the question of making the saloon an outlaw in the land?

Democracy means the right of the people to rule and that rule is generally the rule of a majority. But in this case, we ask not that a majority shall have the right to decide the liquor question but that the majority shall have that right when it is supported—not by one-half of the states of the Union or by two-thirds of the states of the Union but by THREE-FOURTHS OF ALL THE STATES.

The hour has struck for the nation to act. Every reason that can move a human mind or heart can be summoned to the aid of this cause in which the home and the highest interests of our country and humanity are pitted against the breweries, the distilleries, and the saloons.

Over a hundred Nebraska farmers petitioned the state railway commission the other day asking its aid in securing cars with which to carry their 600,000 bushels of wheat to market. They have held this wheat for weeks, but their requests for cars were denied by the railroad. This is interesting in view of the fact that it was only a few weeks ago that big business was accusing the farmers of holding their wheat because of dissatisfaction over the government price guaranty.