

Reminiscences of a Wayfarer

Some of the Important Events of the Pioneer Days of Richardson County and Southeast Nebraska, as remembered by the writer, who has spent fifty-one years here.

The Evolution of The Sober Life.
"If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter; for he that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be higher than they."

Solomon was not only a preacher, but he was a philosopher as well, and was evidently a strong believer in what the great of the earth, in all times, have called manifest destiny. That, above the acts of men, whether in their individual or collective capacity, and whether good or bad, he, (or something,) that is higher than the highest, is steadily regarding, and in his own good time will right perverted justice in the provinces, (nations), and relieve the oppressions of the poor. This, according to my interpretations of the foregoing excerpt from a book of very great authority, is what the author intended should be understood. If it was true in that age, it is true in this, and has been true in every other. In this paper I propose to give the ordinary experience and observations of an ordinary wayfarer on the one journey we are all taking through the world, touching matter germane to the philosophical proposition of the Jewish savant.

It requires a long time for human kind to get out of an old rut. We are essentially a precedent loving race, and perhaps it is just as well. The reforms in human society and government that have been of great benefit, have had gradual in their inauguration and development. It must be remembered that the road from the mental and moral midnight of barbarism—man's original and first condition—has been a long and weary one. It took every year of the more than five thousand that history tells of, to produce one Shakespeare; and it took every hour of that long period to evolve the conditions that made him possible. The slow growth is the healthy and the permanent one—the forced and unnatural, the ephemeral and short-lived. Common observation discloses the fact that in plant life there are three stages in its growth: first in the root, second in the stem and third in the flower and fruit. The same is true of man's life.

His first growth is in stature, the second in breadth, till the physical house is built, and third, in mental and moral flower and fruit; and out of that flower and fruit has grown all the civil, moral and intellectual excellence of the race. But to attain its present high stage of development some element of its original barbarous origin had to be discarded from time to time, and with each slough of the kind, a step forward was made.

There is a good deal of the barbarian, the troglodyte, the cave dweller, and the wild man of the woods, lingering yet in the man civilized, in these opening years of the twentieth century; one trait in particular, the drink habit. It is as old as man's ability to produce an intoxicant, but sharp attention to its pernicious effects on men and society was not directed till about one hundred years ago. At that time, and for centuries before, the habit or custom among all classes of people of drinking liquor that would intoxicate, was as universal as man himself, except in Mohammedan countries, where the use of all intoxicants were inhibited by edict of the Prophet that no one dared disobey. I am discussing this question in its historical and sociological aspects only. Beyond that I will leave "Billy" Sunday and the press that favors the liquor traffic to fight it out among themselves.

Within the space of my own life, and the cycle is rapidly nearing completion, I have had occasion to know and to observe the practical effects of the liquor habit and traffic on individuals and upon society generally around me. My first recollection of the matter is, that drinking was the rule and total abstinence the exception. I have lived long enough to see that order reversed, and drinking become the exception, and sobriety the rule.

Let me give a fact or two. When I began the study of the law in the decade of 1850, I knew but one member of the bar, resident at Beards-town, or attending from elsewhere, who never had used intoxicating liquor as a beverage, and that solitary exception was Abraham Lincoln. From the judge on the bench to the lowest tipstaff in the court, everybody drank, and nobody seemed to think anything of it.

I am dealing with the phantoms of a dead time, and from out the shadows there comes before my mental vision pale ghosts of men I knew in the morning of my life, and in the heyday of their strong intellectual manhood and high professional stand-

ing at a bar second to none for ability in the family of the states—such as Robert S. Blackwell, Richard Yates, Jackson Grinshaw, Stephen A. Douglass, William A. Richardson (the man for whom our county was named), and many others of lesser note,—lawyers of the highest class—three of them distinguished senators, illustrious in history, another a law writer on a pioneer subject peculiar to the American states, and the forerunner of a new and distinct branch of our jurisprudence unknown to the common law, all slain in the day of their greatest usefulness by a social custom universally tolerated, if not entirely approved. Society can be as cruel as its members, but its offenses are those in which the whole body shares, and hence individual responsibility is not felt. The murderer dies on the scaffold; a jury has said he was guilty of taking human life, and the law has declared that he must die. I am a member of the community whose laws he has violated and being such have consented to the lex talionis; nevertheless, I feel in no way that I am responsible for his death. Why? Because the whole mass of the people have likewise consented, and are therefore involved, and responsibility thus diffused, becomes nil. And so of the social custom mentioned. It came down to us as an heritage from that far off race of robbers, gluttons and drunkards from whom we are descended.

Let me instance another fact of equal significance. My early recollection of the hospitable welcome extended to preachers of the gospel, included a decanter of whiskey, a sugar bowl and water, with which to compound what they called a toddy, and which the reverend gentlemen took with every demonstration of unctious satisfaction. There was never a word of condemnation of the practice, and I have heard older people say that they had seen more than one of those laborers in the vineyard go into the pulpit half seas over, which, in sailor phrase, means comfortably drunk, and preach the word with great power. I have little doubt of the power of one so situated, whatever I may think of the propriety of the performance.

Dr. Lyman Beecher signalized his great work of reform in this particular, early in the nineteenth century, by sobering up the preachers, and it

was finally accomplished, but it took some time.

Twenty-six years ago Bishop Thomas Bowman of the Methodist church came to our city to dedicate the church building of that society, and I had the pleasure of entertaining the eminent churchman during his stay. Among many other experiences of his long life as a preacher of the gospel, he told me that when he was a boy back in old Pennsylvania, "he had many a time seen the preacher in charge pitch horseshoes (a pastime in which our Gov. Mickey was pre-eminently a leading expert), with some of the lay members on Sunday morning to see who would pay for their morning drink of whiskey. "Billy" Sunday, when he was in the active, sin-committing business, could hardly have done worse than that. The world has moved since Bishop Bowman was a boy, and is moving now more rapidly than ever, and no man between the two great oceans is doing more to make it move in the right direction than this same "Billy" Sunday, who so mortally offended certain people of an uncertain moral make-up the other day. His offense is not so much that he reformed in his younger days, as it is for telling tales out of school, and for preaching the gospel of sober righteousness. It was well enough that he escaped the maelstrom of death and damnation himself, but he sins against the fetish of Falls City's majority, (the saloons) when he sounds the alarm to warn other fellows of their danger, for it is those same other fellows who are wanted for sacrifice to the aforesaid fetish. It is a fact tolerably well understood that Mr. Sunday offended nobody in his chautauqua address the other day but the fellows who voted the whiskey ticket at our city election last April.

Twenty-five hundred of the best men and women of this city and surrounding country heard Mr. Sunday last week, and this is what one of the papers in this city has to say about them. Mark well the language, for it was deliberately written, and is in no sense an accident or oversight: "The crowd likes anything 'rare.' They like to get as near the vulgar, the obscene and forbidden as the police or the chautauqua management will stand for. This accounts for the popularity of these nude performances. Nude—whether in manner of speech or from lack of drapery."

This gratuitous insult to that vast concourse of respectable men and women who filled the auditorium in the park and the grounds surrounding it, to hear Mr. Sunday on Tuesday of the chautauqua week, was published last Saturday in a newspaper in this city. It would be difficult to put a lower estimate on the morals

of a people than the editor of that paper has put on the people who heard Mr. Sunday.

In the first place the statement, as applied to that assemblage, is a gross slander, and as to Mr. Sunday, I assert what I, and two thousand other people know to be true, that Mr. Sunday uttered not a single word in all his nearly two hour address that would, or could offend the most fastidious in the matter of polite expression. What is said here is not intended as a defense of Mr. Sunday. He needs none from anybody. His place in this article is that of chief among the intellectual giants who for long years have been fighting a social monster, and fighting it to the death. This young man has presumably twenty years of active vigorous life before him. His effective work has just commenced. Like another reformed rake of eternal memory, the Apostle Paul, the cohorts of evil will do well to beware, for when the great God lets loose such men in this world, something is going to happen.

In the last but one of this series I told the story of the Meek-Davis, murders, in April 1860. That tragedy was directly caused by liquor. There was no necessity for a fight. Had both men been sober, the ebullition of the drunken fool who started the row by firing his pistol recklessly on the street, would have attracted no attention and nobody would have been hurt. But both Meek and Davis were largely under the influence of liquor themselves and it took but small provocation to start something, and their dance of death was soon over.

Only a few months before, two men from up on South fork west of Salem, had been to that town on some errand of business, and like many others before and since, filled up on whiskey and started home. On the road they got into a dispute about some trifling matter, and from the dispute they got into a quarrel and finally into a fight, in which one named Moran stabbed the other named Hudgins, and killed him. This was the work of liquor. They were friends and neighbors, but crazed by liquor they were savages, and murder was done.

Every murder done in this county for fifty years, except perhaps the Clifford-McWhorter killing, was wholly or in part, the result of intoxication. The same is said to be true of the country everywhere, but it is gratifying to know that changes for the better are constantly going on. Business has done more for sober citizenship than any other factor. Sobriety is the one first important qualification for any responsible business station. Public service corporation set the pace, and like a circle in the water, it grows wider as it goes.

There are people in the world who are said to be better than their religion, and the French are mentioned as being among them. I do not vouch for the truth of the assertion; on the contrary, I am free to say I do not believe it, yet a very distinguished writer of the last century, Henry Thomas Buckle, is authority for the statement. However that may be, I am very certain that some people—ours among them—are better than their laws, especially their fundamental law.

Our constitution is more like an act of legislation than anything else, for there is scarcely a provision in it that is not self executing, without legislative aid. For instance, it devotes all the money that arises from the saloon licenses to the support of the common schools in the district where the traffic is carried on. That is a direct bribe to every voter, as it tends to lessen—or he thinks it does—the burden of his taxes. While that provision remains in the constitution, it will always be difficult in any populous town or city to entirely eradicate the liquor business. The legislature cannot repeal it, and it is next to impossible to amend the constitution without violating it.


If the people could be polled, untrammelled by that constitutional bribe, there is little doubt but what the sale of liquor by authority of law would cease in this state,—I mean the whole people of the state.

In towns like our own, where they have an iron-clad whiskey majority, the hope of getting rid of the traffic is small indeed, but if the people outside, who are compelled to shoulder the burdens—or most of them—made necessary by it, were allowed a voice in saying whether the business should be licensed or not, there is every reason to believe that it would stop suddenly. That is the solution of the whole matter. When will our laws be so framed as to permit the practical test? Forty years ago last winter I helped to enact a law that closed the saloons in this state on every election day since, and no legislator has ever attempted its repeal. Another step was taken last winter, and saloons must now let up for eleven out of every twenty-four hours; and, that they will close some evening in the near future and never open any more, is just as certain as it is, that "He that is higher than the highest regardeth," and that "there be higher than they."

If your liver is sluggish and out of tone, and you feel dull, bilious, constipated, take a dose of Chamberlain's Stomach and Liver Tablets, tonight before retiring and you will feel all right in the morning. Sold by all druggists.

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A WHIFF OF ALDER BLOOM



It drifts in on the breezes from somewhere far away,
A scent of soothing savor that gladdens half the day—
A faint, elusive odor, a shadowy perfume;
There drifts in on the breezes a whiff of alder bloom.

And through its silent magic out of the past arise
The songs of olden summers, the blue of olden skies,
The dawns that broke in silver upon the distant heights,
The star-strewn depths of glory that made the olden nights.

With eyes half-closed I fancy I hear the little stream
Go leaping on and laughing with jewel-flash and gleam,
While over it the alders their snowy blooms have hung,
As though they caught in armfuls the pearly foam upflung.

The snowy alder blossoms! As delicate as lace,
And cool with scented comfort when pressed against the face!
A honey tag as heavy as Oriental musk
Swept from them through the shadows that crept in with the dusk.

And so I sit and fancy the old days have returned—
The olden golden summers for which my heart has yearned,
And memory is weaving upon her restless loom
A warp and woof of sweetness—a whiff of alder bloom.

When the digestion is all right, the action of the bowels regular, there is a natural craving and relish for food. When this is lacking you may know that you need a dose of Chamberlain's Stomach and Liver Tablets. They strengthen the digestive organs, improve the appetite and regulate the bowels. Sold by all druggists.



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