

# Prohibition the Ladder to Real Temperance Reform

Rev. William A. Wasson  
in Pearson's for August

Mr. Wasson is a clergyman of the Episcopal church. He thinks it a clergyman's duty to speak openly against any system which he believes to be a source of immorality and crime. Some folks say that it does not "look right" to be against prohibition. Mr. Wasson believes that no consideration of mere expediency should deter a clergyman from doing his duty. The object of a prohibition law is to lessen liquor drinking. Its effect seems just the opposite. Mr. Wasson has closely studied the matter for years and he explains here just what a prohibition law falls in its object. It does not overlook the evils of the saloon. He submits a plan for the regulation of the liquor traffic which will make for temperance. This article will enable any man to decide whether or not a prohibition law will be for the good of his own neighborhood.—Editor Pearson's Magazine.

**D**URING the decade immediately preceding the civil war, a great "temperance wave" swept over the country. Within a period of five years, eight states, viz., the six New England states, Michigan and Nebraska, adopted prohibition. New York, Indiana and Wisconsin also enacted prohibitory laws, which, however, never went into effect, having been declared unconstitutional by the highest courts in those states.

Now, again, after a lapse of fifty years, the country is witnessing another "temperance wave," which has already risen higher than its predecessor. Nor is the end yet in sight. While in some sections of the country, the "wave" has spent its force and appears to be receding, in other sections it is increasing in volume and strength. There are, at present, eight states in which prohibition is in effect, and four in the south, three in the west and one in New England. Under the local option system, a number of other states are being prohibited by the installment plan. Not long ago it was estimated that saloons were being closed at the rate of thirty a day—nearly 11,000 a year.

**Promises Beyond Performance.**  
The prohibition leaders boast that, while ten years ago there were only 6,000,000 people living in "dry" territory, there are now 23,000,000. If prohibition and temperance be the same thing, we are certainly making prodigious strides toward the millennium. But sober minded people have no faith in the professions and promises of prohibitionists. Fifty years ago the leaders of the crusade thought they were on the dawn of the perfect day, when there would not be a dram shop nor a drunkard in all the land. They were confident that the problem of temperance, which had perplexed and baffled mankind for thousands of years, was as good as solved. The great dragon was about to be slain and his dead carcass hurled into the bottomless pit. But it turned out to be all a dream. The dragon was not slain; he was not even seriously wounded. If he disappeared at all, it was only to hide himself in the cellar to await the passing of the storm. In the course of a few years, the "temperance wave" passed away, and the frenzy and hysteria that caused it, and was caused by it, died out.

The crusade not only did not solve the liquor problem, but it complicated the problem with new difficulties. The states that adopted the prohibition system soon found themselves confronted with two evils instead of one, the old disease of intemperance and the new "disease" of prohibition. And now, the successors of the men that rallied round the standard of Neal Dow are making precisely the same promises and predictions that were made of old. They assure us that the present movement means business. They prophesy that this wave will not subside until it has swept over every foot of American soil and has done to the "rum" traffic what Jehovah did to the Egyptians in the Red sea.

**At the Expense of Truth.**  
Prohibitionists have simplified the liquor problem at the expense of truth, reason and common experience. Instead of suiting the remedy to the disease, they have tried to make the disease conform to their predetermined remedy.

The liquor problem is one of the most complex of all social problems. It does not stand out alone, simple, distinct and isolated, as prohibitionists would have us believe. It is at once a moral, an economic, a physiological, a psychological and, in its final analysis, a purely personal problem. It contains many elements and involves many perplexing difficulties. When we look below the surface and study this problem in its deeper aspects, we find that its roots are inextricably intertwined with those of other social problems. So that genuine and thorough temperance reform must be conducted along many different lines. The liquor problem is not exclusively nor chiefly a legislative problem, and hence it cannot be solved by legislation alone. The evil of intemperance is not caused, though it may be aggravated, by bad legislation, and it cannot be removed, though it may be lessened, by good legislation. The main lines of temperance reform, the most potent agencies for the building up of moral character (and moral character is the basis of temperance in all things), lie wholly outside the scope of legislation. Legislation has, of course, its part to play—and a not unimportant part—in any comprehensive program of temperance reform; but when legislation encroaches on the domain of the church and the home, when it ventures to act as a substitute for purely social and moral agencies, it not only fails to accomplish any good, but causes the greatest harm. Speaking generally, the work that legislation can do in the temperance sphere is of a negative character—preventing and suppressing the evil—while work of a positive character must be done through other agencies. In undertaking temperance reform work along any line, we must learn to be patient, and to be modest in our expectations. We must bear in mind that temperance reform is very largely a matter of moral and social regulation.

**Abolition or Regulation.**  
Liquor legislation must necessarily follow one of two general policies. It may aim at the abolition of the liquor traffic, or at the regulation of the traffic. These two policies are extreme opposites at every point and in every feature. The object of one is to kill, that of the other is to cure. It is on this broad question of general policy that the people are divided today.

No legislative system has ever been more extensively nor fairly tested than that of prohibition. During the last sixty years it has been tried on the state-wide scale in many different sections of the country and under the most diverse social and political conditions, the periods of trial ranging from three years in Nebraska to fifty-three years in Vermont. By its record, by what it has done and by what it has not done, prohibition must be judged. On every page of that record, from beginning to end, are written the words failure, folly, fiasco. Nowhere and at no time, in all its history, has prohibition accomplished a single one of its avowed objects. Nowhere has it

abolished the liquor traffic; nowhere has it prevented the consumption of liquor nor lessened the evil of intemperance. Neither as a state-wide system nor under local option has prohibition ever made the slightest contribution toward the solution of the liquor problem. The one solitary service that it has rendered to society is that of furnishing warning example of the supreme folly of attempting to legislate virtue into men's lives.

There could be no stronger evidence of the failure of prohibition than the fact that seven of the eight states that adopted the system fifty years ago, have since abandoned it and gone back to the policy of license and regulation. The people of these states adopted prohibition in good faith. They honestly and earnestly desired to wipe out intemperance. They realized that intemperance was directly or indirectly the cause of much crime, poverty and disease; that it was a financial burden on the state; and that it was a hindrance to material prosperity and moral progress. They thought it was a better policy to abolish than to license and regulate a traffic that seemed to them to be the root and source of this evil. Now, to claim that prohibition was even measurably successful in these states, that it accomplished even a little good, is to insult the intelligence of the people of New England. No sensible person can believe that these seven states would have deliberately repudiated a system that they had adopted in high hopes and with high moral purpose, if they had found that that system was making for sobriety, prosperity and good citizenship.

**Significance of Prohibition.**  
In view of the fact that it is always easier to secure the enactment than the repeal of laws of a reputed moral purpose, the repudiation of prohibition by these states is all the more significant. The only conclusion consistent with reason and common sense is that the people, after years of bitter experience, found that they had built on false hopes, and that conditions were not only no better, but far worse under prohibition than they had been under the license system. It is also very significant that the states that were swept off their feet by the prohibition wave fifty years ago, are among those states that are being least affected by the present agitation. And even Maine, which is the only one of these states that has retained prohibition all these years, is actually showing unmistakable signs of genuine repentance. It is conceded on all sides that a decisive verdict against prohibition would have been rendered at the last state election in Maine, when prohibition was a prominent issue, if it had not been for the fact that it was a presidential year. Prohibition is generally least popular where it is least known.

If prohibition really prohibited, the fact ought to be reflected in the figures of the United States revenue department. But, according to the government reports, the use of alcoholic liquors actually increases with the spread of prohibition. In 1870, the year the anti-saloon league was organized, the per capita consumption of malt and spirituous liquors in the whole country was 5.6 and 1.4 gallons respectively. In 1890, when only 6,000,000 people were living under prohibition, the figures were 13.8 and 1.11. In 1907, when 23,000,000 people were living in "dry" territory, the figures had risen to the high-water mark, 22.9 and 1.58. The report of 1908 shows a decrease of about 10 per cent in spirituous liquors as compared with 1907, while the consumption of malt liquors was about the same. Both figures are, however, confronted with the remarkable fact that, when the prohibition wave had reached enormous proportions and was wiping out saloons at the rate of 11,000 a year, the American people consumed more liquor per capita than they did in any previous year since 1850, the year 1867 alone excepted.

**Conditions in Maine.**  
Now let us turn for a moment to our old friend, the state of Maine. That prohibition is a failure and a farce in that state is a matter of common knowledge. No one who is not a blind partisan will deny this. Four years ago, Governor Cobb, a sincere prohibitionist and an honest, outspoken man, declared, in his inaugural address, that the state ought to be ashamed of itself to have a prohibitory law on its books and to make that law a source of shame to the nation. And he insisted that, as a matter of common honesty, the law ought to be either enforced or repealed. Recorder Whelden of Portland recently declared: "There are at least 400 men and women who are brought before this court time and again for intoxication." Think of it, 400 habituals in a city from which the liquor traffic is supposed to have been banished sixty years ago. During four years, up to January 1, 1907, the liquor problem in Maine was solved on five streets and alleys, and at 442 different places; and 322 different persons were brought into court for violation of the liquor law.

The report of the committee of fifty, based on the most thorough and extensive investigation of conditions in Maine, is a whole story of the miserable failure of prohibition throughout the whole state. Every one that has traveled through Maine knows that there is not a town in the state where even a stranger, if he takes the side of prohibition, is not met with the liquor he wishes, such as it is, and in many places the stranger is waited on by some considerate person who asks him whether he would not like "something." The statistics relating to arrests for drunkenness, deaths from alcoholism in Maine all tell the same tale. They spell the word failure.

**Dreams in Georgia.**  
In response to the loud clamorings of the Anti-Saloon league, the legislature of Georgia enacted prohibition in 1906. It was a couple of years ago. The act went into effect January 1, 1908. For a short time, the new law seemed to have a good effect. Judging from surface indications, it looked as if prohibition might at last break its long record of failure and actually stop the sale of liquor. But, again, it was all a dream, and a very short dream. The drinkers adjusted themselves to the "dry" system, and were soon hobnobbing as openly and boldly as ever with the old bad boys. Saloons kept going from bad to worse, and before the year had been out the statute books a year, it was clearly evident to everybody that had even half an eye that prohibition in Georgia had broken down.

Here is the testimony of two of the prohibition leaders themselves. Mr. J. H. Helderly of Atlanta, an ardent prohibitionist, said last winter: "The legislature is afraid to stand by the very law which it enacted twelve months ago. Atlanta has become a laughing stock and a stench in the nostrils of the Anti-Saloon league. The good people, as he had been telling his people right along that he knew it to be a fact that the Almighty was on the side of prohibition. Assistant Superintendent Richards of the Anti-Saloon league, utters this wail: "Beer is sold here right and left, and I know it. You can get whisky, too; for what does it mean when twenty-seven carloads of beer and

whisky are shipped here?" Well, Brother Richards, it means, in the first place, that there are a good many thirsty people in Atlanta, and in the second place, that your prohibition is a failure. The leading prohibitionists speak in the same strain as the two just quoted. Conditions in Atlanta are a sample of those that obtain all over the state.

**Under Local Option.**  
Just a word about prohibition under the local option system. The writer is very familiar with the workings of prohibition in a number of the towns of the east end on Long Island, and from his own observation during the last seven years he can testify to the fact that in every one of these "dry" towns, prohibition has been a disgusting farce every time it has been tried. In the writer's own town the record of prohibition may be summed up in the admission of the local anti-saloon leader, that "anybody can get all the liquor he wants in this town under either license or no-license. That no-license is called to accomplish a good end on Long Island, and it is called to accomplish that at the elections, last spring, every town on the island was carried for license by a decisive majority. The Anti-Saloon league made the fight of its life, but it was of no use. The people knew all about the "blessings" of prohibition, and they concluded that they had had enough. The prohibitionists in every town, however, are, including conservative old East Hampton, which gave a majority for license for the first time in fifty years.

Many and various are the reasons why prohibition in this country has proved a failure. The following considerations will reveal a few of the more general reasons. Intemperance is not a mark of the east. Prohibition is an attempt to deprive men of what they believe to be an inherent right. The question of individual rights is the underlying issue in this whole controversy. Majority rule is, of course, a sound political principle, but it is obvious that the application of this principle must be confined within certain limits. If a majority has a right to say to a minority: "You shall not drink beer, another majority has the right to say to another minority: "You shall not drink tea. Now, if the people in any state or town should take it into their heads to enact a law prohibiting the use of tea, what a fearful blot it would put on the camp of the Women's Christian Temperance union, and what an unenviable job the officers would have in attempting to enforce such a law! "What, deprive us of our right to serve tea at our mothers' meetings and parlor soirees! Why, it's an outrage!" "Oh, but, good ladies, we, the majority, made up our mind of the better element, have thoroughly investigated this matter, and we have found that tea is very injurious. In fact, it's a poison. Look at the thousands of women that have gone down to tea-pot graves! Look at the army of innocent little children that have been left motherless," etc., etc. As a matter of fact, many experienced physicians believe that tea and coffee are quite as much injurious to the human system as alcohol. The "temperance" people will retort: "Yes; but there is a wide difference between beer and tea." Of course there is, and that is just why so many people prefer the beer. But there is no difference between the right to drink the one and right to drink the other, and in every instance, outside of Islam, while drunkards have been condemned, the moderate use of alcoholic beverages has been a common custom and has been regarded as the inherent right of the individual.

**Sanctioned by the Church.**  
The use of alcoholic liquors is and has always been considered not only legitimate but necessary to the maintenance of the social habits of civilized generations, and the most highly civilized, progressive and moral peoples. Moreover, prohibition passes condemnation on a great branch of industry that has been recognized throughout all ages as legitimate, an industry that has created a considerable and honorable religious orders of the Christian church have been and are today engaged. Prohibition necessarily fails because it makes no discrimination between use and abuse. It arbitrarily makes a legal crime of an act which is neither wrong in itself nor dangerous to the community, and it condemns the moderate use of liquor to excess, prohibition would compel a hundred temperate men to follow the rule of total abstinence. One man is lame and therefore all his neighbors must use crutches.

**Social Science View.**  
Again, prohibition has failed because it is wholly negative and destructive. You cannot remove an effect until you remove the cause. You cannot abolish the liquor traffic until you abolish the source of the traffic. It is not the liquor traffic that creates the demand for liquor; it is the demand for liquor that creates the traffic. And just so long as the demand continues, just so long will the supply of liquor be forthcoming in one way or another. The attempt to abolish the liquor traffic by prohibition is as futile as would be the attempt to dry up a river by building a dam on the banks of the river. The liquor problem, in its legislative aspects, is ever going to be solved, the solution must be found along the line of regulation, and the sooner we set our feet on the right path the sooner we shall reach the desired end.

**Regulation the Remedy.**  
Nothing is more certain than that every state and local community in which prohibition now obtains will ultimately have to return to the policy of regulation, and just so long as the prohibitory law remains on the statute books, just so long will the demand for liquor be forthcoming. Prohibition is like the quack doctor who cannot cure the patient himself and will not allow anybody else to take the case. The present hysterical crusade is itself an obstacle to reform even in places where the license law obtains. It is a drain on the moral energy of the community. It creates confusion, confusion and bitter strife. It attracts and leads astray many well-intentioned, but unthinking people, whose interest in moral reform and whose zeal and enthusiasm would, if directed, be of great value to the community. It becomes a blind faith in the power of prohibition to regenerate society, and they will listen to nothing else. If you suggest to them some proposition of reasonable reform, they fly off into a rage and denounce you as a traitor to the country and an enemy to religion.

**Rule or Rule Their Motto.**  
Prohibitionists not only refuse to support, but actively and bitterly fight against, every plan of excise reform that does not go to their extreme. It must be abolition or nothing; their motto is rule or ruin. In their blind zeal they actually rejoice in inquiry. The disreputable saloon is far more to their liking than the decent saloon, for the more disreputable the saloon the more ammunition for the campaign. If all saloons were made decent

and orderly, the bottom would soon drop out of the prohibition movement. Tell a prohibitionist that such and such a saloon is certainly a respectable place, and you arouse his fiercest anger. He would rather hear that a murder has been committed in one of the "hell holes." In his estimation the respectable saloon is the very worst kind, as it deceives and beguiles the unwary youth to his destruction.

The real character of the prohibition movement is thus seen in the way it reacts on the prohibitionists themselves. They throw truth and reason and experience to the winds, and often resort to the most contemptible and disgusting methods to reach their end. Some time ago, a traveling salesman who lives in a town in the middle west, was returning home from a trip. On arriving at his station, he noticed that the streets were filled with people. Making his way through the crowd, he discovered that a no-license parade was in progress. It was a long procession, made up of women and children. They carried banners and flags, and sang "temperance" songs. Every child wore a badge on which were the words, "Vote for us; we sound the alarm." At the end of the procession were several files of children dressed in rags and tatters. One of these, a boy, carried a huge banner. Printed on the banner, in large letters, were these words: "My father is a drunkard."

His friend, who happened to be in the crowd, and then happened to glance at the boy. Suddenly an expression of amazement came over his face, and, breaking through the crowd, he ran up to the ragged banner bearer and grasping him by the arm exclaimed: "My God, what are you doing here, my boy? It was this gentleman's father that had dressed up in these rags by the good 'temperance' women and sent out to carry this banner of shame and humiliation through the streets. This exhibition is a sample of the methods employed by prohibitionists to gain converts to their cause."

**Bribe and Vulgar Deception.**  
If these children really had drunken fathers, it was unspokeably brutal and they should make such use of them before the public. If the fathers were not drunkards, the whole thing was a cheap, theatrical performance deliberately intended to create a false impression on the public mind. And all this fraud and vulgarity in the name of temperance and religion.

Here is another example of the intemperate "temperance" of prohibitionists: A professor in one of our universities accepted an invitation to speak at a "temperance" rally in a church. In the course of his remarks he referred to the miracle at Cana, and expressed himself thus: "I have given this matter profound thought, and I wish to say to you that I have reached the conclusion that when Christ turned that water into wine he did what was wrong." Blind passion, wild fanaticism and bitter intolerance are the chief characteristics of the whole prohibition movement. It must be profound thought, and I wish to say to you that I have reached the conclusion that when Christ turned that water into wine he did what was wrong." Blind passion, wild fanaticism and bitter intolerance are the chief characteristics of the whole prohibition movement. 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