

Temperance Waves that Have Swept Over Washington

Stories of Past and Present Spasms of Reform that Have Left a Mark on the Moral and Social Life of the Nation's Capital—Part Played in Movement for Personal Sobriety by Some Men Who Have Loomed Big in American History.

By EDGAR C. SNYDER.

You and your family are respectfully invited to attend a congressional temperance meeting to be held at the hall of the house of representatives on Sunday evening, the 17th instant, at 7 o'clock to encourage by your presence the effort to stay the progress of the tide of intemperance which is now devastating the land.

That is the text of a document appertaining to the most striking episode in the social history of the congress of the United States. It is unofficial, but its importance as illustrative of the characters of some of our American political leaders will be recognized without any serious intellectual embarrassment. The meeting for which the invitation was extended took place duly and quite successfully. It was attended by an overflow crowd of members of both houses of congress, citizens of Washington and visitors to the national capital. The president of the senate presided and spoke at length. The speaker of the house, senators and representatives delivered earnest addresses, all of which aroused great enthusiasm. Many signed a pledge of total abstinence from all intoxicating beverages.

Should such an invitation be sent out at this time for a temperance or prohibition meeting in a hall of congress and result in having Vice President Marshall preside and speak and Speaker Champ Clark participate in the oratory, Washington and the rest of the country would take lively notice and want to know all about it.

The meeting for which the invitation was issued was held just about fifty years ago—February 17, 1867. The invitation bore the signatures of Speaker Schuyler Colfax of Indiana, Senators Samuel C. Pomeroy of Kansas, W. E. Dodge of Iowa, J. W. Patterson of New Hampshire and Richard Yates of Illinois.

No reference was made in the Washington press to this famous temperance meeting. It had not been foreshadowed in the printed news of the day, except such as was suggested in a five-line advertisement which appeared prior to the occasion in the Washington National Intelligencer. The proceedings of congress had long been reported minutely and exhaustively by the local press, as compared to the treatment they receive nowadays from that source, but social affairs were never in the least degree topics of publicity unless of unmistakable political significance, and then, like as not, in mystifying guise.

At that meeting of fifty years ago "to stay the progress of the tide of intemperance," is its secretary's report, which exists in pamphlet form in the library of congress, long before the assembling hour, as the reader is informed, the hall of the house and the galleries were filled with senators and representatives, their families and friends and visitors to the city, while hundreds, unable to get even standing space, were turned away.

The meeting was called to order by Senator Henry Wilson of Massachusetts, afterwards vice president, who, after prayer by the chaplain of the house, delivered a long address. Mr. Wilson stated that the meeting grew out of the determination of several members of congress to form a society "to put from us forever the fatal cup of intoxication. I bid you one and all welcome," he said, "on this occasion, which we humbly trust in the providence of Almighty God, will contribute toward correcting the multitudinous evils of drunkenness that in this age are sweeping over the land."

Representative Hiram Price of Iowa, the next speaker, devoted himself mainly to warning his hearers of the dangers exuding from the example of the "moderate drinker." A huge proportion of the drunkenness prevalent in the land he charged to the complacent indulgences of the "moderate drinker."

Representative Samuel McKee of Kentucky contributed the reflection that a most unhappy train of evils proceeded from the social allurements supplied in the all-round "good fellow" kind of man.

Judged by the frequent "laughter" and "applause" bracketed in the report the most interesting speech of the occasion was by Senator Richard Yates of Illinois, who, then in the prime of life, had long been prominent in the affairs of his state as a legislator and as its governor. He gave some of his personal experiences. He had been one of the "moderate drinkers," possibly one of the "good fellows," and again something else. He had known occasions when his most gentle indulgences had turned up unexpectedly a source of annoyance. It had subjected him to misrepresentation; it had flung upon his name a shadow it did not merit. But when he confessed there had come a time when he realized that for him one drink was enough, two were not enough, three were entirely insufficient and four were chaos. Then it was—and recently—he determined "never again to touch, taste or handle the unclean thing." Thinking of Katie and the children, he sat down and wrote his wife what he had done. The senator took a letter from his pocket and read:

Dear Richard: How beautiful is this morning! How bright the sun shines! How sweet the birds sing! How happy is my heart! I see the smile of God. He has answered the prayer. Always proud of your success—you have achieved a success which God and angels bless; you have conquered yourself. All who love you will aid you to keep the pledge. Love, dear boy. KATIE.

First Congressional Temperance Wave.

Many of that meeting of fifty years ago had forgotten, if they knew, that it was not the first temperance movement among congressmen. In one of the collections of miscellaneous pamphlets in the library of congress is a report of a meeting of the Congressional Total Abstinence society, held in the hall of the house February 24, 1842. But even that was not the first such organization or meeting of members interested in temperance. The Congressional Temperance society, the first of its kind, was organized in 1833, and its first meeting was held in the hall of the house February 24, 1834. Informal efforts were made among those who joined that of 1842 were such veteran public men as Senators Edmund G. Ross of Kansas, Lot M. Morrill of

Maine, Thomas W. Ferry of Michigan, A. H. Cragin of New Hampshire and Willard Saulsbury of Delaware; Representatives Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania, Oakes Ames of Massachusetts, George W. Julian and Columbus Delano of Indiana.

Dusty little pamphlets from remote corners of the library of congress furnish kindling for the only light shed on the views and sentiments of old-time members of congress respecting the drink evil, the means with which it was most desirable to combat it, whether by law and moral suasion or by law and law enforcement.

The 1834 meeting was called to order by Senator William Wilkins of Pennsylvania, asked to take the chair in the absence of Lewis Cass, secretary of war, who had been elected president of the society a year before while he was a member of the senate from Michigan. Chaplain W. H. Stockton of the house, according to the report, "addressed the assembly of grace." Then Walter Lowrie, a Pennsylvania Scotch-American, who had already been a senator from the state, read the first annual report of the society. This that it contained was loudly applauded.

"The frowns of public law have been pronounced against the vice and irregularities of intemperance for many long years, and in the result it is feared that the sanctions of penal enactment have tended only to aggravate the evil. When and where have fine and imprisonment arrested the progress or stayed the ravages of this remorseless scourge? While the statute books have been crowded with prohibitions and penalties to restrain from intemperance, and while the courts have faithfully enforced them, the evil itself has reached a magnitude so tremendous as not only to evince the feebleness of such means, but almost to drive every mind to despair of any deliverance by any agency. And never until the light of truth and the power of example were consecrated in the cause of temperance was any single ray of hope shed over this subject.

"In view of this influence, it may be profitable to remark that it is altogether persuasive. It approaches us with no weapons; it seeks all its attributes from judgment and conscience. It leaves the arena of penal discipline and harsh remedy and strives to prevail by such instruments as illustrate the energy of the human will, when it dare resolve and be steadfast in the promotion of its best interests.

"And well and nobly has the experiment succeeded. It has dried many fountains of intemperance. It has turned back a flood of evils and corrected a depraved public opinion. No cause has ever before so strikingly exhibited the unhappy influence of personal example. It has enlisted sympathy, encouraged hope and confidence and brought into exercise a formidable array of public sentiment, which has directed against the baneful social habit an uncompromising opposition."

Can any man in or out of congress of this day and generation compose as fine an exordium to a temperance address as that produced by those old boys at the time when the stars fell?

Some Temperance Orators.

As soon as Secretary Cass had completed his recitation of the annual report a series of speeches ensued. Attorney General B. F. Butler of New York, of President Andrew Jackson's cabinet, was the first speaker. He said the society was "one of the most useful and glorious institutions of the age and eminently worthy of the active support of every patriot and philanthropist." On this day, February 24, he said, temperance organizations were holding meetings in legislative halls in many of the states and in the British isles.

Senator William Hendricks of Indiana, in a speech following, stated that there were 6,000 temperance societies in existence in the United States.

Representative Henry Laurens Pinckney of South Carolina, to the text of a resolution by him condemning the use of ardent spirits in the navy, made a vigorous speech, in part of which he said:

"While the government has no authority to interfere, it has no right to encourage or increase intemperance by indirect premiums or direct temptation. In other words, it has no right to throw the weight of its influence and authority into the scale of intemperance, causing the community to regard it as a venial and harmless thing, which is not only not openly disapproved and reprobated by the legislature of the union, but actually encouraged by the policy and countenance of the government."

The speaker referred to the allowance of grog to sailors, for which, of course, an item of congressional appropriation was provided. He commended Secretary of War Cass for eliminating liquor from the army and was hopeful that Secretary Levi Woodbury would do the same for the navy.

Among the speakers at this meeting were Senators Samuel Bell of New Hampshire, Thomas Ewing of Ohio, Arnold Knautin of Delaware, Theodore Frelinghuysen of New Jersey, John Tipton of Indiana, and Felix Grundy of Tennessee; Representatives John Reed of Massachusetts, of then "father of the house," Daniel Wardell of New York, Elisha Whitteford of New Jersey, Eleutheros Cooke of Pennsylvania, William W. Ellsworth of Connecticut, one of two sons of Oliver Ellsworth; Lewis Condict of New Jersey and James M. Wayne of Georgia, subsequently many years a member of the United States supreme court.

Dr. Thomas Sewall, a practicing physician of Washington, delivered a scientific address in which he exposed the horrible example of ignorance and stupidity furnished by those who used ardent spirits freely as a beverage. The society voted to print and distribute his address. A few evenings later another meeting of the society was held in the senate chamber.

Especially notable is the fact that the use of the hall of the house for the first meeting of the Congressional Temperance society was obtained by a Kentucky colonel. That is distinctly recorded in the report of the occasion. It was Colonel Richard M. Johnson, perhaps the most genuine

colony Kentucky ever had, the great slayer of Tecumseh, the creator of American Indians.

Famous Pledge Signers.

Two of the most remarkable signers of the declaration of independence from the sway of King Alcohol were Daniel Webster and Thomas F. Marshall.

The New England statesman, compared as he had been to Demosthenes, unlike the Grecian, who was more than met expectations, was commonly known as one of our most splendidly convivial and capacious containers of diverse ardent beverages. Many a time since his day patriotism has among those inclining to the bubbling bowl received fresh inspiration with the repetition of the story that Dan Webster, when interrupted in his quaffings by irrelevant allusion to the national debt, put an end to the discussion by offering to pay off the obligation out of his own pocket.

But little less of a sensation was the news—circulated through the newspapers of the day, for they were saying nothing on the subject—that Tom Marshall had signed the pledge and was going to make a speech about it. Tom Marshall was a nephew of Chief Justice John Marshall and was widely known as a brilliant hustings performer, who was at his best on high bacchanalian occasions, for he was accounted an accomplished, consistent, sincere and sympathetic drinker. His speech on this particular occasion had been advertised and greatly helped to draw the crowd. He more than met expectations. After a few preliminary observations as to the purpose of the society, he launched into what his audience most desired, his handling of his own habits. He prefaced it by saying that he made his confessions as small as possible. He continued:

"I was one of your spreeing gentry. My spree began to crowd each other. My best friends feared they would run together. Perhaps after long intervals of total abstinence (sensation), perhaps something peculiar in my form, constitution of complexion may have presented the physical indications so usual in that terrible disease, which until temperance societies arose, was deemed incurable and resistless. Perhaps I nourished a vanity to believe that nature had endowed me with a versatility which enabled me to throw down and take up at pleasure any pursuit; and I chose to sport with the gift. Physicians tell us that at last temperance becomes not a voluntary habit but a disease, its victim cannot alone resist. I had not become fully the subject of that fiendish thirst, that horrible yearning after the distillation from the alembic of hell, scorching the throat and consuming the vital of the confirmed drunkard with fires kindled for eternity."

Declaring himself through the pledge he had taken forever free from a fate more terrible than death, he thus closed his speech:

"Sir, I would not exchange the physical sensation, the mere sense of an animal being which belongs to a man who totally refrains from all that can intoxicate the brain or derange the nervous structure, the elasticity with which he bounds from his couch in the morning, the sweet repose it yields him at night, the feeling with which he drinks in through his clear eyes the beauty and the grandeur of surrounding nature—say, sir, I would not exchange my conscious being as a strictly temperate man—the sense of renovated youth—the glad play with which my pulse beat healthful music, the bounding vivacity with which the life blood courses through every fiber of my frame—the communion high which my healthful ear and eye hold with all the gorgeous universe of God—the splendors of the morning, the softness of the evening sky, the bloom, the beauty and the verdure of the earth, the music of the air and the waters—with all the grand accessories and associations of external nature, recouped to the fine avenue of sense—no, sir; though poverty dogged me, though scorn pointed its slow finger at me as I passed, though want and destitution and every kind of earthly misery, save only crime, met my waking eye from day to day, not for the brightest and noblest wealth that every encircled a statesman's brow—not if some angel, commissioned from heaven, or rather some demon sent from hell, should come to test the resisting strength of virtuous resolution with all the wealth and all the honors the world could bestow—not for all that time and all that earth could give—would I cast from me this precious pledge of a liberated mind, this talisman against temptation, and plunge again into the dangers and terrors that once beset my path. So help me, heaven, sir, as I would spurn beneath my very feet all the gifts the universe could offer me, I would live and die, as I am, poor, but sober."

Early in his remarks, Mr. Marshall said something about the duty of temperate men in congress aiding their weak colleagues by themselves taking the pledge, plainly indicating Representative Henry A. Wise of Virginia, as one he had in mind for a distinguished exemplar.

Taking the floor when Mr. Marshall had done, Mr. Wise began by saying the gentleman from Kentucky was a glorious example of the triumph of the temperance cause; he was proof that the possession of genius and of the utmost excellence of physical powers, with the charm of all beauties, that dearest bind a man to society, were not strong enough to combat this seductive power of a vice which once it had seized a man the victim himself was the last to realize it.

"He will pardon me," said Mr. Wise, "if I say that when I first became acquainted with him, while I was struck with the greatness of his powers, both moral and physical, I mourned under the conviction that his possessor was in great danger, and I took the liberty to warn him."

Then thoroughly committing himself to pledge of total abstinence, Mr. Wise thus concluded:

"There is no danger that a man of lofty mind, a high-spirited, well-educated gentleman, will stoop to other vices which sink and degrade humanity. He would not lie, he would not steal; he is incapable of dishonor. Death itself could not drive him to the perpetration of baseness. Poverty, want, starvation may assail him; he is proof against them all. This vice of intemperance alone can drag

him down. Against it what genius can guard, what magnanimity shield us."

Among other notable speeches at the 1842 meeting was one by Senator Felix Grundy, eighteen years a senator from Tennessee and later attorney general of the United States. He said the object of this society was to make men sober, to keep them from destroying mind, body and soul; to render them effective agents in promoting the happiness of their families and the well-being of society. These objects were enough. Their accomplishment would be sufficient to fill the hearts of the philanthropists of every eye to overflowing. All beyond this was error. By attempting more they would weaken rather than strengthen the cause. "Let it be understood," said the senator, "that this society attaches to no religious sect or political party, that its labors are to benefit men without distinction by the promotion of virtue and sobriety. Politics and religion and elections should find no place in their proceedings."

Representative George N. Briggs of Ohio called attention to the comparative impotence of previous efforts to promote temperance among congressmen, such as the movement of 1834, which worked against the use of strong drink, but winked at wine; they denounced ardent spirits, but welcomed "the mocker wine as a friend," but which caused "sorrow and contentions and redness of eyes and wounds without cause." The wine drinkers were just like the cider brandy drinkers of Connecticut and the rum drinkers of Massachusetts. A sympathetic communication was read by the secretary from John Mitchell, president of the Washington Temperance society of Baltimore, which, it was stated, numbered "2,000 reformed drunkards."

First Word for Temperance.

There is none of the popular histories of the United States, or in any history of the people of the United States which treats of their social life in any respect mention of the fact that temperance had its advocates in the First congress.

The first champion in the federal congress of the cause of temperance was an Irishman-born, Representative Thomas Fitzsimmons of Pennsylvania. His word for it came about with consideration of the first article in the first schedule of duties as tentatively proposed by Representative James Madison of Virginia. The article was man. A blank space was left to be filled by the house after consideration. A lively debate at once occurred on the duty to be placed on imported rum. Fitzsimmons led the contenders for a high duty, and when Mr. Lawrence of New York objected that too high a duty would yield no revenue, the Pennsylvania member replied that if it were so high as to be prohibitory, so much the better. Lawrence said the high duty would be a temptation to smuggling. "It is an article of great consumption," he said, "and though not a necessary of life, yet it is in such general use that it may be expected to pay a considerable sum into our treasury, when others may not so certainly be relied upon."

"As the gentleman has said," pursued Fitzsimmons, "it is not an article of necessity, but of luxury in the most pernicious kind. It may be observed that lessening the consumption is not the object the committee has in view."

Mr. Madison said he would tax the article as high as would yield a collectable revenue. "I am sure," said he, "if we judge from what we have heard and seen in several parts of the union that this article should have imposed upon it a duty weighty indeed."

Speaking for the manufacturers of New England rum, who used molasses as an ingredient, on which a proportionate tax was proposed, Representative Goodhue of Massachusetts talked very like a present senator from New Jersey—Mr. James Martine.

"If the manufacturers of country rum," said Goodhue, "are to be devoted to certain ruin to mend the morals of others, let them be admonished to prepare themselves for the event; but in the way we are about to take, destruction comes on a sudden; they have not time to take refuge in any other employment whatsoever. If their situation will not operate to restrain the iron hand of policy, consider how immediately they are connected with the most essential interests of the union; and let me ask you if it is wise, if it is reconcilable to national prudence, to take measures subversive of their very existence? For I do contend that the very existence of the eastern state depends upon their navigation and fisheries, which will receive a deadly wound by an excessive impost upon the article before us."

Goodhue had eloquently argued the importance of maintaining the New England fisheries, whose products were exchanged for those of the rum-producing islands, notably Jamaica rum.

Intemperance Common in Republic.

Intemperance was no rare thing in the early days of the republic. The revolutionary government managed somehow out of its slender resources to supply the patriots at the front, and even at Valley Forge, with alcoholic spirits. Wine was in common use on the tables of the officially distinguished. William Maclay, senator from Pennsylvania in the First congress, kept a journal of the proceedings of the senate, which covered part of the period when the senate sat with closed doors and had no published account of its debates, and in this personal journal were sundry notes of the social aspect of his legislative experience. He told of taking dinner on two occasions with President Washington in New York, where the First congress met. The president had numerous guests at the first, and before the company dispersed, calling them by name, the president proposed a toast to each guest, which was drunk in turn. On the second dinner attended by Mr. Maclay he writes: "I was the first person with whom he drank a glass of wine."

The most thorough and intimate biographers of the first president narrating the current of social life at

Mount Vernon tell of the amply filled cellar and buffet, of a decanter for vinous liquids devised by General Washington, of the palpable fact that his home was the most visited private residence in the United States, perhaps more than that of any monarch of the old world; that he set before his guests a great variety of wines and spirits, imported and domestic, much of the latter products of his own estate under the direction of his own distiller. The story that he shipped a negro slave to Jamaica to be battered by a British skipper for a hoghead of rum is well authenticated. It is also remarked that while General Washington allowed a reasonable portion of alcoholic beverage to each of his slaves and hired men, he was rigidly intolerant of drunkenness.

When Washington Most Wicked.

Reverting to the period of the initial temperance movements among congressmen in Washington, an examination of contemporary publications and other evidences available in the archives of the library of congress show that Washington of today is almost a redeemed and disenthralled new Jerusalem compared to what it was almost about the first half of the last century. In those wild-ouats days of the capital city Washington must indeed have been a bad, bad town. A few months before the first meeting of the Congressional Temperance society, the Rev. J. H. Danforth preached a sermon at the Fourth Presbyterian church on Ninth street, which was published in pamphlet form, in which he stated that Washington, with a population of 20,000, was consuming 100,000 gallons of ardent spirits a year; that the city had 216 licensed drinking places, taverns and wholesale and retail shops, at

some of which any quantity could be bought on every day of the week, including Sunday. Whiskey was then sold at 50 cents a gallon. His figures indicate a consumption of five gallons of ardent spirits for every man, woman and child, and a "fountain of intemperance," or saloon for every ninety-two of the population. It was the day of duels, when horse races and cockfights were highly favored sports, when the slave auction block

was in vogue, when imprisonment for debt obtained, when the newspapers were filled with advertisements of run-away negro slaves and of lottery ticket vendors, when gamblers flourished mightily.

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