

## **"A Glimpse behind the Mask of Prohibition"** **by Percy Andreae**

*Prohibition Movement in its Broader Bearings upon Our Social, Commercial, and Religious Liberties.* (Chicago: Felix Mendelsohn, 1915) pp. 9-19

Somewhere in the Bible it is said: "If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off." I used to think the remedy somewhat radical. But to-day, being imbued with the wisdom of the prohibitionist, I have to acknowledge that, if the Bible in general, and that passage in it in particular, has a fault, it lies in its ultra-conservativeness. What? Merely cut off my own right hand if it offend me? What business have my neighbors to keep their right hands if I am not able to make mine behave itself? Off with the lot of them! Let there be no right hands; then I am certain that mine won't land me in trouble.

I have met many active prohibitionists, both in this and in other countries, all of them thoroughly in earnest. In some instances I have found that their allegiance to the cause of prohibition took its origin in the fact that some near relative or friend had succumbed to over-indulgence in liquor. In one or two cases the man himself had been a victim of this weakness, and had come to the conclusion, firstly that every one else was constituted as he was, and, therefore, liable to the same danger; and secondly, that unless every one were prevented from drinking, he would not be secure from the temptation to do so himself.

This is one class of prohibitionists. The other, and by far the larger class, is made up of religious zealots, to whom prohibition is a word having at bottom a far wider application than that which is generally attributed to it. The liquor question, if there really is such a question per se, is merely put forth by them as a means to an end, an incidental factor in a fight which has for its object the supremacy of a certain form of religious faith. The belief of many of these people is that the Creator frowns upon enjoyment of any and every kind, and that he has merely endowed us with certain desires and capacities for pleasure in order to give us an opportunity to please Him by resisting them. They are, of course, perfectly entitled to this belief, though some of us may consider it eccentric and somewhat in the nature of a libel on the Almighty. But are they privileged to force that belief on all their fellow beings? That, in substance, is the question that is involved in the present-day prohibition movement.

For it is all nonsense to suppose that because, perhaps, one in a hundred or so of human beings is too weak to resist the temptation of over-indulging in drink-or of over-indulging in anything else, for the matter of that--therefore all mankind is going to forego the right to indulge in that enjoyment in moderation. the leaders of the so-called prohibition movement know as well as you and I do that you can no more prevent an individual from taking a drink if he be so inclined than you can prevent him from scratching himself if he itches. They object to the existence of the saloon, not, bear in mind, to that of the badly conducted saloon, but to that of the well-regulated, decent saloon, and wherever they succeed in destroying the latter,

their object, which is the manifestation of their political power, is attained. That for every decent, well-ordered saloon they destroy, there springs up a dive, or speak-easy, or blind tiger, or whatever other name it may be known by, and the dispensing of drink continues as merrily as before, doesn't disturb them at all. They make the sale of liquor a crime, but steadily refuse to make its purchase and consumption an offense. Time and again the industries affected by this apparently senseless crusade have endeavored to have laws passed making dry territories really dry by providing for the punishment of the man who buys drink as well as the man who sells it. But every such attempt has been fiercely opposed by the prohibition leaders. And why? Because they know only too well that the first attempt to really prohibit drinking would put an end to their power forever. They know that 80 per cent of those who, partly by coercion, partly from sentiment, vote dry, are perfectly willing to restrict the right of the remaining 20 per cent to obtain drink, but that they are not willing to sacrifice that right for themselves.

And so the farce called prohibition goes on, and will continue to go on as long as it brings grist to the mill of the managers who are producing it. But the farce conceals something far more serious than that which is apparent to the public on the face of it. Prohibition is merely the title of the movement. Its real purpose is of a religious, sectarian character, and this applies not only to the movement in America, but to the same movement in England, a fact which, strangely enough, has rarely, if at all, been recognized by those who have dealt with the question in the public press.

If there is any one who doubts the truth of this statement, let me put this to him: How many Roman Catholics are prohibitionists? How many Jews, the most temperate race on earth, are to be found in the ranks of prohibition? Or Lutherans? Or German Protestants generally? What is the proportion of Episcopalians to that of Methodists, Baptists and Presbyterians, and the like, in the active prohibition army? The answer to these questions will, I venture to say, prove conclusively the assertion that the fight for prohibition is synonymous with the fight of a certain religious sect, or group of religious sects, for the supremacy of its ideas. In England it is the Nonconformists, which is in that country the generic name for the same sects, who are fighting the fight, and the suppression of liquor there is no more the ultimate end they have in view than it is here in America. It is the fads and restrictions that are part and parcel of their lugubrious notion of Godworship which they eventually hope to impose upon the rest of humanity; a Sunday without a smile, no games, no recreation, no pleasures, no music, card-playing tabooed, dancing anathematized, the beauties of art decried as impure—in short, this world reduced to a barren, forbidding wilderness in which we, its inhabitants, are to pass our time contemplating the joys of the next. Rather problematical joys, by the way, if we are to suppose we shall worship God in the next world in the same somber way as we are called upon by these worthies to do in this.

To my mind, and that of many others, the hearty, happy laugh of a human being on a sunny Sunday is music sweeter to the ears of that being's Creator than all the groaning and moanings, and misericordias that rise to heaven from the lips of those who would deprive us altogether of the faculty and the privilege of mirth. That some

overdo hilarity and become coarse and offensive, goes without saying. There are people without the sense of proportion or propriety in all matters. Yet none of us think of abolishing pleasures because a few do not know how to enjoy them in moderation and with decency, and become an offense to their neighbors.

The drink evil has existed from time immemorial, just as sexual excess has, and all other vices to which mankind is and always will be more or less prone, though less in proportion as education progresses and the benefits of civilization increased. Sexual excess, curiously enough, has never interested our hyper-religious friends, the prohibitionists, in anything like the degree that the vice of excessive drinking does. Perhaps this is because the best of us have our pet aversions and our pet weaknesses. Yet this particular vice has produced more evil results to the human race than all other vices combined, and, in spite of it, mankind, thanks not to prohibitive laws and restrictive legislation, but to the forward strides of knowledge and to patient and intelligent education, is to-day ten times sounder in body and healthier in mind than it ever was in the world's history.

Now, if the habit of drinking to excess were a growing one, as our prohibitionist friends claim that it is, we should to-day, instead of discussing this question with more or less intelligence, not be here at all to argue it; for the evil, such as it is, has existed for so many ages that, if it were as general and as contagious as is claimed, and its results as far-reaching as they are painted, the human race would have been destroyed by it long ago. Of course, the contrary is the case. The world has progressed in this as in all other respects. Compare, for instance, the drinking to-day with the drinking of a thousand years ago, nay, of only a hundred odd years ago, when a man, if he wanted to ape his so-called betters, did so by contriving to be carried to bed every night "drunk as a lord." Has that condition of affairs been altered by legislative measures restricting the right of the individual to control himself? No. It has been altered by that far greater power, the moral force of education and the good example which teaches mankind the very thing that prohibition would take from it: the virtue of self-control and moderation in all things.

And here we come to the vital distinction between the advocacy of temperance and the advocacy of prohibition. Temperance and self-control are convertible terms. Prohibition, or that which it implies, is the direct negation of the term self-control. In order to save the small percentage of men who are too weak to resist their animal desires, it aims to put chains on every man, the weak and the strong alike. And if this is proper in one respect, why not in all respects? Yet, what would one think of a proposition to keep all men locked up because a certain number have a propensity to steal? Theoretically, perhaps, all crime or vice could be stopped by chaining us all up as we chain up a wild animal, and only allowing us to take exercise under proper supervision and control. But while such a measure would check crime, it would not eliminate the criminal. It is true, some people are only kept from vice and crime by the fear of punishment. Is not, indeed, the basis of some men's religiousness nothing else but the fear of Divine punishment? The doctrines of certain religious denominations not entirely unknown in the prohibition camp make self-respect, which is the foundation of self-control and of all morality, a sin. They decry rather

than advocate it. They love to call themselves miserable, helpless sinners, cringing before the flaming sword, and it is the flaming sword, not the exercise of their own enlightened will, that keeps them within decent bounds. Yet has this fear of eternal punishment contributed one iota toward the intrinsic betterment of the human being? If it had, would so many of our Christian creeds have discarded it, admitting that it is the precepts of religion, not its dark and dire threats, that make men truly better and stronger within themselves to resist that which our self-respect teaches us is bad and harmful? The growth of self-respect in man, with its outward manifestation, self-control, is the growth of civilization. If we are to be allowed to exercise it no longer, it must die in us from want of nutrition, and men must become savages once more, fretting now at their chains, which they will break as inevitably as the sun will rise to-morrow and herald a new day.

I consider the danger which threatens civilized society from the growing power of a sect whose views on prohibition are merely an exemplification of their general low estimate of man's ability to rise to higher things -by his own volition to be of infinitely greater consequence than the danger that, in putting their narrow theories to the test, a few billions of invested property will be destroyed, a number of great wealth-producing industries wiped out, the rate of individual taxation largely increased, and a million or so of struggling wage earners doomed to face starvation. These latter considerations, of course, must appeal to every thinking man's but what are they compared with the greater questions involved? Already the government of our State, and indeed of a good many other States, has passed practically into the hands of a few preacher-politicians of a certain creed. With the machine they have built up, by appealing to the emotional weaknesses of the more or less unintelligent masses, they have lifted themselves on to a pedestal of power that has enabled them to dictate legislation or defeat it at their will, to usurp the functions of the governing head of the State and actually induce him to delegate to them the appointive powers vested in him by the Constitution. When a Governor elected by the popular vote admits, as was recently the case, that he can not appoint a man to one of the most important offices of the State without the indorsement of the irresponsible leader of a certain semi-religious movement, and when he submits to this same personage for correction and amendment his recommendation to the legislative body, there can scarcely be any doubt left in any reasonable mind as to the extent of the power wielded by this leader, or as to the uses he and those behind him intend putting it to.

And what does it all mean? It means that government by emotion is to be substituted for government by reason, and government by emotion, of which history affords many examples, is, according to the testimony of all ages, the most dangerous and pernicious of all forms of government. It has already crept into the legislative assemblies of most of the States of the Union, and is being craftily fostered by those who know how easily it can be made available for their purposes - purposes to the furtherance of which cool reason would never lend itself. Prohibition is but one of its fruits, and the hand that is plucking this fruit is the same hand of intolerance that drove forth certain of our forefathers from the land of their birth to seek the sheltering freedom of these shores.

What a strange reversal of conditions! The intolerants of a few hundred years ago are the upholders of liberty to-day, while those they once persecuted, having multiplied by grace of the very liberty that has so long sheltered them here, are now planning to impose the tyranny of their narrow creed upon the descendants of their persecutors of yore.

Let the greater public, which is, after all, the arbiter of the country's destinies, pause and ponder these things before they are allowed to progress too far. Prohibition, though it must callse, and is already causing, incalculable damage, may never succeed in this country; but that which is behind it, as the catapults and the cannon were behind the battering rams in the battles of olden days, is certain to succeed unless timely measures of prevention are resorted to; and if it does succeed, we shall witness the enthronement of a monarch in this land of liberty compared with whose autocracy the autocracy of the Russian Czar is a mere trifle.

The name of this monarch is Religious Intolerance.