

INTEMPERANCE IN NEW ENGLAND. HOW SHALL
WE TREAT IT?

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At a recent meeting, I laid before the Society a chart illustrative of certain cosmic and social laws regulating the prevalence of intemperance over the globe. I was enabled to prepare that chart after carefully analyzing the statements contained in a correspondence that had been carried on between the Massachusetts State Board of Health and many persons (American ministers and consuls accredited to and resident in foreign countries, and some private persons of well-known ability), upon the all-important question of the use and abuse of alcoholic drinks. The correspondence was published in the last year's report of the State Board of Health of Massachusetts.

While preparing the chart, I had frequent conversations with the Chief of the Police of Boston and with others upon the working of the Prohibitory and License laws in New England. I then received some rather significant facts from this city, and as they will illustrate the apparently imperfect influence hitherto produced by legislation upon the prevalence of the vice of intemperance, at least in a large city like Boston, I propose to speak of them in continuation of my previous communication. I am well aware that, strictly, according to our rules the subject should not be presented in this form to the Society. But the subject is of so much importance, and intemperance is so constantly thwarting the physician in his treatment of disease, that any paper having for its object the mitigation of this great evil can be never wholly out of order in any medical society.

There are thousands in New England who have an abhorrence of intoxication, and yet they do not assent to the doctrines of either of the great parties now contending for total abstinence or its extreme reverse, the general free sale and use, as a beverage, of every kind of intoxicating drink. These persons ask of both parties what they can do to stem the torrent of in-

temperance; and they get little satisfaction from either. I cannot hope to do much toward a better solution of the problem, but I propose to lay before the Society facts above alluded to, which were given me by the Chief of the Police of Boston. Afterwards I shall give some general views as to the position which, I think, this community should take upon the whole subject of intemperance in New England. We need, I think, some law to restrain unscrupulous men from selling all kinds of liquor to all persons, but we must have laws that can be thoroughly executed, not only in small towns and over a sparsely scattered population, but which will have a benign influence over our large cities. Hitherto we have not arrived at this desirable end; for, notwithstanding all efforts, whether by total abstinence or license laws, drunkenness has increased, at least among the lower classes, in the large centres of business. In proof of the truth of this statement, let us look candidly at documentary evidence, and evidence which cannot be gained. The Chief of the Police in this city writes in his last report the following words:—

"In looking over the comparative table of crime, one fact presents itself to the mind with peculiar force, and that is the alarming increase of the number of arrests for drunkenness." Of the 400,000 arrests during the last seventeen years, 225,000 were for drunkenness, besides some 28,000 "helped home for drunkenness," to say nothing of the 23,000 "assaults." "But the most startling feature is the steady increase of intemperance compared with the increase of the population." "Intemperance has increased in fourteen years one hundred and seventy-five per cent. in spite of law." In connection with this, it may be stated that I have seen tables prepared under the direction of chief of police, and from returns made by his subordinates, which indicate

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that the percentage of drunkenness and crime consequent on drunkenness was very large during the years 1861, '62 and '63, the first three years of the late war. During 1863 it was higher than in any year before or since that time. In general, it may be broadly stated that in 1854 the percentage to the whole population of those "helped home drunk," "arrested for drunkenness," or of "disturbances suppressed," almost all of which arose from intemperance, was 6.94; in 1863, it was 15.42, and in 1870, it was 12.01.

Again, it is a singular coincidence, to say the least, that in July, 1868, when the license law was in operation, there were *less arrests for drunkenness* than were made during either of the forty-eight months of the four years beginning Jan. 1866, and ending Dec. 31, 1869.* By dividing the months of the four years into classes, according to the prevalence of prohibition or of license law, we gain curiously significant and almost inexplicable results on taking the percentage of arrests for drunkenness to the whole population of the different years, which results are more clearly seen by the following table:—

Total number of Arrests for Drunkenness in Boston from June 1 to May 31, inclusive.

	Arrests.	Population.	Percent.	Law in force.
1866-7	5819	194,422	2.99	Prohibition.
1867-8	6085	195,654	3.09	Do.
1868-9	6817	230,988	2.95	License.
Last six months of 1869	4889	234,483	4.17	Prohibition.†

In other words, it seems to be a fact that, during the years when the license law prevailed, there were fewer arrests for drunkenness than previously under the prohibition law—and very much fewer than during the subsequent six months when prohibition was again in operation, with cider, it is true, allowed under certain restrictions. It is but right, however, to state that the annexation of Roxbury in 1868, whereby a large population, much of it rural, was added to the city, may have tended to lessen the percentage of that year.

While, therefore, it seems that neither prohibition nor license has had any real influence towards stemming this strong current of intemperance in Boston—still, in the estimation of many, a good effect has

* The Chief of Police informs me that, strictly speaking, until September, when licenses were first given out, there was neither prohibition nor license law in operation. The police, however, acted always under the same orders.

† Except cider under restrictions.

been produced in some of the smaller towns of the State, where the people have, by vote, decided that no liquor shall be sold. Such towns have occasionally become real asylums for the salvation of drunkards, who have risen to a proper self-respect and have determined to give up the use of intoxicating drinks, but fear that they cannot withstand the temptations of a large city. Judge Pitman, in his letter accepting a nomination for the office of Governor, states that to a certain degree similar results have been arrived at in New Bedford. But even there, from all that I can learn, there are many secret ways, whereby liquor can be obtained by those who wish it. There are no *open* bars, but it cannot, I think, be denied that there are *secret* ones in that city.* Again, in some towns, where there are large manufacturing establishments, and in which there are foreigners working, the same results occur. In some towns, the citizens have voted to sustain the Prohibitory law in its entirety and in town meeting have decided not to allow any liquor to be sold; nevertheless, in these very places it can be bought at every corner. For example, in two of the medium-sized townships of New England, intelligent physicians, long residents therein, and both of whom deeply deplored the existence of intemperance, told me a short time ago that drunkenness was never more rife than when, apparently, the Prohibitory law was in full force. One of them related this as an undoubted fact. In the other town another informant told me that apothecaries who, a few years ago, were prosecuted when selling, as they believed, for medicinal purposes and with the most honest intent, could now sell as they pleased, even under the "enforcement" (!) of the Prohibitory law. I say enforcement, but as above stated, although the citizens of the town have voted that the law should be enforced, the selectmen do not in fact carry out that public vote, and the mass of the citizens *virtually* say "Amen."

Surely, there never was a greater attempt of a whole people to hoodwink itself, as it were. Such promulgation of law, and at the same time such utter and open, daily and, I might say, hourly contempt for it, tend to lower the political morality of each citizen consenting thereto, to corrupt the whole community, and, in fact, to bring *all* law into less repute among the masses of

* Correspondents in whose honor and truthfulness and means of information I have entire faith, assure me of this being a true statement of matters at New Bedford.

the people. Nothing, surely, can be more fatal to the best interest of a republic than such a state of things, however caused.

The following fact also illustrates the results of prohibition in a large city:—

A gentleman, intimately connected with a large pauper hospital, informs me that whereas many were formerly brought in drunk, in consequence of liquor bought and used at the dram-shop, quite as many, if not more drunkards are brought in now, while prohibition is in force, but that each man has his own whiskey-bottle in his coat-pocket.

During a recent professional visit which I made to the eastern part of Maine, I asked of many persons at some stations where the train was stopped, and the uniform answer given was, "Liquor can always be obtained by any one who wishes for it." At one, at least, of the stations, ale was openly sold at open bars. One informant stated, while admitting the fact of the utter disrespect paid to the law, that he thought, although it was violated everywhere, the people would never grant a License law. I believe many thoughtful persons agree with him. Some claim, and, as I think, justly, that the State has no right to license, for money, the perpetration of any vice. To "license" one to sell all kinds of liquor is virtually licensing to do what will promote intemperance, that is increase a gross vice.

Thus we may say that, although in New England the law appears to be enforced in some places with tolerable success, so far as the open sale is concerned, it is not enforced at all in others. I doubt if anyone will contend that it prevents anywhere the obtaining of liquor by those who are determined to have it. Meanwhile, as we learn from Boston that when there was the least law there were least arrests for drunkenness, and when some relaxation of the law allowed the use of milder liquors there was less intoxication than before, we have a right to ask whether similar results would not follow further relaxation, and whether the permission to sell light ales and beer, and light wines would not, under certain very general rules, really be a promotion of temperance.

As the Prohibitory law has thus failed of success, because the people do not sustain it, and, moreover, as no License law for the sale of liquor, has, as yet, commended itself to our citizens as being the best course possible, it remains to be seen whether some better plan may not be devised. I feel sure that the only foundation for our

course in this matter is in as profound a study as we can make of the natural laws of the propagation of intoxication throughout the globe. That investigation I have made elsewhere as I have already hinted.*

Generally it may be stated that from letters received from several correspondents resident in foreign countries, already alluded to in the beginning of this paper, I have been able to present some proof of the existence of great cosmic and social laws governing the vice of intemperance. The result of my investigations and my thoughts upon the subject may be summarily stated in the following propositions:—

First. Stimulants of some kind are found to exist and to be used at times to excess in every quarter of the globe.† To use stimulants, therefore, seems to be one of the strongest of human instincts. As such it cannot be prohibited, any more than we can annihilate any other instinct. We can only curb it by reason or by law, if it transgresses the bounds of social life.

Second. Intemperance is very rare between the isothermal lines of 77° F. north, and south of the equatorial isothermal line of 82.4. It gradually increases on going northward (and southward probably), between 77 N. and S. and 50° isothermal lines, which is the area for the natural growth of the grapevine. It becomes very rife above 50°, and, moreover, it is of a coarser, more brutal character than in either of the two previously named areas.

Third. Intemperance produces little or no crime at the equatorial area, rarely in the middle area; whereas it is the great provocative of crime above 50 F.

Fourth. Race has immense influence on the prevalence of intemperance. For example, the English race has entailed on this nation the incubus of two centuries of drunkenness, inherited from one generation to another. England now overshadows Ceylon in the tropics, and Australia in the grape region, with these same habits, thus overriding all climatic law, at least for a time, till reason and conscience and wise laws can restrain it.

Fifth. In Europe and in the other grape-growing areas of the earth, mild wines are used freely from babyhood to old age, and they do not seem to produce a nation of drunkards.

Sixth.—Similar remarks may be made on lager beer and its effects.

* Vide Third Report of the State Board of Health. Boston. 1872.

† It is true that Commodore Wilkes states that he did find one set of savages which had no stimulating drink.

Seventh. On the contrary, ardent spirits dwarf intellectually, morally and physically the nation that uses them to excess.

Eighth. Hence we should not classify all liquors as equally prejudicial to man. On the contrary, admitting a human instinct, we should allow the reasonable and free use of some stimulants and discourage the use of others.

Ninth. We should in this country cultivate everywhere the grapevine and permit the use of lager bier. We should open our ports to a free trade in mild, "unfortified" European wines, at least until we can make sufficient of our own to satisfy the necessities of our people.

Tenth. We should do everything we can to restrain the use of ardent spirits as a beverage, by moral suasion and if need be by stringent law. We should close "grogs-shops."

Eleventh. Moral suasion and education in the horrors of intemperance, too much neglected of late, I fear, in our pursuit of law as a prevention of intemperance, should be inculcated.

Twelfth. Inebriate asylums should be established for the reformation of dipsomaniacs, and repeated drunkenness should be punished as a crime.

Thirteenth. The seller of liquor to a known drunkard should be signally punished, and the offender should be made to pay the expenses of crimes or injuries resulting from the intemperance of his victim.

Fourteenth. All adulterations of liquor should be punished signally and promptly as a high crime against society.

Fifteenth, and finally, it would be the greatest blessing to this community if by large coöperative work by capitalists, Holy Tree Coffee Houses could be everywhere opened. In these good food and good coffee and tea could be prepared cheaply for the people. These could be placed side by side by the two thousand grogs-shops that now disgrace our city. Our correspondence proves that a great gain for temperance would be the result of such a movement.