

(December 14, 1908.)

The Right and Wrong of the Prohibition Movement.

BY PROF. HUGH MUENSTERBERG.

ADDRESSING the Canadian Club on the foregoing topic Professor Hugo Muensterberg, the eminent psychologist, educator and author, of Harvard University, said:

Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Canadian Club,—Since your chairman invited me to speak to you this afternoon on the topic chosen—that of prohibition—I have learned that you have some alcoholic problems before you in a political campaign which is now being waged in your city. I think that is unfortunate for me. Let me illustrate. Only three days ago, I think it was, a Chicago newspaper reporter came to get an interview from me in connection with a criminal case which had been attracting some attention. I begged to be excused. He persisted. "But I do not know the facts," I explained. "Oh, that doesn't matter," was his prompt reply. "We know the facts. We want from you only an opinion." (Laughter.) Well, that's the way it must be in your case, too. I know nothing of the Toronto situation, and I want to be understood that I do not touch it by a single word I say. I am speaking upon the subject entirely as it presents itself to the people of the United States.

Perhaps I may say at the outset that I have given the alcohol question much attention from a scientific point of view for the past twenty years, both in Germany and at Harvard. It is a serious scientific and psychological problem. I have been studying it in the laboratory and from the psychotherapeutic point of view. I have experimented with the influence of alcohol on the human system and have tried to cure drunkards. The problem has always been near to me. It is not nearly so new as some of our campaigners would make it. The first edicts against intemperance and the saloon were issued by the Emperor of China about 3,000 years before Christ. But I fear they must have been ineffectual. (Laughter.)

But you have a time limit and I must make this discussion short. Where are we standing on the alcoholic problem? To get at the root of the matter let us remove what is not open to discussion and deal only with those phases that are open to discussion.

First, then, I think we all recognize that the intemperate use of alcohol is perhaps the greatest source of poverty and misery in the world. Its evils are incalculable. It is the greatest source of poverty and crime, the greatest source of disease and of mental disturbance, of idiocy and depravity in the next generation that the world ever knew. To deny these statements is to close our eyes to the facts. The way from the saloon to the hospital and the penitentiary is a broad one. The immoderate use of alcohol ruins thousands of homes and hundreds of thousands of beings every year. There is not the slightest doubt that diseases of the liver, the stomach and the heart, and the essential source of modern insanity lies in alcoholism.

Add another fact. The saloon is the most dangerous centre of corruption and a vehement factor in the degradation of politics, and a high school for the violation of the law. Alcohol, even in moderate use, is a menace for every child, for every one of abnormal mental status or unbalanced brain, and for a large number of individuals in any community.

This, then, all lies outside of discussion. To claim that the intemperate use of alcohol is harmless is unworthy of any thinking man who has his eyes open to the fact. The question that lies open to discussion is—what is the safest and wisest way to overcome these dangers? How can we reduce the great harm done without introducing new evils?

There are two answers possible. One is radical prohibition; the other the slow educational reform of immoderate drinking by the moderate use of light alcoholic beverages. After twenty years of study and the treatment of drunkards my conviction is that for the United States the only safe way was not by prohibition. At the same time it is my sincere conviction that the saloon, the bar-room and the treating system ought to go absolutely.

But there are dangers from total prohibition not less than from the abuse of alcohol. During the recent campaign by the prohibitionists my position was challenged. I was accused of making false statements, but, during the discussion, not an argument was brought forward to change my views on this point. In the United States prohibition means an education

in the violation of the law. There is no greater danger than a constant disrespect of law. Much of the turmoil of recent years, from the fight against the trusts down to the smaller agitations which have troubled America are due to habitual disrespect for law.

We must deal with men as they are; we must take cognizance of the deep physiological desires. Prohibition has swept over two-thirds of the country. The idea is to make a law against the desire of a great multitude. The man who never takes alcohol, the scholar who does not care for it, does not mind, but we have no right to generalize from particular cases, and overlook the needs of the laborer, whose physiological condition is different, and to prohibit the satisfaction of a deep physiological desire. Personally I was brought up in a temperance household and have not touched a glass of beer in twenty years, but I have no right to generalize from a special organization, and no right to overlook the needs of hard-working laborers. The female organism does not require the kind of stimulants that such men need, and women have no right to generalize for men.

It is not wise to set up a standard thus. There are men who have an inherent desire for certain stimulants. It may be all very well to institute prohibitory laws and the surface appearance may at first be deceiving, but if one rules beneath the surface one will find the results are very disappointing. Wherever prohibition obtains light wines disappear and the more compact, but harder, liquors, containing the much larger percentage of alcohol, become apparent. The social and moderate drinker gives way to the lonely drinker, and the consequences are always disastrous.

Under prohibition there is no supervision of the drinks that are offered. The desire for the stimulant has not been eliminated and, however stringent, the restriction leads to the person with the craving seeking a substitute. In the Southern climes, where the wave of prohibition has obtained, the drug habit has become a grave menace, and the use of cocaine and morphine is growing alarming. To close the saloon and open the drug store is to devastate and ruin society. If no sale of alcohol and drugs is permitted, gambling, betting, sexual over-indulgence and perversion and the satisfaction of the lower instincts always occur. The emotional drying-up of the population is another result not desirable for a healthy nation.

Prohibition has the simplicity of superficiality, which attracts many, just as religion is replaced by spiritualism, medicine by Christian Science, political economy by socialism and philosophy by pragmatism for many people. It appeals to the emotions and finds great favor with women and children and others who do not think seriously on the subject. It is a well-known fact that the adoption of prohibition into any section leads to a reaction which means a much more alarming degree of intemperance than ever obtained before the imposition of restrictive laws.

There are not a few who believe that the most moderate use of light alcoholic beverages is dangerous to everyone. While I am free to admit that alcohol is never a food, I do not know of a single fact which indicates that small moderate doses of alcohol are dangerous to the normal adult. I emphasize adult, because even small quantities of alcohol are dangerous for children; and normal, because for certain psychopathic conditions alcohol is dangerous. Doses that might ruin some will stimulate other brains to production. I know a New York writer who cannot write a page of his brilliant books without the stimulant of alcohol.

The brain is influenced by a small dose. There is a certain inhibition or suppression of some cells so that under the influence of alcohol they do not work with the same activity. The kind of rest thus induced of certain brain centres is not dangerous. If anything was destroyed there would be danger, but after over-exertion periods of rest akin to sleep are needed, and where there is no opportunity for the enjoyment of art, no absence of rush, such relief may be desirable.

The only argument against the moderate use of light alcoholic beverages is that American recklessness would not stop there. This is unworthy of the nation. The true reform will be in the education of the national will, which can not be done by the removal of the temptation. If there is no training of the will there will be no moderation in any craving, and intemperance in alcohol will extend other drugs, to gambling, crime, sexual desire. What a man had before his mind would fascinate him if he had not learned control.

The conservative middle way to true reform is the slow education to self-mastery. Gentlemen, I thank you.