Temperance Problem By Dr. S. S. Hepbron

OF STILL POND, MD.

MORE WILLING TO ENDURE THE ILLS WE HAVE, THAN BE IN TOO GREAT HASTE TO FLEE TO THOSE WE KNOW NOT OF---NO LAW OF MAN OR GOD STRICTLY OBSERVED.

Mrs. Wm. T. Brown
Chestertown, Md.
My dear Mrs. Brown,

Your letter was received by me today. In it, you asked if I am interested enough in temperance work, to write an article on the subject, to come out in the county paper an Saturday March 21st.

I have been a life long, tetotaler, I have earnestly tried, never to be a fanatic on any subject, fortunately for me, when about nine years of age, I pledged my Father, that I would not smoke or drink, until I was twenty-one years of age. He had put down his paper, taken down his old clay pipe and prepared for a smoke. My brother and I took our stand by him for our evening talk. I asked him what good there was in smoking, Any how, "None at all" said he, "and if you boys will promise me, not to smoke, chew, drink whiskey or play cards until you are twenty one, I will give each of you a handsome gold watch, when you are of age.' We readily agreed.

The promise on both sides, was faithfully kept. In my case is still in force. It has never been violated except by medical advice.

You have intimated that you would like for me to say how the old saloon system compares with the present times. Personally, I am more of a Prohibitionist now than ever in my life, Governor Ritchie, notwithstanding.

Prohibition is by no means a perfect cure, for drunkeness and no man made system ever will be, but to my mind, notwithstanding the opposition with which it meets it has done much and great good.

Of course some one will say, Oh! he is an old clergyman, short-sighted and full of prejudice. The man who differs with us is always prejudiced. That is so, the world over on all subjects. I have not lived in the world and mixed up with all classes of people in their homes and on the street for 80 or more years with out getting some experience and being able to form some opinions, of my own.

Local Option, failed sadly, to accomplish its purpose. Kent County went for it, Baltimore city did not. The daily boats, always came over well loaded with jugs. On my return from Va. after alengthy absence I had quite a long talk with the clerk on the boat a boyhood friend. I said to him you seem to be progressing,"Yes was his reply," You know Kent has gone for Local Option. I am with one or two whiskey men in the city and I keep quite a number of men in the county supplied with liquor. I have bought a 10,000 dollar home and have a good bank account. I said to him,"your father was a good old Methodist Class leader. Does his spirit ever haunt you?"

At Buck Neck, where I was to land I saw a deck hand standing with arms folded and looking with some amusement at a lot of perhaps 20 jugs, that he had placed there in order for the landing. A tall slender demijohn, had been placed in the center and a fat pussy one by its side. These were surrounded by the others, grading down in size. I said to him, "You seem to have all the jug family there. Yes sir there is the Papa jug, the Mamma jug and all the little jugses."

My son was to cast his first vote and I stood in the ranks with him. Local Option was an issue, before that community. No word had ever passed between us on the subject, up to that time. As we stood there waiting to vote I said to him, "Boy how are you going to vote on this liquor question?" I don't know said he, "How will you vote', my reply was, "I am not wonderfully pleased with the working of Local Option, but it is to my mind a step in the right direction. As a minister of the Gospel it gives me an opportunity to declare my opposition to one of the greatest curses, on the face of the earth," I hope you will not cast your firs vote for it." He said, "I will follow your example."

That boy has long since passed over the "River." My heart now swells with tender comfort, that I set him a wholesome example.

You have asked me to draw a comparison between now and formally when but few restrictions were placed upon the sale of liquor. As I stated before I do not look upon prohibition by any means as an ideal system. Give me something better and I will take hold of it with all my heart. We are, as it were, an army in an enemy's country; our fortification may be weak. It would be worse than foolish to tear them down until we get some that are stronger.

Prohibiion has a great deal laid at its door for which to my mind it is by no means responsible. Wiley politicians have made use of it to put forward their purposes. They have appealed invariably to the weakest side of human nature. The Pros may be weak and blind in their zeal, for it, but can the Cons claim for themselves, that their prejudice and self interest has not rendered them equally weak and blind.

It curtails my liberties, says one, and he works himself up into a rage over the fact that he is no longer a free man, to get drink if he pleases to beat up his wife and children and to spend his money as he sees fit.

Liberty! Think of it. There is not a free man in this whole United States. A country that claims to be the "Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave." Society has to have laws for its preservation. Some of them are galling. All are restricting.

The time was, when I could take down from its rack my old muzzle loading gun, go out on my farm and shoot what I pleased, any time I wanted to or join some friends down on East Neck Island and shoot ducks geese or swan, if they were to be found. But now, I must pay for a license and am restricted as to the season.

The time was, when I could hook up Selim to my buggy for which I paid no license and go where I pleased and as I pleased with out a road cop, supervising my actions. I could come to Chestertown and drive up in front of any store I saw fit,, turn around any where it suited me. Now the man has to pay for the privilege of riding in his own car and must observe certain rules, or pay the penalty.

Yet, no body is making a special kick. It is good for society and so one and all of us yield as best we can.

Here is a law good for society, and there are millions antagonizing it bitterly because it curtails their liberties. I am told by many, that the law is not being observed. No law of God or man ever has been strictly observed, in the history of the world. There would be no need of a police force, if the spirit to obey were as strong as the spirit to disobey.

Time and again I am told that the boys and girls are drinking more than ever. I am from Missouri on that line. No doubt it is to the front more than before. So are bare legs and cigarette smoking. The times have made many changes in the conduct of people, that are to men of my type, more than objectionable. The daily papers, are far more zealous to report evil than good. Every report gets the coloring of the writer.

To satisfy myself, I have written out a list of 31 men of my early manhood. Men whom I knew well and associated with, most of them, were good men, but not angels. I have run over that list time and again endeavoring to be honest with them, sixteen drank to excess, ten drank moderately and five were total abstainers.

I had another party to make up a list of thirty, from another part of the county, not telling him why I wanted it. He did so. It is a list of Kent County's best men at the time forty or more years ago, most all of them, have written their history. He gave them almost a clear bill. He intimated that most of them indulged in a measure, when at parties and men's gatherings. I knew most of them well, The older ones better than he did. I am unable to give them as free a bill of clearance, as he did. I know human nature well enough to make this assertion that any man who drinks even moderately is on dangerous ground. He will slip up some time when with bad companions.

I sat by the bed side of an old friend in Va. less than two months ago. He had been a free liver, was nearly 80 years of age. He had never been a member of church. He asked it was pronounced to be? I said No. me if I thought prohibition the curse What do you think of it. He was a bitter anti Cannonite, said, "I agree with you. There is not half the drunkenness here that there was in my boyhood and early manhood days when you lived here."

I then told him of an experience of some two years previous. It was on the day before Christmas Eve. I received a telegram to this effect from near Richmond Va. "Fent dropped dead at the road gate today. Funeral tomorrow at 12, I want you, sadly" It was from the wife of one of my dearest friends. I buried that day one who had never been able to control his appetite for strong drink. I hastened to Tolchester and took the late boat for Baltimore. My mind was dwelling much upon the sad failure of him whom I had just buried.

Here was Christmas Eve, when I expected to see some one under the influence of drink. I paraded that boat but failed to see any body, who gave any sign of drinking. Surely I said I will see some one on Light St. as there used to be in saloon days. Twenty minutes wait for a car failed to bring the man in sight, if he was about. At the Union Station I had to wait an hour for a train to Washington. I took my seat where I could see every train load that went out or came in. I think some 2000 or more people passed me. I failed to see any sign of any one staggering along or smell any fumes of liquor.

In Washington I missed the last train to Richmond until 6 A. M. the next morning. I was unwilling to search up a hotel and pay nearly a dollar an hour for a bed. I camped right there in the waiting room, determined to look out for a drunk. At five A. M. I went to an all night Greek restaurant for breakfast. Surely I said to my self I will find the man here, This is Christmas Eve I failed again.

This to me was a wonderful experience. I had seen at least 10,000 people Christmas Eve and not a drunk. A great change has come over the traveling public. I could not help being impressed.

Now my dear Mrs. Brown I have written longer than you requested, or than I intended. I have been an oyster on this subject for good reasons. I am glad that you have called me out of my shell.

There are those who will criticise me unmercifully. I have formed my opinions after due anl deliberate consideration. I have seen the evils of strong drink. Time and again I have sat by the bedside of men that I have staid by until I have enabled them to stand on their feet and it has moved me deeply to listen to their shame-faced confessions of weakness. Time and again have I said those sad last words "Earth to earth and Dust to dust" over men who would have been Princes among men, but for strong drink. I am ready to back any movement that in any measure gives a hope of relief. For the present I am more willing to endure the ills we have, than be in too great haste to flee to those we know not of.

Yours sincerely
S. S. Hepburn

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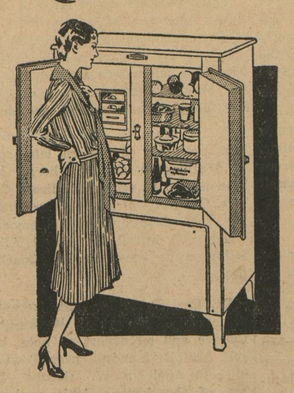

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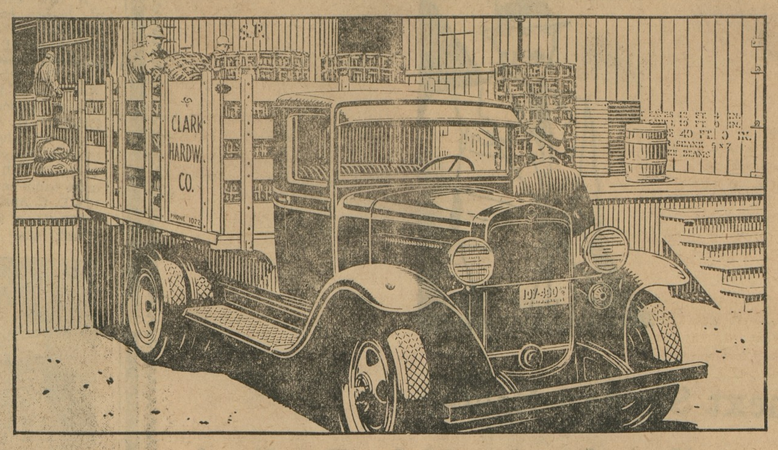

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