
Temperance

by Eugene V. Debs

Unsigned editorial in *Locomotive Firemen's Monthly Magazine*,
vol. 3, no. 6 (June 1879), pg. 177.

Through countless ages gone by, the use of intoxicating liquors has been a bane and curse to humanity. As early as 1639, when our fair land was scarce better than a trackless forest, the people who had settled here to seek a home upon American soil became debauched and depraved from the use of stimulants, to such an extent that it was found necessary by the authorities of Massachusetts and Connecticut to establish laws restraining and prohibiting the use thereof. From that time until the present moment every effort which human ingenuity could devise has been made to suppress intemperance; yet, we must confess, much to our humiliation, that but little headway has been made. Wherever we go throughout our country we can see the victims of this dreadful evil. The half-clothed sot, with pale and emaciated countenance, staggering along the street, the most pitiable sight one can imagine, has become an object so common that he does not even excite our attention, much less our compassion. I have often looked at a besotted remnant of mortality whom I had known in earlier years, and then turning from him after a few moments reflection, I could not help but say to myself — “What a respected citizen he might have been had he not fallen a victim to intemperance.”

When we think of the families that have been wrecked, the deaths by delirium tremens, and the suicides that are recorded, the women and children who have been driven into the streets from homes made desolate by the husbands and fathers of debauchery, and then consider that intemperance is the foster-parent of nearly all this misery and wretchedness, we grow impatient for the coming of that day, however far distant it may be, when the human family will have grown sublime enough to firmly withstand all of the temptations that issue from the enticing wine-cup. How often do we see a young man starting out upon his journey through life, with prospects as bright as the rays of the morning sun; he is happy and prosperous, has a good

business, and a large circle of friends. Time passes along, he gets married, has a cheerful little home, and he is soon the husband and father of a magnificent family. Everything goes well for a while, and all is joy about his homestead. It is soon noticed, however, that through custom acquired from one of his friends, he steps across the street occasionally and for “companions sake” takes a social glass. Here now comes the turning point. It soon becomes an established habit with him to take “a little something” when the time comes. In a little while he “nips” a little oftener, and is always promptly on hand at the proper time. He is now a “moderate drinker.” Dare any man advocate even moderate drinking?

Let us take an imaginary glance at the future. Ten years have elapsed. When we left our good friend he enjoyed and partook of stimulants, to a moderate degree only. Let us see what effect it has had. We take a stroll up street with the intention of calling upon our old associate. We pause at his shop door, but find upon inquiry that he as been superseded these five years past. We look at each other amazed for a moment, then ask, “What has become of him?” The answer is, “Gone to a drunkard’s grave two years ago. He took to drinking, got worse every day, tried without success to quit, neglected his family shamefully; finally all his property was sold, his wife and children turned into the street, and he, like many of the victims of drunkenness went down to a grave of shame, wet with the tears of a mourning family of beggars.”

My friends, this illustration is not overdrawn. Men equally as firm as yourselves have said: “We can drink moderately without drinking to excess,” and then in the course of time became perpetual drunkards.

Have the manhood to say “No” when you are asked to pour a liquid into your stomach that transforms a man into a beast.

Your mission on earth is to cultivate the attributes with which God possessed you, and you should seek to do so rather than degenerate them unto the low and groveling passions of the brute creation.

Edited by Tim Davenport

1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR · February 2017 · Non-commercial reproduction permitted.
First Edition.