

WHY WAS NATIONAL PROHIBITION ENACTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA?

(By ARCHBISHOP REDWOOD.)

What caused the enactment of legislation making mandatory National Prohibition? Did the American people desire National Prohibition? No. The average man in the street and the above-the-average citizen were against it. They thought it humbug and an incentive to hypocrisy and even worse evils. They felt that it was less an attempt to amend the United States Constitution than an endeavor to amend human nature, and they knew quite well that that was an impossibility by mere legal means. Nor were the average citizens alone against Prohibition. Against it were powerful bodies who viewed it as a direct menace to their rightful existence, and a detriment to the normal continuance and growth of their country. And their opposition to it was all the more emphatic because it was to be enforced by constitutional enactments. Against it were also the great religious bodies—except the Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians—because it carried a potential danger to the sacramental rite. Again, the Labor unions opposed it, as a drastic interference with a right whose exercise should not be curtailed without their consent. The taxpayer dreaded by it the loss of revenue on the one hand, and, on the other, the increased cost of government; and he also viewed it as a futile attempt to hinder the illegal manufacture, distribution, and consumption of intoxicating liquors. Finally, the newspapers opposed it on the ground that Prohibition by Federal law was wholly unnecessary, because the individual States had full and complete powers to regulate or prohibit the sale of liquor. These facts being so, why were the 44 States so eager to ratify the Federal Amendment?

Two negative causes helped to make Prohibition possible. The first negative cause was the saloon and its horrors of long standing. It had been repeatedly warned, but declined either to read the writing on the wall or to heed it. The saloon-keeper brought the house down on his own head. He still blindly hoped in his political power, which had sunk in the great tide of public opinion against the saloon. The second negative cause was the indifference of the people at large. As every experienced citizen knows, the basic characteristic of a democracy is the spirit of "let-Harry-do-it." People wake up only when hurt, and thus too late. In a constitutional nation the majority rule *theoretically*, but, in fact, a militant and determined minority generally gets what it wants, especially in a land like America, where noise and bluster count for so much, and consequently a few can and do override the many. Thus the saloon element and popular indifference were the main causes that helped in a negative way the ratification of Prohibition.

The *positive* dominant influence was the incessant and insidious work of those forces typified by the Anti-Saloon League. Shrewd, persistent, blatant, bold, its members set an ideal before them, made it their gospel, and used every means, fair and foul, to achieve it. They stood out in word and action as the only true custodians of the nation's morality, and like the Pharisees they alone had virtue. They assumed to dictate the country's moral code. They were the self-appointed Moses to lead the American people out of bondage to a

promised land. Like all other bigots, they were intolerant to anybody who did not agree with them, and branded their opponents as corrupt and immoral.

But, whatever their demerits, they were the most practical hypocrites ever seen in America. Close students of human nature, they understood that the average legislator's desire is to swim with the current, to be ahead of the next fellow in supplying what the people seem to want. With this conviction, the Anti-Saloon League set about creating in the mind of the legislator an "atmosphere" of Prohibition, to convince him that the people in his district really demanded Prohibition. Their psychological work was conducted with consummate skill. Accordingly, they deluged the legislator with letters, telegrams, Press clippings, pamphlets, and matter of all sorts calculated to persuade him that his constituents desired and demanded Prohibition. They went further: they threatened that, if he opposed Prohibition, they would go into his district and do their utmost to break him for ever. And, in many cases, they carried out their threats. By grossly unfair means (witness their most disgraceful abuse of fair-play regarding Cardinal Gibbons) they entered into political fights solely for the purpose of defeating the man they could not control. They riddled with concentrated barrage some particular person until he was removed as a factor against them. It is obvious, therefore, that it is due to the Anti-Saloon League, with other minor contributing causes, that the Eighteenth Amendment was ratified. They knew, on the one hand, the great indifference of the people at large, and, on the other, they worked on the susceptibility of the legislators. It is a far easier task to change the mind of 100 representatives than that of millions of people. Hence they opposed a referendum to the people. A legislator is a very human person, whose greatest desire is success as a means to continue in office. He is therefore most susceptible to what he deems the wishes of his constituents. The daily and hourly receipt of heaps of letters and telegrams demanding the enactment of certain legislation goes far to make him believe that so insistent a demand is real and universal. Add to this the snowball tendency of public officials to be in the "van," and you have some of the most potent reasons why the amendment was ratified and Prohibition inflicted, without referendum, on the American people.

Prohibition is upon them, but, be sure of this, the battle is only just begun. Wait till the legislation framed to introduce and enforce Prohibition begins to operate. Can that legislation be carried out? That is very doubtful. The odds are against it; a mighty revulsion of public opinion is to be expected; and then we shall see . . . what we shall see.

There is one flower necessary in the garden of life; it is the flower of faith. Where this heavenly plant grows not, many other flowers wither away quickly, especially the flower of true happiness.—*Monsignor Landriot.*

There is nothing sweeter in the world than to be forgotten, except by those who love us and whom we love. The rest bring us more trouble than joy; and when we have accomplished our task, dug our furrow, be it great or small, the happiest thing is to disappear.—*Lacordaire.*

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