

THE FATHER OF PROHIBITION

BY HERBERT ASBURY

A VAST number of holy men have been given credit for starting the series of miracles that finally brought forth the Eighteenth Amendment, but the real father of Prohibition in this country was Francis Asbury, the first Methodist Bishop to be consecrated in the United States, and for many years almost the sole proprietor of American Methodism. There was no organized temperance movement when he arrived from England in the latter part of 1771, and little or no discussion of the subject in pious circles, for the clergymen of the period held to the curious view that the regulation of the liquor traffic was solely a matter for the civil authorities, and that salvation and abstinence did not necessarily go hand-in-hand. But from the beginning of his American ministry Asbury was the inveterate foe of the Rum Demon, although he himself occasionally drank ale "for my health." He was the first preacher on the continent to inaugurate a serious and concerted attack on John Barleycorn, and under his instructions and leadership the Methodists were the first sect to make drinking a matter of concern to the Lord. This primary linking of God and Prohibition occurred in 1780, twenty-eight years before the first temperance society was organized at Saratoga, N. Y., and twenty-four years before the birth of Neal Dow, who is generally hailed as the father of the movement because he procured the passage of the Maine law in 1851. At a conference called by Asbury in Baltimore, dominated by him and attended by the preachers of the Northern Methodist circuits, the following minute was presented and adopted:

Question 23. Do we disapprove of the practice of distilling grain into liquor? Shall we disown our friends who will not renounce the practice?

Answer. Yes.

Immediately before and after the Revolution there was much drinking everywhere in the country; it is quite likely that, in proportion to population, almost as much hard liquor was consumed as is now drunk under Prohibition. Good whisky was regarded as one of the blessings of God, to be used accordingly; it was considered a preventive of disease, and a necessary adjunct to decent social intercourse. "From my earliest recollection drinking drams, in family and social circles, was considered harmless and allowable socially," wrote Peter Cartwright, a celebrated Methodist circuit rider. "It was almost universally the custom for preachers, in common with all others, to take drams, and if a man would not have it in his family for his harvest, his house-raising, his log-rollings, weddings and so on, he was considered parsimonious and unsociable, and many, even professors of Christianity, would not help a man if he did not have spirits and treat the company. I recollect, at an early age, at a court time in Springfield, Tennessee, to have seen and heard a very popular Baptist preacher, who was evidently intoxicated, drinking the health of the company in what he called the health the Devil drank to a dead hog. I have often seen it carried and used freely at large baptizings, where the ordinance was administered by immersion."

Asbury's first American sermon, in Philadelphia on the night of his arrival, is said to have contained a denunciation

of whisky; and thereafter he continually preached against it, and made frequent mention in his Journals of the wide-spread evil of drunkenness. "This is the prime curse of the United States," he wrote, "and will be, I fear much, the ruin of all that is excellent in morals and government among them." He implored the Lord to "interpose Thine arm," which the Lord, as everyone knows, eventually did, employing first Neal Dow, then Carrie Nation and finally the Anti-Saloon League, Wayne B. Wheeler, General Smedley Butler, and company. Much of the divine authority has now passed into the hands of the Methodist Board of Temperance, Prohibition and Public Morals.

By compelling conferences to enact rules against spirituous liquors, by procuring the insertion of a prohibitory section in the first Methodist Discipline, and by insisting upon a literal obedience to the general rule of the Wesleyan societies against drams except in case of illness, Asbury forced the itinerants to aid him in his campaign. But they did not always practice what they preached, and it was many years before the great body of Methodist preachers acquired the holiness, so far as liquor was concerned, that is now so characteristic of them. The local preachers and exhorters were, in particular, a constant thorn in Asbury's side; they continued to distil and drink liquor and to sell drams, ignoring warnings and denunciations. Even threats of eternal damnation did not reconcile them to the invasion of their liberty. Asbury finally found it necessary to expel many of them, as well as a large number of lay members, and the itinerants were instructed to examine both with great care at the regular class and society meetings. Cartwright gives this account of one such examination which resulted in the expulsion of a local preacher on an East Tennessee circuit:

In examining the leader of the class I, among many other questions, asked him if he drank drams. He promptly answered me, No, he did not.

"Brother," said I, "why do you not?" He hesitated; but I insisted that he should tell the reason why he did not.

"Well, brother," said he, "if I must tell the reason why I do not drink drams, it is because I think it is wrong to do so."

"That's right, brother," said I; "speak it out; for it is altogether wrong for a Christian; and a class-leader should set a better example to the class he leads, and to all others."

When I came to the local preacher, I said, "Brother W., do you drink drams?"

"Yes," said he.

"What is your particular reason for drinking drams?" I asked him.

"Because it makes me feel well," he answered.

"You drink till you feel it, do you?" said I.

"Certainly," said he.

"Well, how much do you drink at a time?"

He replied, gruffly, that he never measured it.

"Brother, how often do you drink in a day?"

"Just when I feel like it, if I can get it."

"Well, brother, there are complaints that you drink too often and too much; and the Saturday before my next appointment here you must meet a committee of local preachers at ten o'clock, to investigate this matter; therefore prepare yourself for trial."

"Oh!" said he. "If you are for that sort of play, come on; I'll be ready for you."

Then Cartwright goes on to describe the trial:

I had hard work to get a committee that were not dram-drinkers themselves. When the trial came on, the class-leader brought evidence that the local preacher had been intoxicated often, and really drunk several times. The committee found him guilty of immoral conduct, and suspended him till the next quarterly meeting; and the quarterly meeting, after hard debate, expelled him. The whole society nearly were present. After his expulsion, and I had read him out, his wife and children and connexions, and one or two friends, rose up and withdrew from the society. . . . From this very day the work of religion broke out in the society and settlement, and before the year closed I took back the thirteen that withdrew, and about forty more joined the church, and not a dram-drinker in the society; but the poor local preacher who had been expelled, I fear, lived and died a drunkard.

II

The right of the local preacher and exhorter to distil, drink and sell liquor continued to be a matter of great concern to Asbury and the temperance element among the Methodists, but no official rule against them was enacted until James Axley appeared on the scene as a member of the General Conference of 1812. He then intro-

duced a motion that "no stationed or local preacher shall retail spirituous or malt liquors without forfeiting his ministerial character among us." It was defeated, but to satisfy Axley and at the insistence of Asbury this was inserted in the pastoral address:

It is with regret that we have seen the use of ardent spirits, dram-drinking, and so forth, so common among the Methodists. We have endeavored to suppress the practice by our example; and we really think it not consistent with the character of a Christian to be immersed in the practice of distilling or retailing an article so destructive to the morals of society, and we do most earnestly recommend the Annual Conferences and our people to join with us in making a firm and constant stand against an evil which has ruined thousands both in time and eternity.

Axley renewed his motion each year, without success until the Conference of 1816, the year of Asbury's death. An attempt was then made to amend it by adding, "that every prudent means be used by our Annual and Quarterly Conferences to discourage the distilling or retailing of spirituous liquors among our people, and especially among our preachers." But this was unpopular and was withdrawn, and Axley's original motion passed.

Axley, a Virginian, joined the Methodists in 1802, and became one of the noted preachers of the South and Middle West. He was fanatical in his opposition to liquor, and is said to have anticipated Carrie Nation by smashing bottles and bar fixtures with a hammer. Asbury employed him as a traveling temperance exhorter, changing his circuits with great frequency and sending him into Indiana, Louisiana, Tennessee, North Carolina, Ohio and other districts where there was considerable consumption of liquor. He seldom failed to convince the Methodists that they would go to hell if they did not stop drinking, and his discourses became famous. One, known as Axley's Temperance Sermon, is still cited to ambitious young Methodist preachers as a model pronouncement against liquor, although it is curiously free from invective. This sermon was preached in East Tennessee, where there

was a large production of peach brandy. Axley's text was II Timothy, iv, 14: "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil; the Lord reward him according to his works," and the sermon offered the first exact knowledge that the world had of the nature of the evil perpetrated against the Apostle Paul:

Paul was a traveling preacher, and a Bishop, or a presiding elder at least; for he traveled extensively, and had much to do, not only in regulating the societies, but also in sending the preachers here, there and yonder. He was zealous, laborious, would not build on another man's foundation, but formed new circuits "where Christ was not named," so that from Jerusalem, and round unto Illyricum, he had fully preached the Gospel of Christ. One new place that he visited was very wicked. . . . Sabbath-breaking, dancing, drinking, quarrelling, fighting, swearing, etc. abounded; but the word of the Lord took effect; there was a powerful stir among the people, and many precious souls were converted. Among the subjects of that work there was a certain noted character, Alexander by name and a still-maker by trade: also Hymenæus, who was his partner in the business. Paul formed a new society, and appointed Brother Alexander class leader. There was a great change in the place; the people left off their drinking, swearing, fighting, horse-racing, dancing and all their wicked practices. The stills were worked up into bells and stew-kettles, and thus applied to useful purposes. The settlement was orderly, the meetings were prosperous, and things went well among them for some time.

But after awhile there came a backsliding:

One year they had a pleasant Spring; there was no late frost, and the peach crop hit exactly. I do suppose, my brethren, that such a crop of peaches was never known before. The old folks ate all they could eat; the sisters preserved all they could preserve; the children ate all they could eat; the pigs ate all they could eat; and still the limbs of the trees were bending and breaking. One Sunday when the brethren met for worship they gathered round outside the meeting-house, and got to talking about their worldly business—as you know people sometimes do, and it is a mighty bad practice, and one said to another, "Brother, how is the peach crop with you this year?" "Oh," said he, "you never saw the like; they are rotting on the ground under the trees; I don't know what to do with them." "How would it do," said one, "to still them? The peaches will go to waste, but the brandy will keep; and it is very good in certain cases, if not used to excess." "I should like to know," said a cute brother, "how you could make brandy without stills?" "That's nothing," replied another, "for our class leader, Brother Alexander, is as good a still-maker as need be, and Brother

Hymenæus is another, and, rather than see the fruit wasted, no doubt they will make us a few."

The next thing heard on the subject was a hammering in the class-leader's shop; and soon the stills in every brother's orchard were smoking, and the liquid poison streaming. When one called on another, the bottle was brought out, with the remark, "I want you to taste my new brandy; I think it is pretty good." The guest, after tasting once, was urged to repeat, when, smacking his lips, he would say, "Well, it's tolerable; but I wish you would come over and taste mine; I think mine is a little better." So they tasted and tasted until many of them got about half-drunk, and I don't know but three-quarters. Then the very devil was raised among them; the society was all in an uproar, and Paul was sent for to come and settle the difficulty. At first it was difficult to find sober, disinterested ones enough to try the guilty; but finally he got his committee formed, and the first one he brought to account was Alexander, who pleaded not guilty. He declared he had not tasted, bought, sold or distilled a drop of brandy. "But," said Paul, "you made the stills, otherwise there would have been no liquor made; and if no liquor, no one would have been intoxicated." So they expelled him first, and then *Hymenæus* next, and went on for compliment, till the society was relieved of all still-makers, dram-sellers and dram-drinkers, and peace was once more restored.

III

Another noted dry exhorter of the South and Middle West at this time was James B. Finley, a native of North Carolina, who entered the Methodist connection at the age of twenty-eight, after several years of service as a local preacher. Asbury employed him as he did Axley and Cartwright, as a traveling oracle against liquor, and Finley had great success. "Frequently," he wrote in his autobiography, "I would pledge a whole congregation, standing upon their feet, to the temperance cause, and during my rounds I am certain the better portion of the entire community became the friends and advocates of temperance. In one circuit alone at least a thousand had solemnly taken the pledge of total abstinence. This was before temperance societies were heard of in this country." Like Axley, Cartwright and the others, Finley spread the doctrine of Prohibition among the faithful to such effect that in many parts of the South and Middle West any person who refused to drink, for whatever

reason, came to be called a "Methodist fanatic." Also like Axley and Cartwright, he encountered much opposition from the local preachers and exhorters and lay members; he expelled many, and others withdrew of their own accord because they were not in sympathy with the campaign against whisky.

Finley relates that on one of his circuits his host, class leader of the local Methodist organization, took him into a room and showed him a ten-gallon keg of whisky which he had bought to treat his neighbors at a barn-raising. "Do you know," demanded Finley, "that God has pronounced a curse against the man who putteth the bottle to his neighbors' lips?" The brother replied angrily that there was no law against distilling and using whisky, and that in this matter he proposed to do as he pleased. Finley left the house, saying that he would "rather lie in the woods than sleep in a Methodist house with a ten gallon keg of whisky for my room-mate." At his appointment the next day he preached a rousing sermon against liquor, and when he had concluded, the local exhorter advised him thus: "Young man, I advise you to leave the circuit and go home; you are doing more harm than good. If you can't preach the gospel and let people's private business alone they don't want you at all." Finley replied that he was commissioned by the Lord to smash this stronghold of the Devil, and that he would brook no interference from distillers and whisky-drinkers in the church.

The prohibitory minute enacted in 1780 remained in effect during 1781 and 1782, and nothing was added to it by the Methodist conferences for those years. Asbury's time and thought were devoted almost wholly to the sacramental controversy which had arisen among the preachers of Virginia and Maryland. They were not ordained ministers and had no ecclesiastical warrant for conducting the Lord's Supper. However, their argument was that the Southern Methodists pre-

ferred to receive the Lord's Supper from their own itinerants, whom they could trust to serve them with the flesh and blood of Jesus instead of the flesh and blood of Satan. The priests of the Church of England were then in great disrepute, and were regarded by the Methodists as minions of hell. For a time the uproar threatened disaster to the Methodist movement in this country, but Asbury finally averted serious trouble by inducing the Virginians to suspend the administration of the sacrament for one year while he wrote to John Wesley and obtained aid and advice. He then turned his attention once more to rum, and in the Conference of 1783 this further prohibitory rule was adopted:

Question 11. Shall our friends be permitted to make spirituous liquors, sell and drink them in drams?

Answer. By no means; we think it wrong in its nature and consequences, and desire all our preachers to teach the people by precept and example to put away this evil.

The first Methodist Discipline, largely written by Asbury and Dr. Thomas Coke, and adopted at the Baltimore Conference in 1784, when the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized, contained this regulation, and a further rule forbidding the preachers to drink spirituous liquors "unless it be medicinally." Wesley permitted his English preachers to drink ale after preaching, and this permission was expressly granted to the American itinerants by the following note:

After preaching take a little lemonade, mild ale, or candied orange peel. All spirituous liquors, at this time especially, are deadly poison.

These provisions remained in the Discipline until 1796, when the Conference adopted the following rule, as Section 10 of Chapter II:

Of the Sale and Use of Spirituous Liquors

Question. What directions shall be given concerning the sale and use of spirituous liquors?

Answer. If any member of our society retail or give spirituous liquors, and anything disorderly be transacted under his roof on this account, the

preacher who has the oversight of the circuit shall proceed against him as in the case of other immoralities; and the person accused shall be cleared, censured, suspended or excluded, according to his conduct, as on other charges of immorality.

This section remained in the Discipline until 1840, when it was "struck out as seeming to sanction the practices for which it made regulation." In their "Notes on the Discipline," prepared at the request of the 1796 Conference and thereafter printed as part of the Discipline, Asbury and Dr. Coke made this comment:

Far be it from us to wish or endeavor to intrude upon the proper religious or civil liberty of any of our people. But the retailing of spirituous liquors, and giving drams to customers, when they call at the stores, are such prevalent customs at present, and are productive of so many evils, that we judge it our indispensable duty to form a regulation against them. The cause of God, which we prefer to every other consideration under Heaven, absolutely requires us to step forth with humble boldness in this respect.

In view of the vast extent to which the movement started by Asbury has grown, it is interesting to notice that he never admitted, nor even discussed, the advisability of political compulsion; on the contrary, he advocated teaching "by precept and example," and the rules which he caused the Conferences to enact applied only to Methodists. The section against liquor in the present-day Discipline makes no mention of the religious and civil liberties of the people, nor is there much of "humble boldness" in the manner in which the Church steps forth to coerce the law-maker, although immediately following the endorsement of the Anti-Saloon League the Discipline formerly said, "We recognize that the Church as an ecclesiastical body may not properly go into partisan politics nor assume to control the franchise of the nation." However, even this apology was eliminated by the General Conference of 1924, and the current Discipline contains no reference to the impropriety of political meddling. But it does contain a mighty gloat over the Eighteenth Amendment.

VIRGINIA

BY VIRGINIUS DABNEY

Mythology

SINCE that great day three centuries ago when the *Mayflower* landed her cargo of witch-burners on our coasts, the Brahmins of Massachusetts have persisted in proclaiming Plymouth as the nation's birthplace and their State as the fount of American culture and democracy. The First Families of Virginia have just as persistently retorted that Jamestown was settled thirteen years before Plymouth and that it was the Old Dominion and not the Bay State that played the leading part in the upbuilding of early America. Nothing seems to stick quite so firmly in the proud craws of the loyal Virginians of today as these claims of the New Englanders. For while they are themselves by no means guiltless of creating historical myths, they are hardly the equals of the descendants of the sainted Pilgrims. If they are reluctant to admit that Washington's Farewell Address was penned by Alexander Hamilton, or that Jefferson deserves little or no credit for the Louisiana Purchase, or that Monroe's part in the promulgation of the Monroe Doctrine was limited, their output of balderdash can scarcely be compared to that of the estimable sons of the Bay State.

The favorite legend nurtured by New Englanders is that the beginnings of American constitutional history are to be found in the Mayflower Compact. It seems to matter little to them that Virginia had representative government long before the *Mayflower* sailed, and few of them, even today, can be brought to admit that the year 1607 antedated the year 1620.

Unfortunately for the peace of mind of highly patriotic Virginians, the Massachusetts historians have persuaded nearly all the people of the North, East, and West that American institutions had their sole origin in the civilization of the Puritans. Right-minded authors and editors in the Old Dominion are thus kept in constant ferment combating this nefarious propaganda and consigning its sponsors to everlasting damnation.

With the perennial wrangle as to whether the blood of a Brahmin or that of an F. F. V. is of deeper indigo I am not especially concerned. The fact is that the greater part of the aristocracies of both the Bay State and Virginia came to flower on this continent. Each sprang in large measure from the English merchant class. Only a handful of the forebears of the haughty Massachusetts gentry of today could boast on their arrival of a coat-of-arms, while a very small proportion of Virginia's puissant First Families can trace their descent from the Cavaliers.

II

Surgery

Virginia's present boundaries date from 1863, when West Virginia was admitted to the Union as a separate State. Following King James' Virginia grant of 1609, describing the Commonwealth as extending into the interior "West and Northwest," it modestly claimed the entire territory from which have since been carved the States of Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan and Wis-