

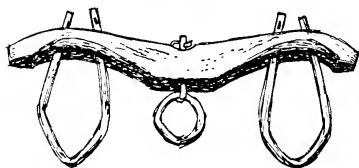
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Wates, Richard

The temperance movement. Address
of Senator Wates, of Illinois, before
the Congressional Temperance Association,
on Sunday evening, February 17,
1867, in the House of representatives.

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THE TEMPERANCE MOVEMENT.

ADDRESS

OF

SENATOR YATES, OF ILLINOIS,

BEFORE THE CONGRESSIONAL TEMPERANCE ASSOCIATION, ON SUNDAY
EVENING, FEBRUARY 17, 1867, IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, WASHINGTON, D. C.

In introducing the speaker, Hon. Henry Wilson, president of the association, said :

We have passed through a great war, in which we fought six hundred battles for the Republic. In that great contest Illinois played a glorious part. The Governor of that State linked his name forever with that grand struggle for unity and liberty. I have the honor and the pleasure to present Governor Yates to this assemblage. [Applause.] God grant that in the great struggle in which we are now engaged against the enemy of human nature he may associate his name as gloriously as he did in the war against the enemy of his country. [Applause.]

ADDRESS OF SENATOR YATES.

LADIES AND GENTLEMAN: It was not my intention to address you at all until this afternoon, and I feel the need of more preparation before speaking to so large an audience as this. The reason why I did not propose to address this assembly was because having so recently associated myself with the Congressional Temperance Association, I did not like to make a parade of myself before the public. Men sometimes sign pledges, and they break them; but, Mr. President, I have signed for good, [applause,] and I have made my covenant with God that I will keep mine. But I felt it were better to prove first that I was well established in my new position before I attempted to express sentiments on this question in that earnest and enthusiastic manner in which I always address my fellow citizens in behalf of any cause which has the conviction of my judgment and the approval of my heart.

Some two months ago your distinguished chairman, the able and eloquent Senator from Massachusetts, in his kindness, in the goodness of his great big heart, came to me with a petition numerously signed by members of Congress, and said: "Governor, I want you to sign a call for a temperance

meeting." "With all my heart," said I. I signed it. But the temperance meeting did not come off. I became impatient. I went to the honorable Senator, and told him I was tired of waiting; could he not furnish me a pledge? He said he could to-morrow. The next day he furnished me with a printed pledge of the Congressional Temperance Society. I put it in my pocket, took it home, took it to my room, read it carefully, and, after one look to God and one to home, I signed the pledge. I raised myself to my full height, and I was FREE. [Great applause.] If I refer to myself in the remarks I have made, and which I intend to make, I assure you it is not from egotism, for I take no peculiar pride myself in having been addicted to the use of ardent spirits. But there is another reason why I feel permitted to refer to myself, and that is, because while I have considered that I was only a moderate drinker, it has been published all over the land that I was a drunkard.

Fellow-citizens, there was some truth in this, and there was a vast deal of error in it too. I was addicted to drinking occasionally as a stimulus, as I supposed to strengthen my nerves—[laughter]—and as a heightener of social joys. But, Mr. Chairman, differently from other men, I had a most unfortunate difficulty with myself, and that was, I had a wonderful facility, whenever I drank, of letting everybody know it. [Laughter.] My sprees were not frequent, but they were long and they were loud. [Laughter.] The grand prairies of Illinois did not furnish area enough for one of my forward movements. [Laughter.] That was not only the case, but whatever I have done for the last seventeen years—whether I had to make a speech to a political meeting; whether I spoke against the Nebraska bill upon the floor of this House; whether as Governor, I wrote a message, or published a proclamation, or prorogued a secession legislature—[great applause]—the universal charge of the opposite party was, that all these acts were done under the influence of whiskey. [Laughter.] Now, fellow-citizens, I have concluded to put a stop to this matter. The editors and reporters of newspapers are an honorable class of gentlemen whom I respect; but I want those libellous scribblers who have made so many misrepresentations as to my course of conduct, to understand that from this time henceforward their vocation in that respect is gone—[laughter and applause]—and they may now publish their libels until the hand that writes them shall fall withered and palsied; but I never intend that they shall have any license or authority to publish me as a drunkard again, even if I have to abstain, as I will abstain, from the mildest glass of claret that ever the fair hand of the fairest lady in this land should present me. [Applause.]

There is the evil of the thing: this misrepresentation, this liability to misrepresentation. Why, sir, after I had made these speeches some sharp article of abuse would be published in some paper, and some "Friendly Indian" of mine—[laughter]—would mark around it with black lines and send it to me for my Christian contemplation and supreme delight.

[Laughter.] I will stop it. I have promised God; I have promised my country; I have promised that proud Commonwealth which for twenty five consecutive years has honored me with all her public positions, in the Legislature, as Governor, as member of both houses of Congress; I have promised all who love me, and I have promised Katie and the children—[loud applause]—that I will never touch, taste, nor handle the unclean thing—[applause]—and by the blessing of God and my own unfaltering purpose, I intend to fight it out on this line to the last day in the evening of my life. [Applause.] If all you, gentlemen, would do the same thing, you would lose nothing in mind, body, or estate. [Laughter.]

Fellow-citizens: It may seem strange, but I would, as I feel now, as soon drink fire from hell itself as whiskey, for it is hell and damnation too. It destroys the health, and mars the beauty of the body; it can bow down to earth the most giant intellect, and make it weak as that of a child: it demoralizes and it annihilates the immortal soul. It makes a man forget his children or the wife of his bosom, and treat them with harsh unkindness and barbarity, and even murder them. Unaffected by intemperance he would peril his life for that wife of his love; he would dive into the ocean's depths, face the cannon's mouth, or peril his life amid the flames of the burning dwelling to snatch from death his darling babe.

I do not suppose at all that I am superior to anybody else in intellect. I certainly have no special claims to consideration from birth or fortune; but there is one thing I do claim, and that is, that God has endowed me with nobility of soul, with warm and generous impulses—a heart as unfathomable in its affections as the ocean, and as broad as the area of humanity, and I appeal to you, Mr. Chairman, from our slight acquaintance, if you do not think I have enough of the *ardent* about me without *ardent spirits*. [Laughter.]

Mr. Wilson. Yes; you have.

Mr. Yates. I would say to the young man that grandeur of human character does not consist in transcendent genius alone. It does not belong alone to the statesman beneath whose eloquence listening Senates sit enraptured; it does not belong alone to the warrior who bears his proud, unconquered banner over every field; but it does consist in force of character, in force of soul, feeling, thought, and purpose. Caesar was a weak man when he sacrificed the liberties of Rome by suffering Marc Antony to put the crown upon his head. Washington would not have been great if he had yielded to the temptations of his willing army, and accepted a crown at the expense of the liberties of his country. The reformed drunkard accomplishes a more heroic achievement than did the Spartan band at Thermopylæ, because he conquers himself. That man is only great who seeks right and truth and justice, and adheres to them with strong, vigorous, and perpetual purpose.

As to the effects upon the nation, Mr. Jefferson said, many years ago, that—

“The habit of using alcoholic liquors by men in office has created more injury to the public service, and given more trouble to me, than any other circumstance which has occurred in the internal concerns of the country during my administration. If I had to commence my administration again with the knowledge I have from experience derived, the first question which I would ask from a candidate for public favor would be, is he addicted to the use of ardent spirits.”

The man who is to legislate for a great country, to help make laws and constitutions involving the destinies of millions of human beings, ought to be a man of reflection, moral principle, integrity, and, above all, a sober man. [Applause] Go into your legislative hall, State and national, and behold the drunkard staggering to his seat, or sleeping at his post, and ask yourself the question whether he is not more fit to be called a monument of his country's shame than the representative of freemen. Would it not be most fearful to contemplate that ill-fated epoch in the history of our country when the demon of intemperance shall come into our legislative halls without shame, remorse, or rebuke; when he shall sit upon juries, upon the bench, and drunkenness run riot among the people? Who then will protect the ship of State upon this maddening tide; who will steer her in her onward course amid the dashing billows; who spread the starry flag to the free, fresh, wild winds of heaven?

Watchman, what of the night? We have been engaged in a mighty revolution. Your army and navy have carried your arms under Grant and Banks against the Gibaltars of the Mississippi, and opened that stream from its source to its mouth. Under the gallant Joe Hooker your troops scaled the heights, and above the clouds unfurled to the sun the glorious flag of the stars. [Applause.] Sherman marches from Cairo to the sea, while Grant marches through the Wilderness to the Confederate capital. The rebellion is crushed. Behold! a whole race set free—the shackles of the ages broken, and we see full high advanced the standard of the nation's redemption. Hark! dinna you hear the pibroch of the Highlanders, and borne upon the wings of the wind the slogan shout of universal emancipation? [Applause.]

And now shall this puissant nation, “Columbia, queen of the world and child of the skies,” pause in her efforts when there is an enemy in our land more destructive than war, pestilence and famine combined, which sends annually one hundred thousand men to untimely graves, makes fifty thousand widows, and three hundred thousand wives worse than widows—filling our prisons, our poor-houses, our lunatic asylums, and swelling to an untold extent the great ocean of human misery, wretchedness, and woe?

Somebody told me he saw in a Chicago paper the other day that since Governor Yates had joined the temperance society, whiskey had fallen ten

cents a gallon. [Laughter.] Well, that's good, indeed. [Laughter.] At all events, it's *good news*, for all that ever kept my slanderers from drinking themselves to death *pro bono publico* was the high price of whiskey. [Laughter.] We will bring it within their reach, for it will have to fall much lower than the present price before it reaches its real intrinsic value—a specie basis. [Laughter.] Mr President, if old King Alcohol were dead and buried, as he ought to be, beyond the power of resurrection, this nation could bear our national debt like a young Hercules. [Applause.] Then, sir, two blades of grass would grow where one now grows, and unbounded wealth, Imperial power, and proud position would be the heritage of the nation forever. [Applause.]

But some say this temperance business is fanaticism—it's a gloomy sort of life. There never was a greater mistake. Temperance is one of the sweetest and most delightful things upon earth; it is the very spring-head of cheerfulness, happiness, and joy—the very chivalry of manhood itself. I have been a temperance man for fifteen days, and I am a gayer boy to-night than I have been for seventeen years. [Laughter.] I think I am the gayest man in the Senate, except the compeer of Clay and Crittenden—the able, indomitable, and gallant old cavalier of Kentucky, (Garret Davis.) I except you also, Mr. Chairman. [Laughter.] Temperance gloomy? Not a bit of it, Mr. President. My pledge shall be a perpetual charm—"a thing of beauty which is a joy forever"—not a cloud of gloom, but an ever-present rainbow of promise, hope, and beauty. I am as proud of it as of my wife and children, and that is the strongest way I have to express my pride. [Applause.] I am as proud of it as I am of the commission which entitles me to hold the position of an American Senator. By-the-bye, Mr. Chairman, I will submit to you the question: I rather think the commission and the temperance pledge ought to go together. [Applause.] What do you think about having "the teetotaler" put into the iron-clad oath. [Laughter.]

You say, of what use is the pledge? I will tell you: Twenty days ago there came along a friend of mine—a Senator—and said, "Let us take a drink." I said, "Certainly, all right." Another friend from Illinois in about three minutes and a half came along and said, "Let us take a drink." Said I, "All right." It is this way. One drink of liquor is enough for me; two ain't half enough, [laughter,] three is only one-third enough, and four is chaos. After I signed the pledge I was asked several times to drink; but I didn't do any such thing. [Laughter]

After I signed this temperance pledge I wrote to a little lady out in Illinois, who weighs about a hundred pounds, has black hair and flashing black eyes, and "a form fairer than Grecian chisel ever woke from Parian marble," and I received the following answer:

"MY DEAR RICHARD: How beautiful is this morning! how bright the sun shines! how sweetly our birds sing! how joyous the children! how happy is my

heart ! I see the smile of God. He has answered the prayer. Always proud of your success, you have now achieved that success which God and angels will bless. It is the shining summit of human aspiration, for you have conquered yourself. All who love you will aid you to keep the pledge. I love you, my dear boy.

KATIE.

[Loud applause.]

Love, the sun, soul, and centre of the moral universe ; love, which links angel to angel, and God to man ; love, which binds in one two loving hearts.—How beautiful is love. [Applause.]

As I look over this audience, composed of Senators and Representatives of this great nation, and these galleries blazing with beauty and the worth of the city, and sojourners from all the States and Territories, I ask myself why they are here ? Proud England, upon whose dominions the sun never sets, has but one queen ; but, thank God, we have millions of queens, who

“Walk in beauty like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies,”

whose chains we feel, and yet we bless the silken sceptre. You are here to give, by your presence, encouragement to the Congressional Temperance Society ; and I propose, sir, that this society shall be the beginning of societies throughout the land, and that we will push forward the temperance column, move upon the enemy's works, and give him grape, canister and Greek fire. [Applause.] We will storm the citadel of intemperance, until it shall crumble and totter and fall to the earth. [Applause.] Why do I refer to the ladies ? Because their example is mightier than the eloquence of a thousand Senates or the banners of a thousand legions. [Applause.]

You are here to-night to see the snowy white flag of temperance as it is unfurled over the Capitol of your country, as it rises and rises, and unfolds to God and spreads until it shall cover the whole land, and until there shall not be a drunkard nor a moderate drinker to take away the bloom from the cheek of female beauty, and until all the hearthstones of this land shall blaze with comfort and joy, and happiness and gladness shall dwell in green freshness there. [Tremendous applause.]

[From an Editorial article in the Washington DAILY CHRONICLE,
February 18, 1877.]

THE CONGRESSIONAL TEMPERANCE MEETING.

The Congressional temperance movement in Washington promises to lead to the most gratifying results.

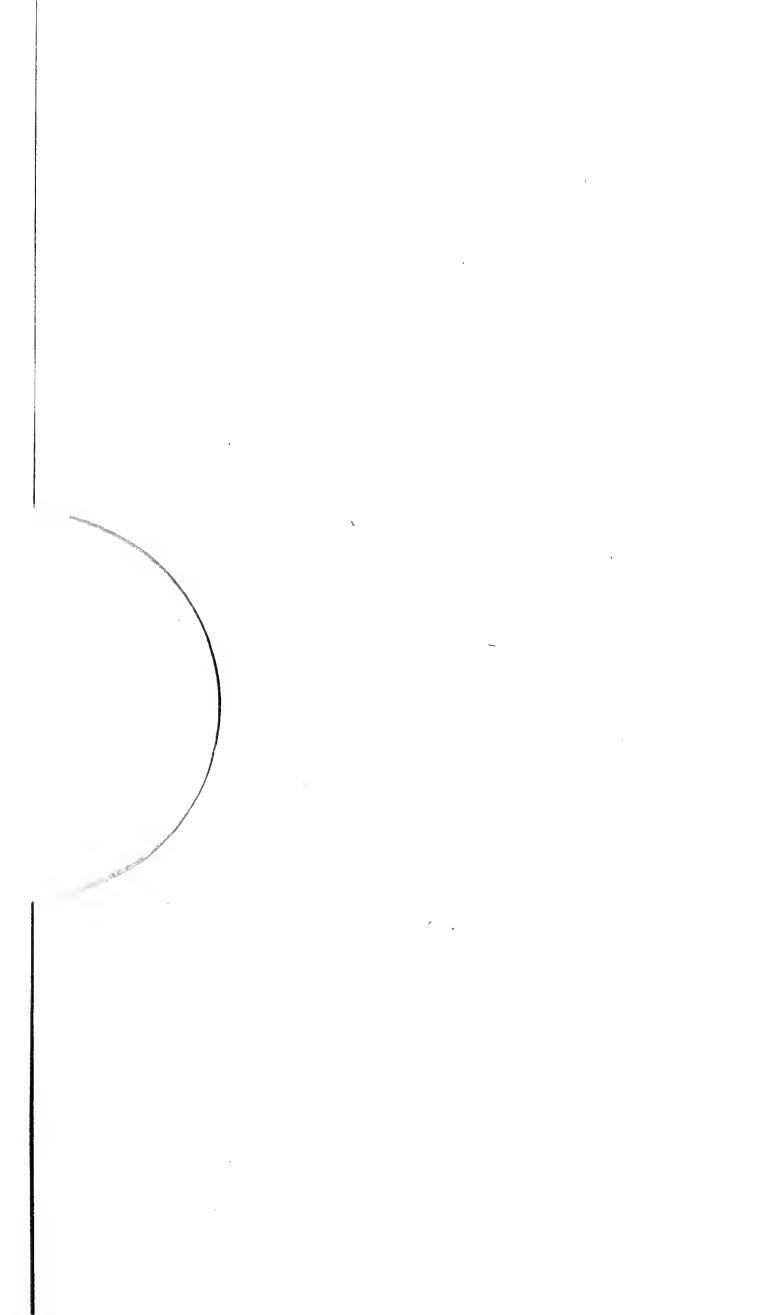
The movement for a State temperance convention, to be held at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, on the 26th instant, headed by the Governor, Secretary of State, and Speaker of the Senate, is hailed with much satisfaction in this quarter. No such meeting has ever been held in the national capital as that which assembled last Sunday evening in the hall of the House of Representatives to organize a Congressional Temperance Society. It was one of the events of these eventful times. Thousands were turned away. Every available spot which gave even room to stand upon, in the galleries, upon the floor, and the very doorways, was occupied, while dense lines of anxious men and women extended back from every door along the corridors. The speeches were short, brilliant, and effective. That of Governor and now Senator Yates, of Illinois, was particularly touching. His bold and determined stand against intemperance, his avowal that henceforth he never would touch a drop of liquor of any kind, and his frank statement of the effects of drinking upon himself and others, deeply moved the audience.

So general is the desire of the thousands who heard his remarks, and also of many who were unable to gain admission, to see the speech in print, that we produce it in our columns. The reader who was not present cannot fully appreciate the effect of the speech, so much did it depend upon the manner of delivery. The Speaker has a magnetic power over an audience which is rarely equalled. At first hesitatingly, as if struggling to master the emotions of his own soul, he began in tremulous tones, when suddenly some flash of

thought electrified the audience, and he is relieved by an outburst of applause. The occasion was grand, the scene inspiring, and the Senator, whose fine appearance and graceful figure, no less than his brilliant public services, justify the pride of his friends, proceeded in a clear, ringing voice, and with deliberate and distinct utterance through a speech of three quarters of an hour in length, scarcely a sentence of which was not applauded. Shouts of laughter and stifled sobs and tears of his auditors followed in continuous succession. The face upon which there were no smiles, no tears, was that of the speaker. He seemed moved by a calm, mighty energy, as he depicted the fearful havoc and degradation of intemperance.

A most beautiful and touching letter from his wife gave special interest to the speech, and profoundly moved the audience. As he closed he was presented with a basket of beautiful flowers, and left the platform amid long-continued applause.

The war upon this fearful evil promises to become fashionable in Washington, and Senator Wilson, of Massachusetts, president of the Congressional Temperance Society, labors steadily to bring men of all parties into his organization. In this good work he is gratefully assisted by their wives and families. Another meeting is to be held on Sunday evening next, at the same place, when a similar scene may be anticipated.





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