

Temperance Songs and Hymns

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The nineteenth century was an era of reform in the United States. Inspired by several currents of thought and belief abroad in the country at the time—among them liberal political ideals, evangelical Protestant perfectionism, and a spirit of buoyant optimism among many Americans—reformers agitated for a great variety of causes. Anti-slavery, women's rights, peace, abolition of the death penalty, prison and asylum reform, health and dietary reforms, and educational improvements claimed the energy of all kinds of Americans hoping, through reform activity, to make their country a perfect society.

One of the most popular and widespread of the many reforms that flourished during the period was the temperance movement. The issue of temperance, moderation in or even total abstinence from drinking alcoholic beverages, was raised toward the close of the eighteenth century, most notably by Dr. Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and a leader in shaping the educational institutions of the new republic. Rush saw some of the disturbing results of alcoholism in his medical practice and strongly advised against imbibing distilled liquor. Like most Americans of the time, however, Rush thought cider, beer, and wine promoted good health. The admonitions of Rush and others had little effect on curbing the drinking habits of the nation. By the early nineteenth century the nation was, as one historian has dubbed it, an "alcoholic republic."

In response to what growing numbers of Americans perceived as the scandal of national insobriety, the temperance movement began during the 1810s and grew rapidly during the 1820s and after. Particularly in New England, numerous local temperance societies were formed at the urging of preachers and other temperance advocates. As the movement took hold, it spread beyond the Northeast to other parts of the country and to all social classes. Temperance societies banded together to form powerful national organizations such as the American Temperance Society (founded 1826), the Washington Society, or Washingtonians (1840), the Sons of Temperance (1843), the Independent Order of Good Templars (1851), the

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Woman's Christian Temperance Union (1874), and the Anti-Saloon League (1893). Although the movement was predominantly a Protestant one, some Roman Catholics formed the Catholic Total Abstinence Society (1840), modeled after a successful organization in Ireland. Temperance novels and short stories, drama and poetry, sermons and Sunday school lessons, public school readers, tracts and pamphlets, and newspapers and magazines appeared, beginning in the 1830s, as the temperance reform movement gained ground. In 1919, after more than a century of growth, the work of the temperance movement culminated with the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment, which established Prohibition as the law of the land.

If in the early nineteenth century the United States was a nation of drinkers, it was also a nation of singers. When Americans met together, inevitably they sang. Church services, revivals, camp meetings, political rallies, and meetings of voluntary associations were all accompanied by rousing music. Reform movements produced lively songs and hymns that expressed their goals, strategies, and hopes for the eventual triumph of their causes. Beginning in the 1840s, for example, the Hutchinson family quartette sang numbers such as "The Slave's Appeal" and "Get Off the Track" at hundreds of antislavery gatherings. The women's suffrage movement also generated songs sung at national conventions and local rallies. At the turn of the nineteenth century, a Social Gospel Hymnal was published to sound that movement's call for reform of unjust economic structures. Throughout the twentieth century, labor organizing inspired many rousing songs that protested poor working conditions and vilified management and strike breakers. Folksingers like Woody Guthrie and the Weavers became troubadours of the labor movement, lending their voices and guitars to the fight for fair employment and popularizing labor songs such as "Which Side Are You On" and "Union Maids." By the 1950s and 1960s, songs and hymns such as "We Shall Overcome" and "Keep Your Eyes on the Prize" buoyed up the long struggle for African-American civil rights.

Like these reforms, the temperance movement was accompanied by music. Temperance hymns and songs were printed in magazines, newspapers, hymnals, and songbooks. Temperance tunes were also increasingly published in inexpensive formats and thus were affordable to large numbers of temperance supporters. The songbooks were very popular and were often reprinted many times to meet the rising demand for them.

Reform leaders understood well the potential of music to aid in recruiting supporters. Frances Willard, longtime president of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, expressed the opinion of many reformers when she wrote in *Do Everything* (1897), a handbook for her organization, "Song is a sentiment maker and . . . every chorus rendered at a public entertainment ought to add new converts to the cause of Temperance. . . . We have not appreciated the magic power of song to win the hearts of those whom we may have supposed to be indifferent or opposed to Temperance work" (67, 151). After recruits were won by song they were kept enthusiastic and energetic through endless parades, rallies, and organizational meetings. Singing had the power to inspire flagging spirits and recapture wandering attention.

Over the temperance movement's long development, both its aims and its methods changed. These changes were evident in the lyrics of its hymns and songs. In the early years, its participants believed that moral suasion was the way to convince people to moderate their drinking or, better, give it up entirely. Drunkenness was understood as sin, and individuals were urged to forswear drinking as they should other forms of sinful behavior. In the evangelical context in which the early movement flourished, "coming to Christ" and thereby being freed from sin certainly included giving up liquor. Those who continued to drink were seen to be in Satan's grasp and thus in grave moral danger. Family and friends of the person captured by the devil prayed and wept over the tempted one, hoping for a change of heart. Sober citizens as well as reformed drunks joined temperance societies for mutual support. "Away the Bowl," an early temperance song, suggests the enticing and dangerous qualities of drinking and dramshops and describes the strength that could be gained from joining a temperance group. It also reveals a changing notion of what drinks were dangerous since it adds wine to the list of those to be avoided.

By the 1850s, temperance reformers had shifted from total reliance on prayer and moral suasion toward pushing for legislative action to regulate the sale of liquor or prohibit it entirely. Attention also shifted from saving individuals to attacking what reformers now identified as a powerful interlocking economic and political system bent on destroying the lives of vulnerable individuals. Hymns addressed the growing liquor industry and its allies: politicians and the men who voted them into office, and businessmen intent on making money no matter what the cost to the morals of society. "An Incident True" indicts this system, pointing the finger not only at the drunkard but at all those who play a role in maintaining the powerful liquor industry. "Vote As You Pray" makes clear that praying, while necessary, is no longer a weapon sufficient to defeat the liquor foe. "Let us wake from the delusion that praying will win the day," the song warns. Every weapon in the temperance reformers' arsenal should be used. Prayer must be accompanied by the ballot to ensure victory over alcohol.

In reformers' changing analysis of the situation it was not only the drunkard himself who was responsible for his condition. Although nineteenth-century temperance reformers were aware of some female drinking, they saw drunkenness primarily as a male problem. As the lyrics of "An Incident True" recount in melodramatic fashion, not only did the drunkard suffer, but so did his wife and children. The themes of the drunkard's suffering family and ruined home were featured in many temperance hymns and songs during the century and with good reason. Most women and children were dependent on men's earnings for their support, and if a man spent his wages at the saloon his wife and children went hungry, ill clothed, and ill housed. Often they were physically abused as well.

The 1870s saw the entry of large numbers of women into the ranks of temperance reform. Although there had been women's auxiliaries earlier and women leaders of the Good Templars, the Ohio Women's Crusade of winter 1873-1874 mobilized women to an unprecedented extent in spontaneous demonstrations

against local saloon keepers. "The Crusade Hymn" was sung by Crusaders from Hillsboro, Ohio, as they marched toward the town's saloons to plead with saloon keepers to stop selling liquor to their husbands, brothers, and sons. The hymn is not, strictly speaking, a temperance hymn, because its lyrics mention nothing at all about the reform but rather are based on verses from Psalm 146. As the Hillsboro women gathered to march, their leader asked the town's Methodist minister to choose a familiar hymn that all of them could sing. He asked for a hymn that would rally them to their task and aid them in overcoming the fear of stepping out of their usual sphere of the home into the alien territory of the saloon. The minister's choice was a sound one, and as the Crusade women marched down the main street singing the hymn, they testified that they felt the power of God uplifting them and making them bold.

The Crusade spread rapidly across the northern United States as women took to the streets to protect their homes and families from the dangers of alcohol. To consolidate the work of the Crusade, a permanent organization, The Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), was established in fall 1874. "The Crusade Hymn" became the rallying cry of the WCTU. It became part of the ritual of the organization and was sung at national, state, and local meetings to remind members of the WCTU's formative event and to inspire them in their continuing effort to eradicate the liquor industry.

The WCTU's publishing arm produced numerous collections of hymns and songs and attracted songwriters who wrote specifically for the organization. Anna A. Gordon, for years personal secretary to Frances Willard, the organization's most famous president, and herself the president of the WCTU during the 1910s and 1920s, was a prolific writer who compiled a number of songbooks used and distributed by the organization. "Saloons Must Go," published in one of Gordon's most popular collections, was a collaboration between the two women. A lively march, it weaves the WCTU's motto, "For God and Home and Native Land," into its lyrics. In addition to the familiar theme of the protection of home and family from drink, it contains another favorite theme of temperance reformers: a concern for the nation and the hope that, by purifying America from alcohol, reformers would be helping to bring in the Kingdom of God on Earth.

The WCTU, like other temperance groups, sought to bring children and young people into its ranks. From the earliest decades of the reform, the education of youth in temperance beliefs and aims was seen as crucial to the continuation of the work. "The Future Lawmakers," included in a WCTU songbook for children, is an example of a temperance song geared to youngsters as future voters. The first line of the song looks forward to the time when women as well as men can cast ballots. From the early 1880s, the WCTU supported woman suffrage, devising the slogan "The Ballot for Home Protection." It saw the women's vote as a powerful tool in both the temperance reform and a host of other reforms the organization championed.

By the 1890s the push for total constitutional prohibition was becoming strong. A third party, the national Prohibition Party, was organized in 1869, and though it never gathered enough supporters to win a national election, it succeeded in gaining

many state and local offices. It also kept the issue of prohibition in the forefront of the national consciousness and forced the Republican Party to take prohibition seriously. The goal of total prohibition had been voiced as early as the 1860s, when the song "Prohibition" was published. Its chorus proclaimed, "Nought will cure our sad condition short of total prohibition." For fourteen years, from 1919 until the Eighteenth Amendment's repeal in 1933, a majority of the nation's citizens agreed.

"Away the Bowl" is found in George W. Ewing, *The Well-Tempered Lyre: Songs and Verse of the Temperance Movement* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1977), p. 25; "An Incident True" is in *Silver Tones: A New Temperance and Prohibition Song Book*, compiled by Rev. C. H. Meade, G. E. Chambers, and Rev. W. A. Williams (Warnock, Ohio: W. A. Williams, 1892), no. 4; "Vote As You Pray" is in J. N. Stearns and H. P. Main, *Trumpet Notes for the Temperance Battlefield* (New York: National Temperance Society and Publication House, 1892), no. 40; "The Crusade Hymn" is in *The White Ribbon Hymnal, or Echoes of the Crusade*, compiled by Anna A. Gordon (Chicago: Ruby I. Gilbert, 1904), p. 107; "Saloons Must Go" is in Anna A. Gordon, *The Temperance Songster* (Cincinnati: Fillmore Music House, n.d., after 1904), no. 93; "Future Lawmakers" is in Anna A. Gordon, *Temperance Songs for Children* (Evanston, Ill.: NWCTU Publishing, 1916), p. 5; and "Prohibition" is in George F. Root, ed., *The Musical Fountain* (Chicago: Root and Cady, 1866), as published in George Ewing, *The Well-Tempered Lyre*, p. 156.

Further Reading

For background on the temperance movement in the United States, see William Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Norman H. Clark, *Deliver Us from Evil: An Interpretation of American Prohibition* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976); and Jack S. Blocker, Jr., *American Temperance Movements: Cycles of Reform* (Boston: Twayne, 1989). For a discussion of temperance hymns and songs, see George W. Ewing, *The Well-Tempered Lyre: Songs and Verse of the Temperance Movement* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1977), and "A Bibliography of American Temperance Hymnals, 1835-1934," in *The Hymn: A Journal of Congregational Song* 51 no. 2 (April 2000): 28-36. For a brief discussion of the Catholic temperance movement and its music, see Robert F. Grimes, *How Shall We Sing in a Foreign Land: Music of Irish Catholic Immigrants in the Antebellum United States* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1996), pp. 139-43.

Away the Bowl

Our youthful hearts with temp'rance burn, Away, away the bowl;
From dramshops all our steps we turn, Away, away the bowl;
Goodbye to rum and all its harms, Farewell the winecup's boasted charms.

See how the staggering drunkard reels, Away, away the bowl;
 Alas! the misery he reveals, Away, away the bowl;
 Goodbye to rum and all its harms, Farewell the winecup's boasted charms.

No alcohol we'll buy or sell, Away, away the bowl;
 The tippler's offer we repel, Away, away the bowl;
 United in a temperance band, We're joined in heart, we're joined in hand.

An Incident True

If you'll listen I'll tell you an incident true,
 Which occurred in a high license place,
 Where five thousand saloons pay a large revenue,
 For the right to breed crime and disgrace.

Chorus: Oh, what shall we do with this terrible curse,
 And when will deliverance come?
 O God, we turn our eyes to Thee,
 Protect, protect our home.

In the city Chicago, a poor drunken man,
 In his wrath seized his dead infant child;
 With its body he beat his own poor dying wife;
 Licensed rum made him frantic and wild.

Chorus: Oh, what shall we do with this terrible curse . . .

But who sold him the drink? Who enacted the laws
 That allowed the saloonist to sell?
 And who made him saloonist?
 And who was the cause of this horrible deed,
 Can you tell?

Chorus: Oh, what shall we do with this terrible curse . . .

Shall we say that the man who elects by his vote,
 Those who make just such laws ev'ry time,
 And supports party platforms that license denote,
 Has no part in this terrible crime?

Chorus: Oh, what shall we do with this terrible curse . . .

Can we tell at what price all that's dear shall be sold,
 And just what is the worth of a soul?
 Can the sum that would meet all the damage be told—
 That would make ev'ry broken heart whole?

Chorus: Oh, what shall we do with this terrible curse . . .

Vote as You Pray

Can you go on thus my brother,
While praying day by day,
"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,"
And yet not vote as you pray?

Chorus: Oh, vote as you pray, vote as you pray,
Vote as you pray, my friends;
Oh, vote as you pray, 'twill hasten the day
When the rum fiend's work shall end.

Can you see your neighbor falling
Around you in the fray,
And pray that God may speed the right,
And yet not vote as you pray?

Chorus: Oh, vote as you pray, vote as you pray, . . .

Do not cease from prayer; no never!
But pray on while you may;
But if you would know your pray'r is heard,
Be sure to vote as you pray.

Chorus: Oh, vote as you pray, vote as you pray, . . .

Let us wake from this delusion,
That praying will win the day;
Unless our prayer and votes agree,
Then always vote as we pray.

Chorus: Oh, vote as you pray, vote as you pray, . . .

The Crusade Hymn (Give to the Winds Thy Fears)

Give to the winds thy fears;
Hope and be undismayed;
God hears thy sighs and counts thy tears,
God shall lift up thy head.

Thro' waves and clouds and storms,
He gently clears the way;
Wait thou His time; the darkest night
Shall end in brightest day.

Far, far above thy thought
His counsel shall appear,

When fully He the work hath wrought,
That caused thy needless fear.

Saloons Must Go

List to the tread of many feet, from home and playground, farm and street,
They talk like tongues, their words we know:
"Saloons, saloons must go!"

Chorus: Saloons must go, saloons must go,
Of home sweet home the deadliest foe;
With pray'r and work the world we'll show,
Saloons must go!

For God they lift their flag of white,
His name is on their banners bright;
His law of purity doth show,
"Saloons, saloons must go!"

Chorus: Saloons must go, saloons must go, . . .

For Home's sweet sake they move in line,
With mother love their faces shine;
Their loyal hearts will have it so,
"Saloons, saloons must go!"

Chorus: Saloons must go, saloons must go, . . .

For Native Land their drums they beat,
Quick time they keep with marching feet;
America, for thee they know,
"Saloons, saloons must go!"

Chorus: Saloons must go, saloons must go, . . .

Thy kingdom come, O Saviour great,
In hearts and home, in church and state;
But ere it comes, full well we know,
"Saloons, saloons must go!"

Chorus: Saloons must go, saloons must go, . . .

The Future Law-Makers

I'm a little "Loyal" Legion boy/girl,
I'm only ten years old,

But in the cause of temperance
My name has been enrolled.

Chorus: We are growing up you see,
And we'll help the temp'rance cause;
When we're twenty-one, you know, then we'll make the laws,
Oh! then we'll make the laws, Oh! then we'll make the laws,
Yes, when we're twenty-one, Oh! then we'll make the laws.

I don't know much about the curse,
But this I know full well:
That wine and cider, gin and rum,
They nevermore should sell.

Chorus: We are growing up you see, . . .

The broken hearts of mothers dear,
The cries of little ones,
Plead earnestly for help from us,
The daughters and the sons.

Chorus: We are growing up you see, . . .

We are coming, coming, one and all,
To fight against the wrong;
We all are "Loyal Legioners,"
Three hundred thousand strong.

Chorus: We are growing up you see, . . .

Prohibition

Hark! the world is hoarse with wailing,
Lamentation unavailing,
For today is heap'd with sorrow,
And there's more to come tomorrow.

Chorus: Prohibition, prohibition,
O! 'tis worth all repetition;
Nought will cure our sad condition,
Short of total prohibition.

Oh, thou earth and thou great heaven,
Are no means of rescue given?
Yes, there are on one condition,
Yes, there are with prohibition.

Chorus: Prohibition, prohibition, . . .

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Talk no more of mere restriction,
Do not trifle with conviction,
We may fence with regulation,
It must come to prohibition.

Chorus: Prohibition, prohibition, . . .