

VALENTINE'S DAY 1929

SOMETIME AFTER 10 A.M. on this shivery-cold and windy Chicago morning, seven men gathered in a nondescript garage warehouse on Clark Street.

Most of them were wearing hats and coats against the chill of the nearly empty warehouse as they waited, maybe for a big shipment of smuggled whiskey, maybe for a special meeting. These were no Boy Scouts. All had ties to a criminal gang run by George “Bugs” Moran, a slow-moving, slow-thinking thug who was supposed to be on his way to the garage. Most of them had done some jail time. One, a mechanic, maintained the gang’s trucks, which delivered illegal beer and liquor to Chicago bars and nightclubs, a thriving business despite laws that banned the sale of alcoholic beverages. Another owned an illegal nightclub. A third was the business manager for Moran. There was an optometrist, who just liked hanging out with the gangsters, and three muscle men, who often carried out the gang’s dirty work.

On the snow-dusted street outside, a black Cadillac with a police gong, siren, and gun rack—the type usually driven by police detectives—pulled up to the

A crowd gathers outside the Clark Street garage as officials remove the victims of the St. Valentine’s Day murders.



Investigators take a look at bullet holes left behind by a machine gun in a Chicago gangland shooting in the mid-1920s.

curb. Four or five men emerged, two dressed like police officers, and went into the warehouse. Seeing the “officers” and apparently thinking local cops were conducting a routine alcohol raid, the seven men inside lined up against the back wall and put their hands in the air.

They were still in that vulnerable position when two machine guns started firing.

CHICAGO POLICE had seen dozens of gangland murders as rival gangs fought over who could provide bootleg beer and liquor to the city’s many neighborhoods. But they had never seen anything as gruesome as this massacre of seven men.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. Starting nearly a century before, small groups of religious and morally minded citizens had tried to solve a growing problem of drunkenness by encouraging moderation in drinking and then, later, abstinence from alcohol. The crusade had gradually gained steam and in 1920, the Eighteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution had outlawed the manufacture, sale, and transportation of liquor. Prohibition, as it was called, was a grand social revolution that was supposed to forever end drunkenness, reduce crime, and make life better for America's families.

Nine years later, the results were quite different. People who had always followed the rules now openly ignored the highest law of the land. Children helped their parents secretly concoct brews. Young people carried flasks of whiskey in their pockets to look fashionable and hung out at illegal "speakeasies," drinking. Teenage boys acted as lookouts for bootleggers or drove cars and boats loaded with illegal liquor to big cities.

As alcohol was sold all around them, police officers, public officials, judges, and politicians took bribes or looked the other way. Gangsters like Bugs Moran and the notorious Al Capone divided and controlled some of the nation's biggest cities, and now they seemed to murder each other at will. Rather than become more moral and upright, America, in the eyes of many, had become a lawless society.

How had such good intentions gone so terribly, terribly wrong?



CHAPTER 1

THE LITTLE SHEPPARD

LOOKING BACK on the childhood of Morris Sheppard, you can see glimmers of a budding statesman, the kind of earnest political leader who would want to make a big difference in the world.

Born in 1875, little Morris learned poetry and literary passages before he was old enough to recognize his ABCs. As a toddler, he would stand on the counter of a local store in rural East Texas and recite verses for a stick of candy, continuing until his pockets couldn't hold another piece.

Attending schools in small Texas towns like Daingerfield, Black Jack, and Pittsburg, he studied Greek, Latin, history, and English and developed persuasive skills and an apparent flair for leadership. At 13, he shared with some other boys the story of William Tell, the legendary marksman who shot an apple off his son's head with a bow and arrow. Admiring Tell's skill and bravery, but lacking the arrows, Morris and his friends decided to reenact the deed—with a gun.

“We are told,” reported the *Pittsburg Press* in 1888, “that several boys stood with apples on their heads

Morris Sheppard rose from a child orator to become a powerful voice against liquor.

and Morris with a target rifle shot them off—that is to say, the apples, fortunately not their heads.”

The boys’ parents were horrified when they heard about the game and put a quick end to it. Morris escaped a whipping but got a stern lecture from his father, a local judge.

When Morris finished his regular schooling at 16, he moved on to the University of Texas in Austin. Jumping into student life at the young and still-small school, he joined a fraternity, led a literary society, played the cornet and piano, and sang in the glee club. Always fond of a good joke, he got a kick out of entering the dining hall by walking on his hands. But he was best known for his preacherlike speaking skills and was selected to compete in contests and serve as a graduation speaker.

From there he went to law school, spending two years in Austin and a third at Yale University in Connecticut. Once again, he attracted attention as a star orator, winning a debating prize and speaking at the graduation ceremonies.

Somewhere between his general-store recitations and his law degree, young Morris came to a heartfelt belief: He despised liquor and the saloons that sold it. He sometimes said his feelings grew out of his grammar school science classes, where he saw vivid drawings of a drunkard’s stomach and read about how alcohol destroyed the human body.

He may have been influenced by the anti-liquor stance of the Methodist church, which he joined as a college student. His time at Yale also may have hardened his stance. He arrived there in debt and driven to succeed. So, he said, “I cut out every item of expense that was possible and quit every practice which might be injurious”—including tobacco, coffee, and tea. The result, he said, was “so satisfactory” that those items “remained on the contraband list ever since.”

After Yale, young Morris began practicing law in East Texas, but in 1902, his career took an unexpected turn. His father, John, who had been elected to a second term in the U.S. House of Representatives, fell ill and then passed away. Friends immediately urged Morris to run for his father’s seat.

Jumping in just ten days before the primary election, Morris stumped the



By the mid-1920s, when he posed with two youngsters in front of the Capitol, Sheppard was a senior statesman in Congress.

district, delivering an average of seven speeches a day. When his opponents made fun of his youth, he replied that it was something he “was overcoming day by day.”

To nearly everyone’s surprise, he won the seat. At the age of twenty-seven, he headed to Washington.

Small in stature at 5 feet, 7 inches, slight at 135 pounds, and youthful looking, Sheppard hardly looked like a Congressman. “It will take the older members



While most known for his glittery speeches, Sheppard (center, seated) also chaired a U.S. House Public Buildings and Grounds Committee in 1912.

some time to get to know Mr. Sheppard, so that they will not try to send him on errands,” the *Washington Post* noted.

Nicknamed the “boy orator of Texas,” Sheppard was originally known more for his speaking skills than for any special legislation. As the “boy” matured into a confident congressman, the world outside of Washington was changing. Debates that had simmered for years over whether alcohol was dangerous and should be legally banned were beginning to roll to a boil. Originally, the arguments took place community by community and county by county. But as the number of towns outlawing liquor sales and saloons multiplied, the organizers raised the ante, taking aim at entire states. To support their efforts, Sheppard introduced legislation to keep liquor from moving from wet areas—where liquor was legal—into dry ones, where liquor was outlawed.

In 1911, he actively campaigned to prohibit the sale of alcohol throughout Texas, openly supporting prohibition for the first time. Despite his efforts, the prohibition proposal fell a few thousand votes short in the hotly contested election.

In 1913, one of Texas’s U.S. senators resigned. Sheppard outmaneuvered a more popular candidate, and the Texas legislature selected him to fill the powerful job as senator. In a colorful speech to the state legislature, he accepted his new

job, calling for limits on working hours, clearer and simpler laws, and, with fiery eloquence, an end to liquor sales.

“The liquor traffic is a peril to society,” he said. “I shall oppose this scourge from hell until my arm can strike no longer and my tongue can speak no more.

“I shall oppose it because I hear the cries of children who are hungering for bread. I shall oppose it because I see a mother’s wasted face, her pale lips pleading with the besotted figure at her side.

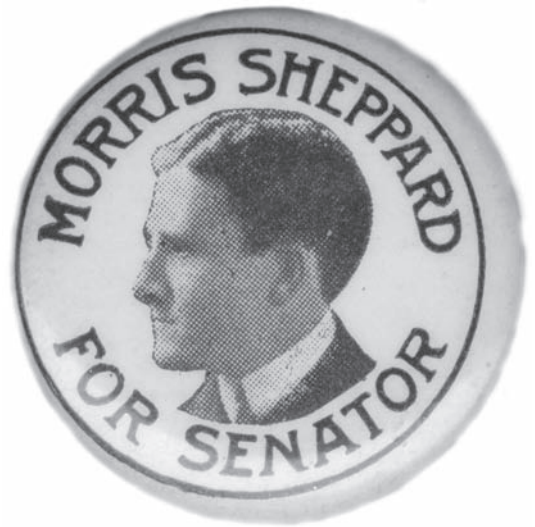
“I shall oppose it because I see the staggering forms of men whose trembling hands hold but the ashes of their strength and pride.

He concluded, “I shall oppose it because its abolition will mean a new stability for the Republic, a new radiance for the flag.”

Just months later, toward the end of 1913, the two biggest anti-liquor groups in the nation decided the time was right for an even more dramatic move. To end the scourge of alcohol now and for future generations, they proposed a national solution—not just a law, but an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would forever ban the sale of liquor throughout the country. To champion their cause in the U.S. Senate, they turned to Morris Sheppard.

On a chilly winter day in December 1913, some 4,000 people gathered in Washington, D.C., to take crucial steps toward changing America’s drinking habits once and for all. Leading the march were children.

At the very front, a young boy carried an American flag. Just behind him, dozens of girls in white dresses carried banners calling for a national prohibition on alcohol. Following them were Woman’s Christian Temperance Union members from every state, many wearing the white ribbons that symbolized prohibition. Some sang their anthem, “A Saloonless Nation by 1920.”



Sheppard was elected to the Senate in 1913.



Joining from another direction were the men of the Anti-Saloon League. Together, they marched to the Capitol. Waiting on the steps to receive a proposed constitutional amendment were Senator Sheppard and Representative Richmond Pearson Hobson of Alabama.

Later that day, Sheppard introduced this constitutional amendment in Congress for the first time, saying, “The fact that alcohol undermines the brain and paralyzes the will of man, planting in him and his posterity the seeds of physical and moral degeneracy, the seeds of disease, the seeds of poverty, the seeds of crime, makes it a peril to the very existence of free government. Let the people of this Nation insert in the National Constitution, the source of the Nation’s life, a clause prohibiting an evil that will prove to be the source of the nation’s death.”

Results might take years. But with patience and determination, Sheppard and his supporters could—and would—change the culture, the behavior, and the course of America.

For his role, Morris Sheppard would be known as the Father of National Prohibition. It would turn out to be a most dubious distinction.

Woman’s Christian Temperance Union and Anti-Saloon League members march toward the Capitol in 1913 to present a proposed prohibition amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

THE GREAT REVIVAL

TEN NIGHTS IN A BAR ROOM

IS THE GRANDEST DRAMATIC EVENT IN THE HISTORY OF THE 19TH CENTURY.

A PLAY WHICH HAS EVERYWHERE PROVEN A SENSATION UNPARALLELED IN THE HISTORY OF THE DRAMA.

THE SOBS AND TEARS OF SYMPATHY

From auditors of all sexes and ages, who come to witness this truthful picture, are evidences of its wonderful dramatic power. Over 100,000 persons, heads of families, members of churches, all interested in the propagation of the great principles of temperance, have born testimony to the

LIFE-LIKE DELINEATORS OF FOLLY, MISERY MADNESS AND CRIME
 CAUSED BY THE BRUTAL, DISGUSTING AND DEMORALIZING VICE OF DRUNKENNESS.

This dramatic drama depicts a series of truthful scenes in the course of a drunkard's life. Some of them are touching in the extreme, and some are dark and terrible. Step by step is portrayed the downward course of the tempting vender and his infatuated victim until both are involved in hopeless ruin. The play is marred by no exaggerations, but exhibits the actualities of life with a severe simplicity and adherence to truth that gives to every picture a photographic vividness. The large audiences seem to be in full sympathy with the moral of the story, and laugh at Sample Switcheel, sympathize with poor drunken Joe Morgan, and weep at

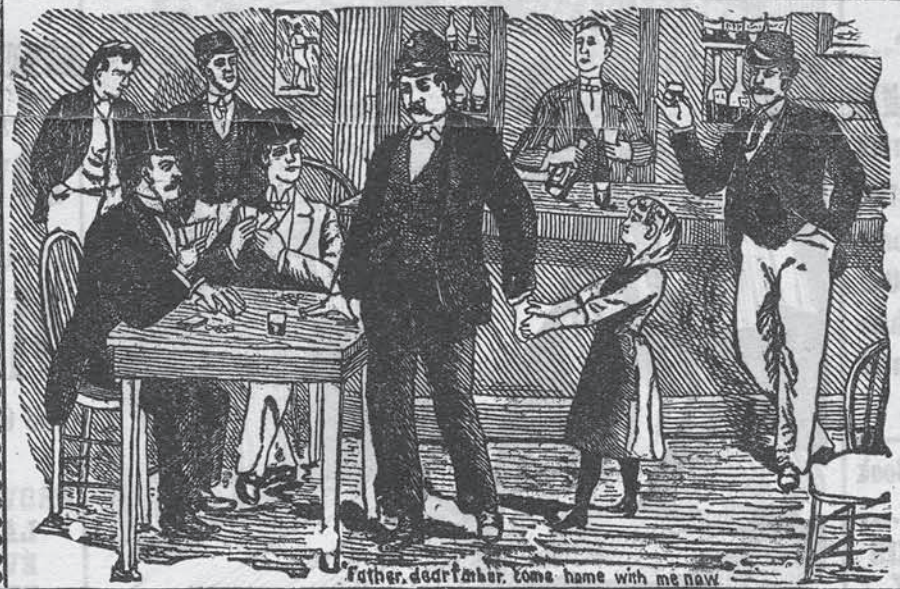
THE DEATH OF LITTLE MARY.

AN ENTERTAINMENT FOR EVERYBODY. INTERESTING TO ALL!

REMOVING THE BARRIER BETWEEN PULPIT AND STAGE.

**MUSIC!
SONGS!
DANCES!**

NEW



Father, dear father, come home with me now

A HAPPY COMBINATION
 OF MIRTH, PATHOS, COMEDY AND SENSATION.

YOU WILL
SEE THE BEST RE rendition
 OF THE PLAY YOU EVER SAW.

ENDORSED BY THE PRESS, CLERGY AND CRITICS OF ALL CREEDS AND DENOMINATIONS!

YOU WILL SEE A FIRST-CLASS COMPANY OF LADIES AND GENTLEMEN. A FIRST-CLASS PERFORMANCE. MAGNIFICENT SCENERY. NEW STAGE SETTINGS.

A FEW REASONS WHY

YOU SEE "TEN NIGHTS IN A BAR ROOM"

CHAPTER 2

HOT AND COLD WATER

DRINKING and debates about it date back almost to the founding of America. Long before Morris Sheppard, arguments about alcohol had prompted the first rebellion in the new country, fueled some of the nation's first social movements, and helped launch women into politics, preparing them for their fight for the right to vote.

The Pilgrims brought beer and hard liquors with them on the *Mayflower*. Later the Puritans learned to distill rum. The earliest settlers were fond of “strong waters” and “hot waters.” Those “waters” may have been safer than regular creek or well water, but also had considerably more mind-fuzzing alcohol than beer or fermented fruit-based drinks like wine and cider.

By the mid-1700s, the new land was awash in various kinds of alcoholic beverages. Rum was almost a form of money, paid as wages and exchanged for basic goods. Gin was cheaper and probably more

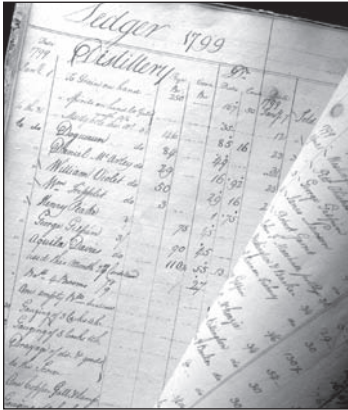
powerful, given its nicknames “Strip and Go Naked” and “Blue Ruin.” Apple cider was widely available in a distilled, or “hard,” version known as

A playbill highlights the sobering message of Ten Nights in a Bar Room, a popular, long-running temperance play.

applejack or Jersey Lightning. Using fermentation processes first discovered by ancient civilizations thousands of years ago, pears became “perry” in New England, honey became mead in Vermont, and Georgia peaches made a fine brandy.

Residents came to expect a good drink almost everywhere—at holiday celebrations and funerals, in taverns, at community meetings, and at polling places. In 1758, a politician from Virginia named George Washington, who was running for the House of Burgesses, bought brandy, rum, cider, beer, and wine for those who turned up to vote, spending a total of thirty-seven pounds, seven shillings. He won.

Hard liquor was so important to both health and morale that members of the Continental Army got a daily ration. As its leader, General Washington enjoyed a wide range of choices, drinking champagne, cider, brandy, beer, rum, and wine. During his first three months as president, hard liquor was one of his largest expenses, though he was a moderate drinker himself. Later he would operate a major whiskey distillery at Mount Vernon.



A 1799 ledger from George Washington's Mount Vernon distillery recorded an active business, including the sale of almost 11,000 gallons of whiskey.

By the late eighteenth century, the new Americans were serious drinkers, with those over age fifteen each consuming, on average, more than five gallons of distilled liquor a year—equal to more than two gallons of pure alcohol—along with many gallons more of beer, cider, and wine.

Drunkenness wasn't the big worry it would later become, but there were already some concerns. Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, former surgeon general of the Continental Army, and maybe the most renowned doctor of the day, published a famous pamphlet in 1784 warning of serious troubles that hard liquor caused drinkers.

Beer, wine, water, and cider were fine, even healthful, he wrote in *An Enquiry*



An early temperance illustration, “The Drunkard’s Progress,” warns of the drinker’s steep decline, from the first drink to an early death.

“I do not think it extravagant therefore to repeat here what has been often said, that spirituous liquors destroy more lives than the sword,” he wrote. “War has its intervals of destruction—but spirits operate at all times and seasons upon human life.”

Rush later devised a “Moral and Physical Thermometer” that displayed how drinking was a quick and slippery slope, starting with tremors and puking from egg rum to the madness and despair of the habitual drunkard. Fearful that drinking would become a major public health problem if it wasn’t kept in check, Rush updated and republished his pamphlet several times over the next two decades. With eerie insight, he predicted that the real revolution against alcohol was still more than a century away. “In the year 1915 a drunkard I hope will be as infamous in society as a liar or a thief, and the use of spirits as uncommon in families as a drink made of a solution of arsenic,” he wrote a friend in 1788.

Initially, Rush’s warnings were largely ignored. But when the young country desperately needed money to pay off war debts in the 1790s, it chose to tax alcoholic beverages, knowing that people loved their liquor so much that they would pay extra to have it. Alexander Hamilton, the secretary of the Treasury, figured

that if those taxes also happened to reduce liquor consumption, the nation would be better off, both morally and physically. In 1791, Congress approved an excise tax on hard liquors—the nation’s first tax on American goods.

Almost immediately, farmers protested, especially those in western Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and Virginia. For them, the roads to markets were so bad that they couldn’t haul all their rye and corn to be sold. So they distilled at least some of it into whiskey, which was less bulky to transport, and they used that whiskey as a form of money, trading it for other goods. These farmers felt particularly singled out and penalized by the taxes, which couldn’t be paid in whiskey and which equaled a third of the typical price they received for their distilled spirits.

Western Pennsylvania was particularly whiskey-soaked, and there, tax collectors were sometimes chased down and subjected to painful and often deadly tarring and feathering. Mobs of angry farmers shot holes in the stills and tried to burn the barns and homes of those who complied with the law by paying their taxes. Then, in August 1794, some 7,000 armed protestors demonstrated against the tax and marched through the streets of Pittsburgh.

In the country’s first act of national force, President Washington ordered 15,000 troops to the area to stop what became known as the Whiskey Insurrection. Luckily, by the time the troops arrived, the residents had calmed down. There was no further violence, and America’s first rebellion was quelled. But for generations after, small still operators would go to great measures to avoid the tax collector.

As settlers moved west to better farming land, whiskey and rum became more plentiful—and cheaper—and at the turn of the nineteenth century, liquor was part of daily American life. In contrast, water might be dirty and milk was perishable and often hard to get. Coffee and tea were expensive. So many families started the day with a glass of whiskey or cider. Workers took breaks at 11 a.m. and again at 4 p.m. for a dramful. Another drink at night helped with digestion and sleep. Babies were given a rum concoction to quiet down, and the sick drank rum and water to perk up. Even children took sips as part of their daily diets.

Abraham Lincoln, born in 1809, recalled that when children “first opened our



In a mid-1800s illustration, parents drink and party to excess at a “gin palace” while their children are neglected.

eyes upon the stage of existence, we found intoxicating liquor, recognized by every body, used by every body, and repudiated by nobody. It commonly entered into the first draught of the infant, and the last draught of the dying man.” Doctors prescribed it for all sorts of ailments. “And,” he wrote, adding his own emphasis, “to have a rolling or raising, a husking or hoe-down, any where without it was *positively insufferable.*”

In the years between 1800 and 1830, Americans drank more hard liquor than at any other time in their history, each imbibing on average roughly nine gallons a year, or about four gallons of pure alcohol, about twice the level of the previous generation. Beer and wine still had a place at the table, but less so than before.

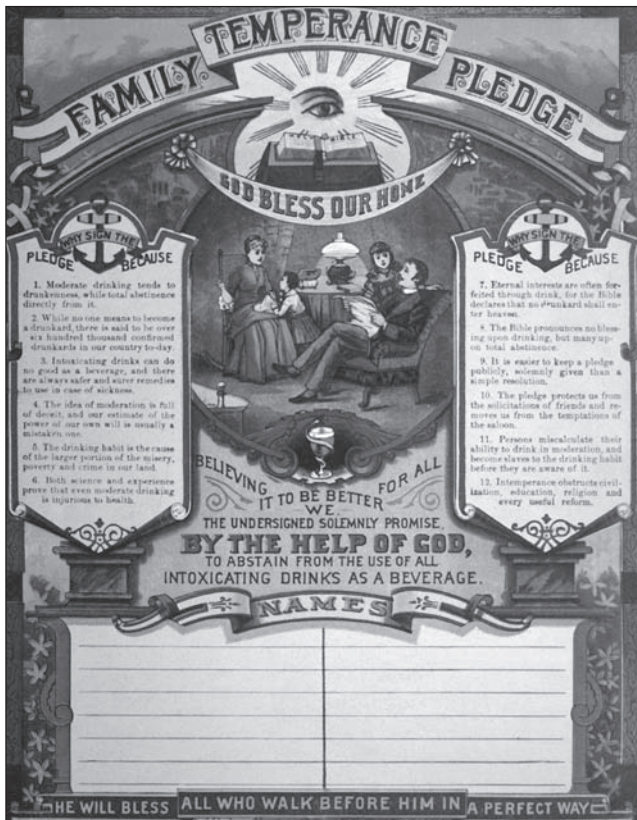
With more hard drink available, the number of taverns and tippling houses multiplied, as did seedier dramshops and gin houses. Not surprising given the amounts ingested, drunkenness also increased and with it, hardships for families

affected by a father's drinking. "Many were greatly injured by it," Lincoln recalled. But the general opinion was that the problems stemmed, he said, not "from the *use* of a *bad thing*, but from the *abuse* of a *very good thing*."

Concerns about that intemperance—or excessive drinking—led to the growth of so-called temperance societies. Members were asked to sign elaborately decorated pledges agreeing to drink only in moderation. Often, people who supported temperance also wanted reform in other areas, calling for an end to slavery, more rights for women, and more education for children.

As the temperance movement began to grow, societies in the 1830s began to discuss a more significant and difficult pledge: an agreement not to drink at all, total abstinence not just from hard liquors, but also from beer, cider, and wine. Those who agreed to live completely "dry" were noted with a "T" by their names on the society's membership rolls, displaying their "total" commitment. In time, those people were known as "teetotalers."

Some joined for religious reasons, others because they had personally experienced the tragedy of too much drink. Susan B. Anthony was just six years old in 1826 when her father decided he would never sell liquor again. Daniel Anthony had sold it in a previous store, but changed his mind when he came across a man by the road,



Temperance pledges like this one from the mid-1800s encourage signers to commit in writing to moderation.

frozen to death with a jug in his hand. When he built a new cotton mill and general store in Battenville, New York, he refused to bring in the rum barrels that customers had come to expect, and when he built housing for his workers, he shockingly served only lemonade at the house raising. As a young woman, Susan would first be a crusader for temperance and only later for women to win the right to vote.

Abraham Lincoln himself took a stand in a famous speech in 1842 when he called on fellow citizens to agree to moderate drinking. “Let us make it as unfashionable to withhold our names from the temperance pledge as for husbands to wear their wives’ bonnets to church, and instances will be just as rare in the one case as the other,” he said. How happy the day will be, he added, “when there shall be neither a slave nor a drunkard on the earth.”

Gradually, the temperance movement became part of American culture, prompting all kinds of stories, plays, and speeches aimed at discouraging liquor. At twenty-three, the poet Walt Whitman wrote a novel of the tragic life of an “inebriate,” (though he was partly inspired by the money he was offered to do it). The showman P. T. Barnum was an avid temperance speaker. One particularly dramatic novel from the early 1850s, *Ten Nights in a Bar Room*, brimmed with the evils of even a single drink: A little girl named Mary arrives at a saloon to beg her father to come home. But in an exchange between her drunken father, Joe, and the barkeeper, Simon Slade, a glass is hurled that accidentally hits Mary in the head, ultimately killing her. That’s only the beginning of the heartbreak and violence; several more lives are shattered before the moral of the tale—that liquor must go—closes the story. *Ten Nights* became a hugely popular temperance play that would be performed off and on for sixty years.

Hoping to influence behavior at a young age, temperance groups also organized children’s societies. One of the first was the Cold Water Army, which had an official pledge:

*We do not think we’ll ever drink,
Whiskey or gin, brandy or rum,
Or anything that’ll make drunk come.*

In some towns, the little armies met frequently to hear short but stirring speeches, sing temperance songs, and hear stories that warned of the many dangers of drink and the positive effects of plain cold water. When the adults gathered for temperance rallies, the children were often the center of attention, wearing badges with slogans like, “Here we pledge perpetual hate to all things that can intoxicate.”

One thousand children joined a march in Baltimore in 1841 wearing red and blue uniforms. The previous year in Duxbury, Massachusetts, one participant remembered, a Fourth of July celebration “drew the entire juvenile population into the ranks” of the Cold Water Army, which “marched into the woods with twice its ordinary numbers, resplendent with flags and many-colored banners, under the escort of a full-fledged band, all palpitating with expectancy.”

For nearly two decades, these societies gained members, and hundreds of thousands of people agreed to swear off alcohol. Impressively, by 1850, the amount of hard liquor consumed per person each year dropped by more than half compared with 1830, to about four gallons of spirits, or less than two gallons of pure alcohol. Led by the Oregon Territory and the state of Maine, many towns and several states passed laws outlawing liquor. But as the next decade approached, most of those laws fell by the wayside as Americans came to grips with a much more pressing matter. The fight to end the practice of slavery was ripping the country apart. The Civil War would soon demand the nation’s full attention.

