

Lyman Beecher: Sermons (1820s-1830s)

Lyman Beecher was a protestant minister in the North during the Antebellum (before Civil War) period. His sermons are a great insight to the issues plaguing urban northern society during the industrial revolution. Northerners looked to reform their condition, a different condition that existed in the south. Here Beecher speaks out on behalf of two major issues for antebellum northerners.

Beecher on Alcohol:

So long as men suppose that there is neither crime nor danger in drinking, short of what they denominate drunkenness, they will cast off fear and move onward to ruin by a silent, certain course, until destruction comes upon them, and they cannot escape. It should be known therefore and admitted, that to drink daily, at stated times, any quantity of ardent spirits, is intemperance, or to drink periodically as often as days, and times, and seasons, may furnish temptation and opportunity, is intemperance.

It may not be for any one time the intemperance of animal or mental excitement, but it is an innovation upon the system, and the beginning of a habit, which cannot fail to generate disease, and will not be pursued by one hundred men without producing drunkards.

It is not enough therefore to erect the flag ahead, to mark the spot where the drunkard dies. It must be planted at the entrance of his course, proclaiming in waving capitals – THIS IS THE WAY TO DEATH!! Over the whole territory...for if we cannot stop men in the beginning, we cannot separate between that and the end...It should be allowed for medical purposes only. It should be labeled – TOUCH NOT, TASTE NOT, HANDLE NOT.

Source: David F. Musto, *Drugs in America: A Documentary History* (NYU Press, Jul 28, 2002) 59.

Beecher on Immigration:

To the question, ‘What is to be done?’ I would say a few things to obviate misapprehension, and indicate what would seem to be the plain practical course.

In the first place, while the language of indiscriminate discourtesy towards immigrants, calculated to wound their feelings, and cast odium on respectable and industrious foreigners, is carefully to be avoided; an immediate and energetic supervision of our government is demanded to check the influx of immigrant paupers (Catholics), thrown upon our shores by the government of Europe, corrupting our morals, quadrupling our taxation, and endangering the peace of our cities and of our nation....

It is both our right and duty so to regulate the influx and the conditions of naturalization, that the increase shall not outrun the possibility of intellectual and moral culture, that the unregulated action of the European population bring down destructions on ourselves and them...

But we must act, and act quickly, and with decision, or the stream will be too deep and mighty to be regulated, and will undermine foundations and sweep away landmarks, and roll the tide of desolation over us.

Source: Lyman Beecher, *A Plea for the West* 2nd edition (Truman and Smith, 1836) 134.