

The New York Times

Book Review

SUNDAY, JANUARY 15, 1922.



Another View of the Situation.

By P. W. WILSON

TOMORROW being the sixteenth of January, the Eighteenth Amendment to the American Constitution prohibiting the manufacture, sale and distribution of alcoholic liquor as a beverage will have been in theoretically full enforcement for two years. Such a challenge to the immemorial habits of mankind on the part of the wealthiest country in the world is without parallel since the similar edict was imposed by Mohammed on the faithful of Islam, and nowhere has the matter aroused deeper feeling than in Great Britain. On visiting London, a few months ago, I was commissioned to prepare a report on the entire question of prohibition for the consideration of social students in the United Kingdom, and it is possible that the conclusions submitted in this document may be of interest on this side of the ocean.

Prohibition is undoubtedly the most drastic of all sumptuary laws. I have found it hard to believe that the men who drafted the Constitution ever supposed that it would contain a clause like the Eighteenth Amendment, which, when once inserted in the document, is practically irreversible. I had, therefore, to examine first the public opinion which carried through the measure. In the Southern States apparently the color question assisted. Over a long period, moreover, the Protestant Churches had been not only united on the subject but powerfully organized. The influence of the schools and colleges told in the same direction. Although the average saloon does not seem to me to have exercised a worse influence than our English public houses carrying on the same business, the saloon was condemned with especial vigor by employers of labor. In-



After Two "Dry" Years

herent in American liberty is the right of discussion; and local franchise or voting kept the issue of temperance alive in every city and State of the Union.

While the war hastened nation-wide prohibition, the country was gradually going dry even before the war. This, at least, I find to be the conclusion advanced by Professor Lindsay of Columbia University in the notes for his article in the forthcoming issue of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, which he has allowed me to read. Slowly but surely the drys were winning territory from the wets and the Eighteenth Amendment did no more, broadly speaking, than to impose on the more densely populated areas, particularly in the East, the verdict already reached in regions not so fully developed—regions which, however, were gaining in importance with every migration of people to the places where there is most room.

Naturally, I have been impressed by the assertion that the Eighteenth Amendment was sprung upon the nation by the Anti-Saloon League; that it makes one rule for the rich with his cellar and the other for the poor who is deprived of his beer; and that it was put over by certain capitalists as a means of securing industrial efficiency at the expense of the comfort of their workmen, this despite the protests of Samuel Gompers and the American Federation of Labor. The fact that many breweries seem to have been conducted by persons racially associated with a country with which at the time the United States was at war and that the saloons were run by men who often belonged to well-defined groups of citizens, may have been prejudicial in certain quarters to the liquor industry. Also I see no reason to doubt that the Anti-Saloon League has made itself a most formidable factor in the lobbies at Washington and the various State capitals.

Whether the League has played its politics fairly or unfairly, I have had no means of judging; after all, life is a rough-and-tumble game, anyhow. But the important question for the social student is not the League as such but the forces behind the League. Why is the Anti-Saloon League so powerful? The view at which I have arrived is that the basis of its authority is not capital, not anti-German or anti-Irish sentiment, not even Protestantism as vocal in the churches, but—in a word—the women. The Eighteenth Amendment, imposing prohibition, and the Nineteenth Amendment, securing the suffrage for women, have been twin events. As citizens, the women of the United States have insisted, first, that there be no Legislatures without their vote, and, secondly, that no indulgence be permitted which they consider to be detrimental to their domestic well-being. In England a woman will enter the public house and will even serve as a barmaid. But in the United States the saloon was a masculine institution, and for this reason it could not withstand the results of co-education. Mrs. Carrie Nation's hatchet was symbolic of multitudinous influences, emanating from home and office and factory, and summed up in the feminine ulti-



After Two "Dry" Years

matum that declared for the movie, where both sexes are welcome, rather than the saloon, where the boy only is entertained, often at the girl's ultimate expense. There is no country in the world where women are treated with the attention which they receive in the United States. Wherever else they may be drudges, here, at least by comparison, they are queens.

With the Eighteenth Amendment thus carried, what remains to be considered is its enforcement. Apparently, there were those who expected that the Supreme Court would come to the rescue with some legal technicality which would mitigate the impending drought. It was hoped that wet States would be permitted to claim a referendum, that it would be possible for them to adopt a less rigid limit of alcoholic content than one-half of one per cent., and that some loophole would be found which would permit, let us say, New Jersey to administer prohibition in her own way, allowing light wines and beer as a compromise. But a consideration of the many decisions of the Supreme Court shows that this tribunal has assumed that the people of the United States knew what they were doing when they passed the Eighteenth Amendment, and that in any event, if they did not, they must bear the consequences. It was not for the judges to rectify the enthusiasms or the negligence of the electorate. The Supreme Court has in the main upheld the authority of Congress to interpret and of the Federal officers everywhere to enforce the amendment.

The Volstead act, especially as passed over the veto of President Wilson, was from the first an impressive gesture in favor of strict enforcement. Evidence has appeared to show that some Congressmen who themselves included liquor among their minor luxuries were voting against liquor reaching the people as a whole. Apparently, their attitude represented what they believed to be public opinion rather than their own personal habit and inclination. In November, 1920, there were held the elections. No detached observer could avoid noticing that in the platform of neither of the great political parties did there appear the wet plank favoring light wines and beer. Still more significant has been the fact that the new Congress has in the Autumn of 1921 strengthened the Volstead act in important particulars. It is the claim of the drys that their cause is more strongly entrenched at the Capitol than ever before, and if we are to judge by the Congressional Record, the claim

After Two "Dry" Years would seem to be justified.

Over large areas, as for instance, Kansas, which has been dry for fifty years, it may be assumed that nation-wide prohibition has merely assisted the authorities in an exclusion of liquor, already in force. In any city, county or State it is obvious that the drier the environment the easier will it be to keep dry a particular district. Many Europeans, only visiting the Eastern States, thus form a too limited conclusion as to prohibition. They are hospitably entertained in houses where, as a rule, there is a cellar, still unexhausted, and they go back to the other side saying that anybody can get it. My own view has been that a verdict is of value which does not survey the country as a whole.

In the past there have been four methods of taking stimulants or narcotics—first as beer, secondly as wine, thirdly as spirits, and lastly as drugs. Beginning with beer, I and that by general admission commercial brewing has ceased. Some months ago there was a decision allowing such brewing to be renewed for medical purposes only, but Congress has since forbidden this by legislation—the Wallis-Campbell act. With the disappearance of the legal saloon there is no means of distributing beer, owing to its bulk, and the only question that remains is to what extent there has sprung up the practice of brewing beer in the home. Such brewing is both possible and inexpensive, and the most sensational figures have been given for Chicago, New York and other cities to indicate that it is prevalent. These statistics are, however, estimates only, and it does not appear as if there were any comparison between the volume of beer actually home brewed and the former supply by a highly organized, efficiently conducted and legally recognized industry. Home brewing involves trouble. This trouble falls on the housewife. And it is this very housewife who has supported prohibition.

Kansas, which has been dry for fifty years, it may be assumed that nation-wide prohibition has merely assisted the authorities in an exclusion of liquor, already in force. In any city, county or State it is obvious that the drier the environment the easier will it be to keep dry a particular district. Many Europeans, only visiting the Eastern States, thus form a too limited conclusion as to prohibition. They are hospitably entertained in houses where, as a rule, there is a cellar, still unexhausted, and they go back to the other side saying that anybody can get it. My own view has been that a verdict is of value which does not survey the country as a whole.

In the past there have been four methods of taking stimulants or narcotics—first as beer, secondly as wine, thirdly as spirits, and lastly as drugs. Beginning with beer, I and that by general admission commercial brewing has ceased. Some months ago there was a decision allowing such brewing to be renewed for medical purposes only, but Congress has since forbidden this by legislation—the Wallis-Campbell act. With the disappearance of the legal saloon there is no means of distributing beer, owing to its bulk, and the only question that remains is to what extent there has sprung up the practice of brewing beer in the home. Such brewing is both possible and inexpensive, and the most sensational figures have been given for Chicago, New York and other cities to indicate that it is prevalent. These statistics are, however, estimates only, and it does not appear as if there were any comparison be-

After Two "Dry" Years

tween the volume of beer actually home brewed and the former supply by a highly organized, efficiently conducted and legally recognized industry. Home brewing involves trouble. This trouble falls on the housewife. And it is this very housewife who has supported prohibition.

In a country so full of enterprise as is the United States it was inevitable that specialties for home brewing would be advertised and sold. Such brewing is, however, illegal, and if it continues after the novelty has worn off it would be possible for Congress to legislate—if legislation is necessary—against the supply of the prepared ingredients. My belief is that this aspect of the case has been much exaggerated and that in any event it is only of a temporary importance. I am, of course, dealing with the matter from the standpoint of a British observer who has to compare the situation with that of his own country, where there are 100,000 liquor licenses for 40,000,000 people. By the side of that fact home brew in the United States is, I am convinced, only a picturesque detail. That some families are so amusing themselves is probable. That inadvertently they may be poisoning themselves is possible, but that the hobby will develop in years to come seems incredible.

With regard to wine I would say that this seems another detail. While there are amusing stories of alcoholic melons in California and of suspected mincemeat and brandied fruits, the broad fact is that the fermentation of wine as an industry, as in France or Portugal, is not carried on in the United States. Some housewives have for many years prepared their cordials and they will doubtless continue in some cases still

do this, but, generally speaking, wine can only be replenished by import from Europe. That import is illegal except for sacramental or for medicinal purposes. It is possible that there has been some evasion of the law in both these directions, but recent legislation—the Willis-Campbell act—forbids further import until existing stocks in bond are exhausted by permit. It is stated that in 1920 France exported 8,000,000 bottles of champagne to Britain. To the United States, with more than double the population, the export from France was only 285,000 bottles. This gives each American on the average one bottle of champagne for every 386 years.

On drugs, it is not easy to obtain nation-wide and reliable statistics. There is no doubt that the United States is a country where the patent medicine is universally advertised and consumed. But what may be

d the great drug scare occurred in the year 1919, before the Eighteenth Amendment had been applied. Then it was asserted that there was a million drug addicts in the forty-eight States and most alarming figures were presented of the amount of opium and other narcotics consumed. These statistics, offered by a committee investigating for the Treasury, were, however, somewhat discounted by the actual test of the draft for the army, which showed that out of 3,500,000 men there were only 3,120 addicts, or less than 1 in 1,000. Other evidence indicated that addiction is fairly evenly distributed between men and women, and that it particularly assails the young person. The military result was thus to be accepted as typical.

I can find no proof and hardly any serious assertion that the absence of drink has driven any considerable number of persons to drugs. Reports from many States are to some extent conflicting, but apparently it is

After Two "Dry" Years

agreed that the danger of drugs is greatest in the big cities, where the danger of alcoholism is also most apparent, and that drugs and drink are therefore not rivals and alternatives but allies.

The success or failure of prohibition does not depend on either wine or drugs, which are, once more, details, but on spirits. If the people have only turned from beer in order to consume whisky, and had whisky at that, the reform will have done more harm than good.

The proposition that there has been any increase in the consumption of spirits is, I cannot but think, wholly wide of the mark. The utmost that can be alleged is that this consumption in certain areas has not been stamped out, and that the quality of the spirits consumed has deteriorated. In the aggregate, the volume of "hooch" put down the human throat in the United States is a mere fraction of what it was before the amendment came into effect. Of this estimate, the enormous increase in price may be taken as an infallible proof. While there are places still wide open, their number is comparatively few, compared with the saloons and the bars available in the old days—and it is understood that injunctions will now be resorted to by the agents. There are no advertisements of liquor in the press. No sky-signs announce a favorite label. And the label on the bottle now tells nothing as to its contents. The very fact that substitutes of every kind, some of them sheer poison, are too freely imbibed shows how rare is the real stuff. Liquor has ceased to be a commodity and has become a valuable. It is now worth while for the bandit to break into one's neighbor's cellar.

I gather that in some universities there have been students who for the jest of the thing have taken liquor which they would not have thought of taking if it had been legal to do so. Also, it is said that girls anxious to do the smart thing have indulged in the hitherto unfamiliar cocktail. It was, I think, Mr. Ziegfeld who said that prohibition had increased intemperance among chorus girls, but the suggestion was submitted to a jury of women and negatived by eight votes to four.

And in regard to theatres, I cannot but be impressed by the emphatic approval of prohibition on the part of Mr. Belasco, who has the best right, perhaps, of any man to speak on such an aspect of the case. As quoted, Mr. Belasco considers that the dry law helps the stage both through the box office and by increasing the artistic efficiency of the dramatist and the artist. With regard to the movies, a case at Los Angeles has caused a painful impression. But we have the evidence of Mr. Griffith that the movie star has no chance of an established success unless he or she lives under the strictest and most Spartan régime. The movie house has, moreover, helped to kill the saloon. Not less striking has been the testimony of Mr. Statler, the proprietor of so many great hotels. One would have supposed that on the argument familiar to the hotel industry in the United Kingdom he would have regarded the bar as a profitable part of the business and would have opposed its removal. But, in fact, he supports Mr. Belasco, and for essentially the same reasons. The bar is made for man. The box office and the restaurant and the flower stall and the soda fountain are made for both men and women. Abolish the bar and you double the number of your customers. Mr. Statler has found that more husbands are now

After Two "Dry" Years

taking their wives and families to the theatre and that this means more dining and supping in hotels.

When further it is borne in mind that at the clubs and hotels of reputation liquor is not served as a rule in public, that it is rigidly excluded from railroad stations, Pullmans and river steamers, and that it is contrary to discipline in the army and navy, it will be realized that there is in the United States a wholly different standard in this matter from what you will find in any other country, at least in Europe.

The severe epidemics of poisoning by wood alcohol cannot be lightly dismissed. That there should be about twenty-five deaths from this cause recorded in New York over the recent period of holiday implies a still greater number of less serious cases of which the public will hear nothing. In Great Britain, some years ago, there was a somewhat similiar situation owing to the discovery of arsenic in certain qualities of beer. The effect on the public was immediate. The disclosure acted as a more effective deterrent from consumption of liquor than all the tracts of the temperance societies for years past. From numerous conversations, as well as from articles in the press, I gather that the same sequel is likely in the case of wood alcohol. At the moment, it seems to be demonstrated that cases of alcoholism now occurring are more acute than they would have been if the cause had been beer or even good whisky.

Let us first see what has happened in the bonded warehouses. Many of these were isolated and ill-guarded. It follows that an immense quantity of liquor has been withdrawn or stolen in an improper way. While this was going on, the distilleries were replenishing the stores with new spirits going into bond, on the plea that the alcohol was needed either for medicinal or other legitimate purposes, as, for instance, the making of perfumes. The Willis-Campbell act forbids this, and if it is obeyed by the Federal authorities no new spirits will be either imported or manufactured until the present stores are exhausted. This means that hereafter, if liquor is withdrawn from bond, whether properly or improperly, there will be less for the future. Also it is proposed to concentrate stocks in fewer and better secured warehouses.

In the United States the fiscal year ends on June 30. For 1917 there were produced 278,000,000 gallons of spirits. For 1921 the production had fallen to 86,000,000 gallons, or less than a third, and all these gallons were distilled before the Willis-Campbell act came into force. For 1917 there were withdrawn from bond 160,000,000 gallons. For 1921 this amount had fallen to 35,000,000 gallons, or one-fifth. Stocks remaining in bond have fallen from 282,000,000 gallons to 50,000,000.

It will thus be seen that, whatever other comment has to be made on these figures, they dispose of the idea that, so far as spirits in bond are concerned, there has been an increase in consumption as a result of beer being stopped. Assuming that the entire release of 35,000,000 gallons is due to evasion, it represents a consumption far below that of the year 1917 or any recent previous year.

There are, of course, only two legal reasons for releasing any spirits at all, namely, as medicine and for industrial purposes. With 150,000 doctors in the United States, it

After Two "Dry" Years

would have been a miracle if there had not been some overprescription of alcohol. A brief analysis of the position will show, however, that the physicians have not been responsible for any appreciable "deluge of booze." To begin with, twenty-four out of forty-eight States in the Union are medically dry, and doctors there domiciled, numbering about 40,000—so I understand—hold no permits at all. In fact, the number of doctors recorded as holding permits is only 33,000 or thereabout, or 22 per cent. of the total number of physicians. This means that more than three out of every four doctors either are prohibited from prescribing alcoholic beverages or of their own discretion do not desire to be so permitted. The remainder are only allowed 100 prescription forms every three months, and no prescription must exceed half a pint of spirits. If every prescribing physician holding a permit were to prescribe to the full amount of his allowance, the whisky released in a year would be under 1,000,000 gallons. This works out at about a pint a day for every 5,000 persons in the United States. And, after all, one deterrent is that the patient pays not only a top price for his whisky but the doctor's fee in addition. The medical aspect of prohibition, though important, so far as it goes, may be reckoned, I think, among the details.

Far more serious has been the scandal of forged permits, not for doctors, but for various commercial enterprises which are entitled to a certain legitimate ration of alcohol. From reports in the newspapers it is clear that the authorities have put their finger on this leak and that measures are being taken to stop it by the appropriate legal proceedings. In considering the figures which have been mentioned as representing the volume of "escaped" liquor, one ought to compare them with the population of the United States, which also is a large numeral. To give every American citizen one customary drink of rum or whisky in a year—that is, in 365 days—would consume 2,000,000 gallons of spirits. If, then, one reads that 500,000 gallons have "leaked" somewhere, it may be deplorable from the dry standpoint, but it only means a drink all around once every two years! If we assume that today not more than one-eighth of the people touch anything, it means for the "wets" one drink all around in three months. Any invasion is doubtless regrettable. It spreads disrespect for the law. It turns otherwise law-abiding citizens into offenders. It defrauds the revenue and it corrupts civil servants. But the aggregate of evasion, estimated at its highest, works out at a low percentage of consumption per head. The lockers in clubs, the flasks in the pocket, the secret receptacles in the chairs of restaurants—all these devices, however ingenious and amusing, do not amount to more than a fraction of the normal outflow of liquor under legal regulation.

Finally, I must deal with the liquor which never comes into bond at all—liquor illegally distilled by moonshiners or smuggled into the country by rum-runners. Of this liquor there cannot be, in the nature of things, any mathematical estimate. It may be more, it may be less—no one can say for certain. In a country so large as the United States, and with such forests and mountains, as yet untracked, there will always be some moonshining. In so far as it is serious, however, it provokes a contrary demand for stricter en-

After Two "Dry" Years
 forcement, and officials appear to be stirred up by agitation to do something definite. Moonshining, in a sense, thus defeats itself. It cannot succeed beyond a certain measure without reprisals following. It must be regarded as the inevitable percentage or margin which always separates the ideal from the actual. No law is ever perfectly enforced or fully obeyed.

Smuggling overseas does not appear to be difficult to handle. I have reports of three vessels detected on the east coast within the last few weeks. Some passengers may get through at the customs with a bottle or two and some seamen also. On the Pacific seaboard, the Chinese are said to have imported considerable quantities of cunningly packed bottles, labeled with the weirdest mottos. Some private yachts have been suspected and searched. And, at Washington, the embassies and legations, permitted by diplomatic privilege to be wet, are accused, from time to time, of exuding superfluous moisture. But, on the whole, smuggling overseas is negligible compared with possible smuggling over land frontiers so extensive as that of Mexico and also of Canada.

In the case of the Dominion, Quebec is still wet. And undoubtedly there have been fleets of high-power automobiles so constructed as to carry, say, fifty gallons of spirits in addition to their usual gasoline. Out of this contraband, immense profits have been made by courageous individuals and the night-riding has been both rapid and romantic.

The question still to be answered, however, is what bulk of spirits has been secured by these expeditions. Let us suppose that a car, with capacity for fifty gallons of "hootch," were to make 100 trips per annum.

That would mean 5,000 gallons, safely smuggled, provided that all went well. To obtain from Canada 1,000,000 gallons a year, would thus require 200 cars. And, even so, they could only moisten the areas near to the frontier of Quebec. It is a serious leak and it ought not to be minimized. But even Quebec, although considerably enriched by what is going on, cannot replace the distilling industry of the United States.

To sum up, then, I have reported to Britain that prohibition has come to stay, that it is a policy particularly approved by women, that it has virtually stopped the consumption of beer and has enormously reduced the consumption of wine and spirits, without stimulating, so far as can be discerned, the taste for drugs. I have pointed out the strict attitude assumed by the Supreme Court and by Congress and have further explained the significance of the various evasions, and of the new alcoholism, in its more violent forms. On the social results of the policy, I seem to find but one responsible opinion, at any rate among employers. Even on Mondays, labor is now alert and efficient. A wave of unemployment, though possibly exaggerated, has been sufficiently serious to render noticeable an unprecedented absence of distress. Apparently, savings bank deposits are rapidly growing and with them the number of depositors' accounts. According to insurance companies, there have been several years added recently to the expectation of life among persons holding their policies. If I remember rightly, a remarkable fall in infant mortality has occurred in New York, some thousands of babies' lives being saved. From several sources and several cities I have

After Two "Dry" Years information, apparently reliable, that crime has diminished and especially crimes of passion and violence. One hears of a lumber camp in Michigan and an Italian quarter in Long Island being similarly transformed. In one western city, for some years dry, I asked in vain for the poorhouse and the prison. Apparently they had none and the word poorhouse or workhouse seemed unfamiliar. I had to explain it. That some employers are applying to the workers a rule against liquor which they do not themselves observe is perfectly true. In that sense there is, for the moment, one law for the rich and another law for the poor. But a "wet" parade, arranged here in New York last Summer, was a failure. I can discover no general and popular resentment against the self-denying ordinance, nor any disinclination in Europe to emigrate to "Sahara."

What appears to be happening is a liquidation of thirst among those who already have it without the thirst being renewed among the younger generation that is growing up to take their place. I have in mind two families, in one of which the father and in the other of which the mother drank at times to excess. In both cases the children are being reared without a taste, and I believe without encountering the smell or the sight of liquor. I cannot but compare such instances with the deplorable scenes outside public houses which I witnessed in England only a few weeks ago. Prohibition is not a gospel; it is simply a law. It does not aim at a positive good. It does negative considerable evils. Whether Britain will easily adopt this policy I am still very doubtful. Britain is today wetter than the wettest State of the Union before prohibition went into effect. If, however, Britain once gets hold of the big facts she may move quickly. She would then have no land frontier to watch and no forests and mountains on the American scale. A Britain, once dry, might be thus more dry than the United States. That, however, is prophecy, and for the moment Britain has to be convinced.



NY Times Book Review