Manuscript: Trouble Thoughts about Prohibition

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TROUBLED QUESTIONS ABOUT PROHIBITION.

Is prohibition becoming a menace to temperance?

A startling question but one which must be considered by the gentlemen who gather in Houston, Texas in June - in Kansas City, Missouri, in July, if they are to frame platforms on which candid Democrats and Republicans can support with some degree of hopefulness and self respect the candidates for the Presidency which they name.

Five years ago I should have laughed at such a question, a menace! Prohibition had established national temperance. I was the more emphatic because a convert. I had not liked a national law dictating what men and women could or could not drink. Temperance by force seemed to me an unworthy and untrustworthy substitute for temperance by choice which I believed we were slowly achieving. I dreaded too the spread through the country of the hateful combination of fanatical dryness and underhanded wetness which I had run upon in more than one so-called "bone dry" state. However I was willing to consent to any measure that promised to root out the saloon.

My doubts and fears - wobbling if you wish - were ended by a series of personal experiences in the years immediately following the adoption of the Amendment. At that time I was giving from four to eight consecutive weeks each winter to lyceum work. It took me from coast to coast and from Gulf to Lakes. It meant night changes in lonesome places, waits in dreary stations, days in questionable hotels. The only real terror that I had ever felt in this hard travel was of the drunken man who, not infrequently, reeled against me, leered at
me. Not long after the adoption of the 18th Amendment I discovered that he was gone. Prohibition had destroyed him.

Another heartening discovery was that of the new life among working people. Every industrial settlement I visited, or from which I had reports, was taking on order and cleanliness unheard of before the Amendment. The children had more shoes, the women more time at home; there were cars and savings accounts. Prohibition had done this by closing the saloon, forcing the weak and vicious to sobriety. No price, I told myself, was too great to pay for such a short cut to national temperance.

That was five years ago. To-day I am asking myself whether prohibition is any longer serving as a guarantee of temperance, whether it may not be that, having accomplished its revolutionary purpose—the destruction of the saloon—it is not actually becoming a hindrance to further progress and may not in a few years, if things go on as they are now, become a menace to the degree of temperance from choice which the country had achieved before the 18th Amendment was adopted.

These questions have been forced upon me just as my conclusions of five years ago were by personal experience in course of the travel necessary to filling lecture engagements in various parts of the country. The comforting security I had come to feel, whatever the loneliness or sordidness of my surroundings, has been disturbed by the reappearance of an occasional drunken man on a railway platform, at night on a street. More disquieting is the evidence that liquor is finding its way into a place which I am obliged to use constantly and in which I had always felt safe—the Pullman car. Liquor on the breath of a Pullman porter was an entirely new experience to me, but in the past few years it has been a frequent
one. Changing cars in the middle of the night three years ago I was helped on to my train by a porter so drunk that I refused to stay in the car unless he was removed as he was promptly, with profuse apologies by a sleepy conductor now could this happen under the strict rules of the company in a body of men as self respecting and altogether admirable as our Pullman porters? Only through passengers, carrying their supply, drinking it on the train, and treating the porter who accepted through weakness, the desire to be obliging, or the fear if he refused of endangering the fat fee which is almost sure to follow protection of a drinking party.

Drunken men and drinking parties have been frequent on the Pullmans I have used in recent years. I have lain awake and listened to a man babble half the night and nobody protested except myself, and my protest was effective for only brief intervals. I recall at least a half dozen drinking parties going on in state rooms. I do not know that anything could be done about it so long as they remained in their own quarters, They had paid for the room. They carried their own liquor. I have had one convincing proof that they carried an ample supply. It was after a night on a train which a band of revelers had invaded at midnight, and keeping the passengers awake for two or three hours by their irresistible excitement. Everybody changed trains at daybreak. There was confusion about bags, during the morning I opened the one I had carried off. Lying on the top of the other contents were two big bottles of Scotch whisky - part of the supply of the hilarious party that had caused so much disturbance to the would be sleepers of the night before.

The hotel, like the railroad, has ceased to be the inviolate place I believed it had become. Even highly respectable
hotels sometimes allow drinking parties to go on until fellow guests protest. In one of the best managed small hotels I frequent—one to which I always go when I am in that particular city—a large party occupied a room next to mine one night four years ago, and were undisturbed in a noisy drinking bout which lasted until 2 a.m. when I telephoned the office that my patience was exhausted. The men were quickly carried or steered to other quarters. In this case the party was made up of delegates to a convention annually held in the house—a profitable connection not to be disturbed if it was possible to avoid it.

Over Sunday drinking parties in Western and Southern towns—I have never run across them elsewhere—are sometimes of dreadful proportion. Arriving at 8 a.m. one Monday at a trim new hotel in a north Dakota town I was hardly in my room before a highly exasperated housekeeper appeared to examine what she called the "remains."

"There have been two bums locked in this room since Saturday—drinking their souls away. Nobody could get in. Look there," she almost sobbed, "so drunk they actually poured their whisky over my nice new mahogany." True enough there were long patches of varnish burned down the front of the bureau and the desk was mottled and scared.

"It is worse than before prohibition in this part of the country," the housekeeper went on. "I thought that the Amendment would end our troubles, but the drinking is more beastly. We have them every week just like this."

"And where do they get it?" I asked.

"Get it here in this town. Anybody can that's wise. We are only sixty miles from the Border and a whisky express runs
through on schedule time. The drivers stop here at midnight for
gas and meals. Anybody can get what he wants from them."

Many of the women I have talked with in Middle West
boarding houses and hostelaries have been deeply disturbed by what
they described as "things that never happened before." Tied up
for 24 hours by storm in a dingy railroad town I was obliged to
stay in a boarding house near the tracks. It was winter and the
sitting room was unheated. My room was cold and inexpressibly
dreary. So I took refuge in the big dining room where a vicious
but beautiful parrot - the activities of the incoming and shifting
train seen between the blossoming geraniums and begonias in the
big windows - and a talkative and active minded landlady kept me
entertained.

"See that boy" she said suddenly, pointing to a little
fellow of perhaps twelve years, coming from behind a freight car
with a big package in his arms. "That's booze he's got. That
happens every day and I don't know how in the world we're going to
stop it. This always was a bad town for drink. We had a bar in
this very house. My husband ran it, but I kept an eye on it.
Made him shut down at midnight, throw out drunks. He never drank
bad - bar keepers ain't apt to. We women here were all for pro-
hibition and it certainly did clean up the town the first two years;
then the stuff began to be sneaked in - See that garage over there -
nothing but a big speak-easy. That's where that boy is going, men
don't dare take it off the train - use boys - use boys to distribute
it, that's what scares me. Bad as the saloons were boys never
went into them. We women would have torn them down first, but how
are we going to stop this, - They're so cunning about it and sneaky,
and with the men back of them like they are. Do you suppose they
don't get a drink now and then - can't make me believe they don't - and how about respect for law - any kind of law. They are growing up without it.

"As for the men they drink more, at least my husband does. Always was a great hand to visit. The travelling men - railroad hands off work used to come in here evenings - now they go over there - so there he goes, and he drinks too much. I ain't got anything like the hold I had on him with the bar in the house. But it's the boys that worry me most - and not knowing what we can do about it."

Possibly such a situation as this could not be duplicated in the country, but it is an illustration of the way bootleggers and their customers shape their commerce to suit circumstances - and in doing so often make drinkers of those who in the old days were like these boys protected from direct temptation.

Something of that kind is happening in many offices, the bootlegger serving the man at the top manages to build up a trade among clerks, stenographers, even elevator and office boys. A friend of mine at the head of a large educational undertaking was obliged recently to discharge a valuable man whom he found retailing liquor to the office force, most of whom probably never before had used liquor in any form.

Experience seems to prove that if liquor comes in for use at the top it will almost invariably penetrate to the bottom. Fifteen years ago I had among my acquaintances a captivating colored youth - the neighborhood handy man - I never knew him to drink in those days, but within three years after Prohibition arrived he was tippling continually. "Where did he get it?" One of his part-time employers, wanting a faithful messenger between himself and boot-
never entered a saloon but now he drank every time he entered this man's house. Other similar connections were established and always Jo was rewarded with a drink—sometimes a pint to carry away. To-day he is so rarely sober that his former friends have been obliged to find another handy-man.

These are accidental experiences to be sure, but the more significant because accidental. They have come unsought to one who, because a woman, has not a natural access to places where law breaking might be looked for—not a natural approach to those who deal with law breakers. But these experiences are not exceptional in nature. The daily reports of crime and accident prove the part that "hard liquor" plays in the life of the country—as do the drama and fiction dealing with contemporary manners. Curious indeed the picture of contradictions the historian of a hundred years from now will draw of American sobriety in 1926!

"Don't talk about it"—is the answer of large groups—particularly of those interested in politics. If the question isn't raised they apparently think there will be no question. Press them and they say "enforce the law." They say it in a variety of eloquent periods, but if you try to draw from them definite and convincing ideas of how they would go about enforcement you get only a repetition of what is doing already with a success depending, not on the vigor of the police and the severity of the judges, but on the consent, the backing, of the community.

One of the gravest questions forced on us by the revolt against prohibition, now assuming such unexpected forms and pro-
tion, is whether we are not asking something from law which can never be secured except through human consent. Is it physically possible to keep liquor out of a country with a boundary lines of water and land thousands and thousands of miles long when there is a substantial minority that does not approve of the attempt?

Working against enforcement is not only the non-consent of the governed but the lukewarm consent of the governing — who are frequently one thing in public and another in private — a teetotaler at home may be a "wet" politically — a drinker may be "dry", a man may talk and vote dry in Congress and serve liquor at his table. The same is true of the mayors of towns. All this makes for the confusion of the policeman on the beat. He must not see the boot legger, who carries in the supply for an official, but he must at least occasionally arrest the man who makes the liquor, — if he can find him.

The here — dry, there — wet practice shows itself frequently in the industrial world. There are no more ardent supporters of Prohibition than the heads of great industries. They have profited enormously by it. It has made for the steadiness and efficiency of labor. Because of it the liberal-minded and progressive employers have seen their safety, stock sharing, educational, housing plans pushed vigorously forward. The men were morally inclined and financially able to co-operate. Prohibition has made too for industrial peace. Sober men are reasonable men. Employers of labor are emphatic supporters of prohibition — for their employees; as for themselves they "know how to drink" and exercise a privilege which money and power give them.
That is the employer makes of prohibition an economic class issue. Those who haven't money must not be trusted, those who have may be. The working man does not admit the fairness of the decision. He contends that he is as capable of self control as his employer and we have organized labor demanding a modification of the Volstead Act which will give back beer to the worker:

The situation we are now in is most difficult and trying for the great body of sincere and consistent prohibitionists who have labored for years for a National Amendment believing that it would put an immediate end to all forms of intemperance. If they are frank and open-eyed, and many of them are, they are suffering the painful disillusionment which inevitably comes to reformers who believe the evil they hate can be cured by law or formulae alone. When they get what they want they sooner or later are horrified to find law is not enough - that the way out is not so easy - that they still are under the old hard compulsion of persuading men. They have tried to shuffle off responsibility and here it is back on their shoulders, croaking in their ear, that unless they win with consent the law will be nullified - may finally die of disuse.

This is bringing from many a new question - might not a crusade, similar to the old fashioned temperance crusade arouse law-breakers to the enormity of defying the law of the nation - bring them to what is called by some "willing acceptance", of what has been decided by the majority to be for the good of all? But the old fashioned appeal was to free manhood. Can you arouse a man willingly to yield to a