

THE EFFECTS OF DRINK *(Originally published May 1965)*

The reply under this month's "Letters" to the discussion of mixed drinking in last month's Bulletin was welcomed by us (the anonymous editor). There is no furtiveness or mystery to our anonymity, as most of our readers know that anything unsigned in this publication comes from our overworked pen. We wish it were otherwise, and if more of our literary-minded M.D.s would send us material, we would be relieved to busy ourselves with editing alone. Unfortunately, at deadline time each month, someone has to fill the empty columns.

As a medical cynic we do weep often, for we are aware that figures and statistics can be made to prove anything, and we wonder whether those unqualified statistics gathered by Dr. Newton, a non-drinking Baptist minister, could withstand the tests of reliability and impartiality. It had never occurred to us to lift a cocktail to the "glory of God," although we can recall being in the company of several sincere clergymen who have managed it without offending anyone. When Jesus, to accommodate his mother and the wedding guests in Cana who had run out of drink, changed the water into wine to manifest his glory and win the admiration of his disciples (St. John; 2: 3-11), we doubt that he felt he was contributing to the downfall of humanity.

We have no quarrel even with narrow-minded teetotalers. Some of them have won their own battles with bottles to arrive at their own, personal and sensible decisions. We do question, at times, their understanding of mankind, human nature and human behavior.

The non-drinkers did win a major battle back in 1919 when the Volstead Act was passed, and their majority ruled for 14 years during the great social experiment with prohibition. They passed a law.

The effects of the Volstead Act and Prohibition were quite significant. During the Twenties and early Thirties, good liquor disappeared from the tables and open saloons, and bad liquor appeared in the bathtubs and speakeasies. In the decade after Prohibition went into effect, drinking on a national scale did decrease, and there were a number of beneficial effects. Unfortunately, there were also bad effects. Most drinkers continued to drink, now illegally; more young people began to drink; and the attitude all over the nation toward law enforcement and respect for laws in general worsened. Another great triumph of the Prohibition era was that it developed that wonderful class of citizens who were to become internationally known and acclaimed, the American Gangster. Without its impetus, the "syndicates" and what we know as "organized crime" might never have become so well established. The most conclusive finding of an objective study and report

by the Federal Council of Churches in 1925 was that social legislation was no substitute for social education, a lesson that few politicians and no reformers ever seem to learn. There is no doubt that liquor can be harmful, and it takes no simple exercise in faulty, tortured logic to prove it. The same kind of logic; however, may be applied to any form of human activity, from eating and watching television to and including sex and religion. While no electric trade schools "allow" their students to be electrocuted, neither do they prohibit electricity.

In 1933, after having weighed the advantages and disadvantages of its experience under Prohibition, the nation decided not to pass another law; instead, it repealed one. That issue appears to have been settled, for in the past 32 years there has been no national clamor to return to Prohibition. What the citizens of Columbus had hoped to do in last year's referendum was to discard hypocrisy and repeal another law.

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