

Laboratory of Dry Law Enforcement

Washington Busy With Batteries of Test Tubes and Retorts Trying to Keep Track of New Ways of Camouflaging Alcohol as a Beverage



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Where "Booze Mixtures" Are Tested by the Government. The Division of Chemistry, Bureau of Internal Revenue, Treasury Department, Washington, to Which Is Submitted Home-Made Brews Which the Federal Liquor-Hounds Suspect. Chief Chemist A. B. Adams in the Foreground.

IN a suite of large rooms on the top floor of the Treasury Building in Washington Science plays the part of Sherlock Holmes for the whole country, and at this time the nine Government chemists who, by means of test tube and still, convert the clues sent into them by Internal Revenue agents into irrefutable evidence for the law courts are busier than ever before because of violations of wartime prohibition and frauds in food preparations induced by the high cost of living.

The Division of Technology, as this branch of the Bureau of Internal Revenue is called, passes on all patent medicines that contain alcohol, drawing the line strictly between a medicine and a beverage; on all narcotic preparations, to see if they violate the Harrison nar-

of this kind require the sending of the mash or other evidence to Washington to be analyzed. So far the use of home stills is not extensive, when the population of the whole country is considered, but the present rate of increase seems to prove, at least, that a close, many-eyed surveillance will be necessary to prevent illicit distilling on a wide scale. Some of the stills captured are home-made. Others were bought of dealers when the dry period was seen coming on. In one case a tinner was supplying the neighborhood with stills. He was making his sixth when Internal Revenue agents came upon him. In another case the apparatus was divided among three men; one had the container for the mash, the second the still, and the third the worm. When the coast was clear they

The process continues until there is produced a liquid containing from 3 to 7 per cent. of alcohol, according to the strength of the original mixture. The liquid is called raisin wine.

"Some are not content with this, the making of which is in itself, of course, a clear violation of the prohibition law. So they proceed to distill the wine. The mash is put into the still and heat applied. The mixture of water and alcohol is vaporized and, escaping through a pipe, enters a coil immersed in cold water, where condensation ensues. As every one who has had anything to do with chemistry knows, alcohol vaporizes at a lower point than water, consequently the result is a high concentration of alcohol. With an efficient still and by going over the process several times, these violators of the law have succeeded in producing a distillation quite as strong as whisky."

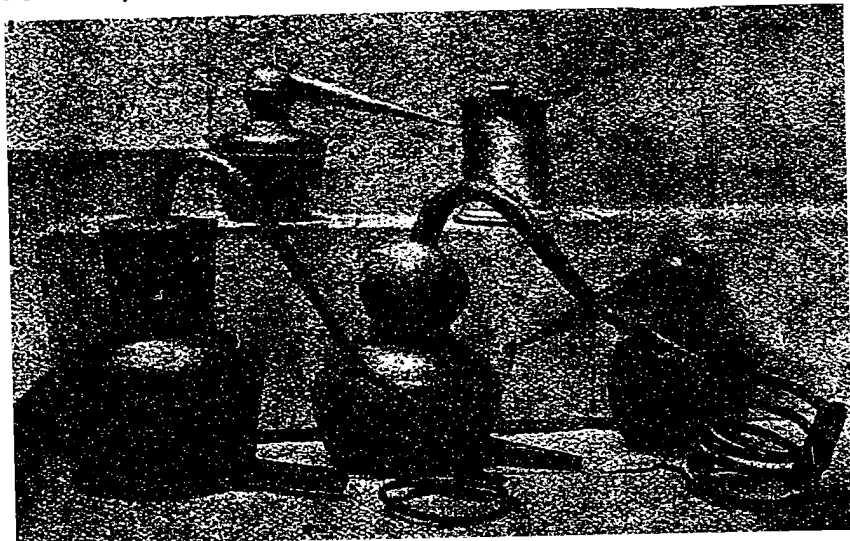
"What are the chief ways in which the agents of the Government trace out the cases and find the offenders?" was a question put to this technical person.

"Chiefly through some one who has a grudge against the chap who is doing the illicit distilling," was the answer. "As has always been the case in moonshine

cases down South, the motive of the informant is often pure spite. Another way of getting information is this: A man is found drunk; he is questioned, and this leads to the discovery of where he got the stuff. In the cities the most common hiding place of stills is in cellars; in the country in barns."

Many attempts are being made to evade the prohibition law by disguising alcoholic beverages as patent medicines. Some of those discovered are practically all alcohol, with only a little flavoring, like Jamaica ginger, as a disguise. Toilet waters are also employed as a mask for intoxicating drinks, with a high percentage of alcohol hidden from the detection of the inexpert by some strong perfume. The ruling of the bureau is that all alcoholic mixtures sold as medicine must contain at least one drug of recognized therapeutic value; that only so much alcohol may be used as is required by the nature of the mixture as a medicine, and that it shall not be used as a beverage. On the tables in the laboratory are hundreds of bottles of different patent medicines undergoing the test. In the last fiscal year

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The Still in the Middle Was Made in 1870 by a Coppersmith and Was Seized on the Premises of a Woman 80 Years Old in Floyd County, Va. On the Left Is a Typical Home-Made Still. The One at Top Is an Up-to-Date Still.

cotic law; on "mashes" captured with private stills, on all food adulterations that are guarded by an Internal Revenue tax. Thus this department is a sort of national thermometer of the extent of attempted invasions of laws upon which the attention of the American people is centered—laws dealing with prohibition and food.

Indications are that the use of private stills has increased largely, probably doubled in a short period, and it is estimated that not one-tenth of the cases

assembled the parts and distilled enough to last for some time.

"Grain or its products, such as cornmeal and barley meal; cane sugar, molasses, dandelions and raisins are being used," said an attaché of the Technology Division at Washington the other day. "Anything that has sugar in it can be fermented. Raisins are being most used. They take raisins and macerate them or steep them in water. Yeast is added and the fermentation begins, the result of which is to turn the sugar into alcohol.



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Gathering Dandelions in a Washington Park, Presumably to be Used for Making Dandelion Wine.

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19,000 samples, including alcoholic mixtures, narcotics, and adulterated foods, were passed upon by this division. There are twenty-two employes in the division. Dr. A. B. Adams is the chief.

In a corner of one of the rooms were boxes containing \$50,000 worth of drugs that had been seized. In the opinion of many of the Internal Revenue agents there is likely to be a large increase of the use of narcotics for their stimulating effect following the enforcement of national prohibition. Every medicine that contains a narcotic must meet the standards of the bureau, and on account of the prospect of increased attempts to evade the law there is added watchfulness at this time. The limits fixed for the use of narcotics in medicines are: Two grains of opium, an ounce; one-eighth of heroin, an ounce; one-fourth of a grain of morphine, and one grain of codeine.

In the routine of this branch of the work appear many queer cases. A re-

cent example came from the Warden of a State penitentiary. It was observed that one of the convicts had all the appearances of a man under the influence of "dope." His cell was carefully searched, everything that went into the cell was closely inspected, but nothing of a suspicious nature was found, yet the prisoner continued to show the symptoms of regular opium-taking. It was noticed that he received letters at short intervals from his wife, and that he looked forward to the arrival of these with exceptional eagerness. But no opium could be found concealed in them, not even under the postage stamp, an old trick in smuggling narcotics into penitentiaries.

Then closer watchfulness revealed that the convict ate the letters he received from his wife; that is, he would chew the sheets of paper until they were a fine pulp. The next letter that arrived from the wife of the convict was sent to the Division of Technology of the Internal Revenue Bureau at Washington. An analysis showed that envelope and sheets

of the letter had been soaked in a heavy mixture of morphine, and then ironed out dry.

With the high cost of food, frauds in adulteration are on the increase. One of the ways is to impregnate butter with an excessive amount of water. There is a law against this; it is contained in the Internal Revenue provision that butter which contains more than 16 per cent. of water must pay a tax of 10 cents a pound.

"The tax," said the attaché of the division, "was intended to be prohibitive, and in fact is such in legitimate business. Those who increase the weight of butter by an undue amount of water aim at the same time to escape the payment of the tax. By manipulation it is possible to inject as high as 50 per cent. of water per pound in butter, thus making two pounds of butter out of one. The chief offenders in this regard are peddlers of the class who have routes in the poorer districts of cities, delivering butter once or twice a week."