The Drunkard

and the

Prohibitionist.

By BENJAMIN DE CASSERES.

Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Unhappiness: Now That Our Bronze Goddess Enlightens the World With Wood Alcohol, the Inalienable Right to Decline a Drink Is Alienated

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All stories of current interest should now start with a date. A law of some kind takes effect almost every day. You may write a deep thing or a joke or something so lovely the next. Our manners, morals and traditions are changing so quickly in the hard, bald, rational spirit of the time it lapsed that what you thought at 6 o'clock last night was a long jump into the future may be old fashioned at 12 noon the next day or an indictable guess before 8 o'clock in the morning.

Americans (I mean those antiquated and absurd souls who believe in the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution, the libertarianism of Thomas Jefferson and the archaic concept of personal interpretations of their life, their liberty and their pursuit of unhappiness) used to make that palpable date July 4, 1776, a starting point in their calendars.

Later, by a sudden transvaluation of national ideals and a miraculous ukase from the Invisible Powers that work through the enchanting formulas of House bill No. 6000 or 0001, of 1818, our dead reckoning began with July 1, 1919.

"Of course, that was before the first of July," one heard everywhere. Men winked at you in the street and whis- pered that "we used to start at the first of July."

Children in the schools are taught ancient and modern American history now. Our ancient history was pre-July. Our modern history was post-July. Our laughter subsided into a whisper. We used to speak of Uncle Sam. Now we speak in aweome tones of his successor, Gourfry Barlow. We used to take our friends from Michigan down to Convy on the boat and point with pride to the big lady in the harbor. Now we rush them to the other side of the boat and point out to them the architectural splendor of the Bush Terminal docks.

Old Liberty is still there, but she weans a modern and her torch is lighted with inflammable wood alcohol; in her other hand she holds a outja board. It's a new day.

Another era set in on Jan. 16, 1920. This was the date, as all good school children should know, when the Lustian Constitution was subsumed by an

EIGHTEENTH AMENDMENT. No lives lost, but everybody in water up to his lifebelt and the blood clothes got irretrievably to Daisy Jones' gullet. It was the date of the New Freedom—for the blackmailer and the blind pig.

Toum the evening, then, of Jan. 15 at the bar of the Psycho-Aqua Club. The Minute Men of the Bronze Rail—laughed-out organization within the Psycho-Aqua Club—had gathered to vote, "Are we blazed out? Not even a puritan stirred, not even a V.O. P. It was a 100 per cent. American crowd being tested to the very limit of their Star-Spangled Banneym. Not, of course, that they cared about drink particularly, but their divine right of refusing one had been taken from them. They were covertly and whisperingly sore at the triumph of Kansas prohibition over Gotham free will. Their eyes were as clear as Bryan's, but their hearts and their throats were as flint.

"Have you ever studied the rise and fall of democracies?" asked Dr. Lew- rul as he bit off a mouthful of nuts. "Do you know that when the barroom goes democracy goes with it? Under the estab- lishment there were no bars. The bar parlor, the wine room, the estab- lishment, the barroom flourished in direct ratio to the quantity and quality of the freedom that exists in a country. All Rastian are undermined by the music of clanking glasses in public places. All Rastian rise also to the pomp of hidden stills."

"The American barroom abolished caste. The proletariat, the bourgeoisie, and the patrician got together under the bar rail. All men were created free and equal before a white apron. In the bar- room race, color or present condition of servitude melted into universal good- fellowship. Liquor was the eternal democratic. Laughter and drink breasted all humility before the big mirror. There was, in the old good barrooms, a continual spouting of claret. A black light was no better than a pair of overalls in the sight of the man Barleycorn and Barcuss, not to speak of Fritz Gambrinus.

"When I en- tered a barroom, whether it was on the Bowery or Broadway, I felt I had entered the democratic heart of America. A bar- room, like a cat, could look like a King. Awe, bunk,

dignity, and fake standards of conduct were shed at the door. You had to be a man—whether you were talking to a poet, a bum, an automobile manufacturer, or a retired plumber."

"The barroom," flew on the Doc as the crowd grew denser around him, "was the place of the universal showdown. Clever-handed second-story men and those game artists had no use for a barroom. Here for the cat always got out of the bag. It has kept many a 'bad man' off the level, and diluted the general insin- cincts of many a lighty. It put pleas- ure before business, which reduced still number of profits. It kept money in circulation which otherwise would have been lavished on bank directors."

"The American barroom democratized ideas. It was the emporium of brains and wit. No one of us would ever buy a drink for a stupid man—not two drinks, anyhow. No such forum had ever been seen in any place in the history of humanity. It was a vineyard of ideas, a bhothue of curious dreams, a clearing house of the vapors, a magic trick bag of talk, a 'department store of brains, an undi- concerned America where every man was a Columbus," the Doc said.

Angel Abe, the Kelley pool expert of the club, rammed the idea of the Thang on His Hip into the mouth of the eloquent psychologist. He drank long and burblingly. He emerged pop-eyed and midian.

"The evils that barrooms have done live on after them, but the good is interred." -

"In us!" broke in Ysopo Magimis, Chairman of the Outja Board Committee. "In us! Right-o!" thundered the Doc. "And the barroom crushed to sundown shall rise again! For the barroom was the materialization of a need. It was the safety value of the man with a dangerous idea in his mind. Three whiskers with the brush ironed out his snobbery and exploited his sager-bomb into a series of idle but human gestures. Boys, if ever we have real trouble in our country it will come from the same

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"Young man, go West! said Horace Greeley many years ago. But! Young man, stay at home in New York and get your education in a barroom, I would have said."

"The barroom was the limesine of the workingmen—and we are all working- men, except the Kaiser and Bryan. After a long day's work do you think the workingman wants to read Herbert Spencer, Ralph Waldo Trine, play with the outja board or more in a movie? Not on your Old Adam! He wants to eat a few infusions, indulge in a little hum- ming, stand on his head, hear a good story. If he gets a black eye ones in a white, all the better. As between a black eye and a snazy's lip—well, Abe, where's that hip-sawpazer?"

The Doc leaned heavily on the bar in the grand old Deltaeastian manner of the days that are no more. Don Conde stroked his grizzled moustache. Ysopo Magimis drew estate arabesques on the sud-weeping bar. Angel Abe wiped off the Battery end of his battle.

"Again," said the Doc, "did you boys ever stop to think that if the world goes dry—which Riacus forbid—it will de- crease the production of liquor 50 per cent. Liquor is a form of cell-com- bustion, and the cooling process of the cells, in the brain and in the heart, will suffer through the bood of Riacus, John Barleycorn, and Gambrinus. In wine and beer especially there were laugh bobbies. Whenever three troubles met over a neddil or a glass of port laughter had the final word. Where there is no laughter there is no de- mocracy."

As things go today we are threatened with a calamity—casus in the laughter output. Alcohol created a million laughes which it made one black eye. As Don Conde says somewhere, Extra Palstaf; enter Falseface.

"Boys, democracy and laughter face their Armageddon in the disappearance of the bar rag."

Don Conde shelled his good Old Doc and lit his head gently in the snus. It was 12 o'clock, Jan. 16, 1920. The committee of the Constitution had begun to wag its superb head.

Angel Abe tossed his hip-poorisy out of the window. It was as empty as life in 1920.