**Medicinal Alcohol**

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There was one way to obtain alcoholic beverages legally during the prohibition years: through a physician's prescription, purchasing the liquor from a pharmacy. Physicians could prescribe distilled spirits--usually whiskey or brandy--on government prescription forms. The government was even willing to allow the limited production of whiskey and its distribution when stocks were low.

Since ancient times there were widespread beliefs that alcoholic beverages had medicinal value. Those beliefs spread widely after the development of distillation techniques. Physicians prescribed alcohol for all sorts of ailments, from snake bite to disease control. By the early 19th century, especially in England, there was widespread use of alcohol in medical treatments of various kinds.

The rise of scientific medicine after 1850 led to changing views, and by the end of the century the therapeutic value of alcohol was widely disputed, and discredited among the most advanced practitioners. In 1916 whiskey and brandy were removed from the list of scientifically approved medicines in The Pharmacopeia of the United States of America. In 1917 the American Medical Association even voted, in a contentious meeting, in effect to support prohibition.

The resolution passed in June of 1917 at the annual meeting of the American Medical Association read as follows:
Whereas, We believe that the use of alcohol is detrimental to the human economy and,
Whereas, its use in therapeutics as a tonic or stimulant or for food has no scientific value; therefore,
Be it Resolved, That the American Medical Association is opposed to the use of alcohol as a beverage; and
Be it Further Resolved, That the use of alcohol as a therapeutic agent should be further discouraged.

Nevertheless, the prohibition laws allowed medicinal use of alcoholic beverages through prescription.

(The prohibition laws also allowed the distribution of wine for sacramental purposes.)

The Federal Council of Churches

The support of national prohibition by the Federal Council of the Churches rests upon four fundamental considerations.

It is especially contrary to democratic ideals and to enlightened public policy to permit any citizen to make profit from a business which is detrimental to his neighbor. This is readily recognized by all as sound policy in regard to the trade in narcotics. It is equally true of the liquor traffic. To insure social protection against a trade whose avowed purpose was to get people to consume the maximum possible amount of alcoholic liquor is the foundation on which our national policy of prohibition rests.

The reasons which led to prohibition not only remain to-day but have been reinforced by the experience of other nations. The social peril of alcoholism is becoming a growing concern to statesmen throughout the world. If serious evils have sprung up since prohibition, they are far less than the evils which arose from the liquor traffic prior to the amendment. The liquor traffic with the accompanying saloon was allied with political corruption, crime, gambling, and prostitution. It meant the wreckage of men and the degradation of families, which social workers and ministers saw constantly in their daily work. It produced needless inefficiency in industry. Moreover, the tendency in the United States, as has been the case in Europe, was toward an increasing consumption of the stronger liquors with consequent intensifying of social hazards. Methods of control short of prohibition, such as taxation, regulations, and the governmentally controlled systems of some of the Canadian Provinces, Norway, and Sweden, have all proved inadequate to cope with the evil.

The proposal to modify the Volstead Act so as to permit the sale of wines and beer presents insuperable objections. It would make enforcement more difficult. It would inevitably mean the return either of the saloon or something equally undesirable. Bootlegging in stronger liquors would become more menacing because it would tend to operate through the places where the milder intoxicants were sold. Moreover, there is no evidence to justify the contention that to permit wine and beer would reduce the consumption of ardent spirits. The teaching of experience is to the contrary.

Rev. S. Parkes Cadman, President.
Rev. Charles S. Macfarland, General Secretary.

Women's National Committee for Law Enforcement

During the 1920s, the Women's National Committee for Law Enforcement, a federation of Protestant women's organizations that claimed at least 12 million followers, observed that prohibition was partially effective in achieving its goals. The group sought better law enforcement for the better realization of the reform, as its president, Mrs. Henry W. Peabody, informed a Senate committee. The National Prohibition Law, Hearings before the Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. Senate, 69th Congress, 1st Session (1926): 666-67

We represent here to-day not only organizations of women, but, as a whole, we represent the home, the school, the church, and we stand firmly for no amendment to the eighteenth amendment. We hold the Constitution of the United States inviolate. We stand for no modification of the Volstead Act, but rather a strengthening. We stand for strict law enforcement, with the removal of all men who do not strictly enforce the law.

The conditions in States like New York and Maryland, where there is no State enforcement law, which is required by the eighteenth amendment, framed to secure concurrent action, are bad. The only remedy, it seems to us, as women, is not a change of law which is satisfactory to the majority of the States, but to do what the Constitution requires to make the law enforceable. That would remove very many of the offenses which are piled up to prove that the Nation is not appearing to enforce its laws.

We are not satisfied that the law is being enforced in all places. We are sure it will be when the Nation has had time to adjust itself. In a well-regulated home it is the policy of a mother to work faithfully and patiently, knowing that perfect obedience requires law and discipline. It is never the policy of a good mother or teacher to say the children are disobedient--therefore let us give in to them and let them do as they like.

**Fiorella LaGuardia on Prohibition**

Fiorella H. LaGuardia was a prominent New York city politician who served several terms in the House of Representatives. An outspoken critic of prohibition, he testified to the policy's failure. *The National Prohibition Law*, Hearings before the Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. Senate, 69th Congress, 1st Session (1926): 649-52

It is impossible to tell whether prohibition is a good thing or a bad thing. It has never been enforced in this country.

There may not be as much liquor in quantity consumed to-day as there was before prohibition, but there is just as much alcohol.

At least 1,000,000 quarts of liquor is consumed each day in the United States. In my opinion such an enormous traffic in liquor could not be carried on without the knowledge, if not the connivance of the officials entrusted with the enforcement of the law. ...

I believe that the percentage of whisky drinkers in the United States now is greater than in any other country of the world. Prohibition is responsible for that. ...

At least $1,000,000,000 a year is lost to the National Government and the several States and counties in excise taxes. The liquor traffic is going on just the same. This amount goes into the pockets of bootleggers and in the pockets of the public officials in the shape of graft....

I will concede that the saloon was odius but now we have delicatessen stores, pool rooms, drug stores, millinery shops, private parlors, and 57 other varieties of speak-easies selling liquor and flourishing.

I have heard of $2,000 a year prohibition agents who run their own cars with liveried chauffeurs.

It is common talk in my part of the country that from $7.50 to $12 a case is paid in graft from the time the liquor leaves the 12-mile limit until it reaches the ultimate consumer. There seems to be a varying market price for this service created by the degree of vigilance or the degree of greed of the public officials in charge.

It is my calculation that at least a million dollars a day is paid in graft and corruption to Federal, State, and local officers. Such a condition is not only intolerable, but it is demoralizing and dangerous to organized government. ...

The Government even goes to the trouble to facilitate the financing end of the bootlegging industry. In 1925, $286,950,000 more of $10,000 bills were issued than in 1920 and $25,000,000 more of $5,000 bills were issued. What honest business man deals in $10,000 bills? Surely these bills were not used to pay the salaries of ministers. The bootlegging industry has created a demand for bills of large denominations, and the Treasury Department accommodates them.

Student Testimony Against Prohibition

In 1926, Senator James Reed of Missouri, an outspoken opponent of prohibition, arranged testimony before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary that supported his position. The following exchange occured between him and Russell Lee Post, a student at Yale University.

Senator Reed of Missouri. What are the facts with reference to the ability of students to obtain liquor?

Mr. Post. Why, it is obtainable, sir; the greater the attempts at enforcement the stronger the sentiment against it.

Senator Reed of Missouri. Do bootleggers ply their trade among the students?

Mr. Post. Well, it is the reverse; the students go to the bootleggers.

Senator Reed of Missouri. The students go to the bootleggers?

Mr. Post. Yes; they do not enter the university campus.

Senator Reed of Missouri. Is there any difficulty of any student of ordinary intelligence--and I presume they are all that at Yale University--getting all the whisky he wants to buy, or alleged whisky at least?

Mr. Post. No, sir.

Senator Reed of Missouri. Is this liquor drunk on the campus or in the quarters of the students?

Mr. Post. Yes, sir.

Senator Reed of Missouri And is it drunk elsewhere?

Mr. Post. Yes, sir.

Senator Reed of Missouri. That is all.