

NOW WE GOT PROBEESH

BY CHESTER T. CROWELL

WE WERE in a club, my host and I, a very excellent club. He had ordered a special lunch because both of us like Italian food. In the kitchen and dining-rooms of that club Italians preside and they receive such orders with pride and pleasure.

"Let's go upstairs to the nineteenth hole and get a cocktail while we are waiting," said my host.

"No, no!" exclaimed the commander of the dining-room with a gesture that offered apology for his presumption. "Excuse," he added. "The bar is closed."

"Yes? When did that misfortune overtake us?" Prohibition was then about six and a half years old.

"Yesterday, Signor. It is because now we got Probeesh." I was charmed. Quite evidently this man had just heard news and was eager to share it. His sincerity delighted me. I encouraged him to go on.

All Italians have histrionic ability; this one, being handsome, seemed endowed far beyond the usual. He assumed a certain stance familiar to everyone who has heard grand opera and then proceeded: "It is a law which says no more bar. It is the Constitution of the country. So the bar is close. If you want anything to drink you must be served here in the dining-room. What would you like?"

We ordered cocktails. While we sipped them I watched this Italian hastening, fluttering, and smiling through his mid-day task. He liked to explain about Prohibition. "It is the law," he would say with such dignity that the lines seemed to belong to the high priest in "Aida." This man is a patriot and inordinately proud of

his son's record as an American soldier in the World War. He listens with rapt attention, indeed almost with awe, to the conversations that his excellent cocktails, lunches and dinners promote. On all subjects he is rigidly conservative. The National Security League might embrace him as a brother; the United States Chamber of Commerce would be charmed with him; as to religion he is also orthodox, hazy and non-participating, which is the *sine qua non* of "class" as he has observed it. Grand Masters, Chief Moguls, and Lofty Gad-zookuses impress him tremendously and he recognizes the insignia of their orders. Briefly he is safe, sane, and regular on all subjects and not the least of these is Law Enforcement. The bar is closed. If you wish a drink you must be served in the dining-room—because "Now we got Probeesh."

II

We were at lunch in an Italian restaurant, several business men and I. The business men are importers of olive oil, cheese and other Italian products. They were having great sport with the proprietor because he had often boasted that a high-class place such as his would never be raided and yet it had been raided the day before. He serves only one meal a day—lunch.

"But, just the same, I had my joke on them," said the proprietor. "Yes, I had my joke and they looked sick, I can tell you."

Suddenly it occurred to him that the story of his joke required a prologue if I were to understand it, so he furnished the prologue.

"When I came to this country I was a sculptor's helper and an artist. A rotten artist. Pretty soon I had to go to work for someone beside sculptors because I found only two and they didn't need me. Well, I went to work on the subway; they were building a subway; that was the only place I could find where everyone spoke Italian.

"Yesterday, when I was raided, they said 'Call a taxi and we will take you to the station.' I said: 'No! No taxi. We will go on the subway. I want to go on the subway because I built that subway. I built it on good *vino* and garlic and good bread and more *vino*. All of us who built that subway built it on *vino*. Now, if I must go to jail because we got Probeerh in this country I will ride in that subway that I built on good *vino*. *Andiamo!* Forward march!' And we went by the subway. Believe me, they looked sick!"

I doubt that they really looked sick, but it was none the less a glorious gesture. To insinuate, however, that the persons who conduct Prohibition raids would catch even the faintest glimmer of that gesture somewhat strains my credulity.

III

We were in an Italian restaurant, my guest and I. This restaurant calls itself a garden because of a yellowish, malarial vine that straggles over a dusty trellis, trying feebly to peep out from under the awning that protects the customers and get some sunlight. I have seen hookworm sufferers who looked exactly like that vine.

"Needa rain," remarked the proprietor.

"No," I objected, "it needs sunshine."

"I not talking about da vine," he explained.

"What, then?"

"Da *vino*."

"Does the *vino* need rain?" I know nothing about the mysteries of wine making.

"Needa rain to get in da *vino*," he went on.

"Yes? How so?"

"Always da *vino* cee deliver in da rain."

"Well, well, why is that?"

"I duno. Vincenzo, he no like to deliver cef no rain."

"Maybe he is afraid of being caught," I suggested.

"No, no; cee all right. I no sell da *vino*; joosta serve wit' da dinner. That no against da law. Theesa restaurant. No speakeasy. Strictly da law here, all time."

"But Vincenzo won't deliver your wine unless it is raining, eh?"

"Thatsa right. Someone tell Vincenzo, he say, 'Vincenzo, you take a care; no roll dat barrel 'cross sidewalk and bump ten tousan peoples; you wait till rain.' So Vincenzo wait. I got joosta four gallon left. But what he care? Eesa bullhead, dat Vincenzo!"

He looked upward dolefully and walked away muttering, "Needa rain."

IV

I was in an Italian restaurant alone. The proprietor was delighted to see me unaccompanied because he wanted to talk to me. Plainly he was worried. I speak Italian, or rather I take a shot at it. Sometimes I understand it as well as English; more frequently I don't. It depends upon the Italian: there are fifty-seven varieties. This restaurateur is from Genoa, so his Italian is much mixed with French, but we managed to break through the barriers, at least to some extent.

"I want to ask your advice," he said. "There are two Prohibition agents who have been coming in here from time to time ever since I have been in business. Usually they bring women with them and order dinner and a bottle of wine. They never pay. That does not seem right to me because I do not violate the law here. I do not sell wine nor buy wine. I make my own wine and it is good, honest wine. I serve it only with meals. Wine is all I have and no drinks are for sale. Just the same those men have been coming here in that way for a long time. My business is small and that is a heavy tax, but I let it go; I said noth-

ing; it is better not to make them mad.

"Well, a few days ago they came in here very drunk and ordered dinner. My guests looked at them and looked at me and wondered why I didn't put them out. You know we never have anything like that around here. It is very bad for business. I have more women customers than men here, and they don't like that. But what could I do? When they had had their dinner they came to me and said they wanted twenty-five dollars. I told them that I did not have twenty-five dollars and that was the truth. They said they did not believe it. I opened the cash register and showed them. I had only about eighteen dollars. They took that. Yes, they not only took it but they told me they would come back later on and get the other seven dollars. Well, they didn't come back and I was happy for that, so I closed up in the evening and went home. But just before I closed up I thought to myself, 'Now they might come back, and if they do I will have just ten dollars in the cash register.' So I fixed it that way and then I locked up and went home. This morning, when I came to open the restaurant, I found the door broken all to pieces. The cash register was also smashed all to pieces. I had locked it so they broke it open by dropping it on the floor and hammering it with chairs. Exactly seven dollars gone. The other three were there. So I think I know who did that burglary. I went to a lawyer and told him about it. I asked him: 'What can we do about such a thing? Is it not right that a citizen should make a complaint when such a thing happens? Is it not my duty?' And he said no. He said I can do nothing. What do you say?"

I explained why his lawyer had advised him as he did.

V

We were in an Italian restaurant, about twelve young men and I. We had gathered to sing, rather than to eat. One of the boys was a stranger to me. I acknowledged the introduction in Italian, but he spoke Eng-

lish, slowly putting the words together as a very small child labors with building blocks. His enunciation, however, was almost without accent.

"I am a citizen of Rome," he said, "and in Italy I am a lawyer. I left Italy for honorable reasons, but I have not yet learned English very well and in this country I am a maker of fine sausages."

This matter being cleared up we proceeded to eat, and then to sing. Presently wine was ordered.

"No," objected the citizen of Rome and maker of fine sausages. "In this country we have Prohibition. We will buy no wine. You come to my room and I will give you wine that I made myself. It is better than this, anyway. This Prohibition wine is horrible."

VI

I was in an Italian restaurant, alone. The proprietor is blond, fat, placid and suggests a German baker rather than a native of Milano. As I ate he strode back and forth, flipping a napkin nervously, mopping his brow, lighting his cigar and immediately letting it go out again. Never before had I seen him behave in such a manner.

"Anything wrong?" I asked.

"Trooble," was the prompt reply. "Lots trooble."

"What kind of trouble?"

He squared off in that characteristically Italian manner as though he were going to sing the principal tenor solo in an opera, brought his hands up as if to direct the orchestra and told his story.

"Comes in here a man. I say to him, 'Hello, what can I do for you?' He take his coat like so [indicating the lapel] and turn it back like so. A badge! He say 'I am Enforcement.' I say 'All right, Enforcement, what can I do for you? You like to eat? You will have a drink?' But no, he will not eat; he will not drink. 'Then you want fifty dollar,' I say. 'All right, Enforcement, here is your fifty dollar.' Business is

rotten but what can you do? Enforcement must have his fifty dollar if he say so. But imagine! This Enforcement will not take the fifty dollar! He will not eat, he will not drink, he will not take the fifty dollar! He is crazy. 'Then what do you want?' I ask. And he say, 'You are arrest.' Oh, hell! Then I have to go and see my lawyer, and he have to go and see this man and that man and this man and that man, and all the time I am running around here and there and in the place we got not enough help anyway. Take the whole day with this foolishness and it cost me one hundred twenty-five dollars. Ees a damn crook, that Enforcement. I hope I never see him again."

"Are you still in trouble?"

"No, everything is fix. But I am tired. And that sauce I put on your spaghetti is terrible. Excuse, please."

VII

We were in an Italian restaurant, my guest and I. The proprietor's aged father, sitting in the kitchen, was directly in my line of vision and from time to time I glanced at him because he has a remarkable head that reminds me of old Roman coins. At a little table nearby the proprietor's daughter, aged possibly five or six, was eating spaghetti. Her grandfather's gaze never once wandered from that table. He adores the child.

Presently a waiter stopped at her little table and filled her glass with water. Immediately grandfather was on his feet and hastening to her. In his hand he carried a small bottle of red Italian wine. He poured about a tablespoonful into her glass of water. She looked up to smile her thanks. His eyes caressed her and aged fingers touched her hair. She is the light of his old age and not for the world would he have her poisoned by impure water! A little dash of wine and all the germs are killed. He is taking care of her as he would if the family still lived in the province of Liguria, where he and his ancestors were

born. Here, however, his act not only violates the law but outrages the current morals. He is teaching a mere infant to drink an intoxicating beverage, which will darken and shorten her life, as he certainly ought to know, being 78 himself and of sound mind.

VIII

I was in an Italian restaurant, a very plain one. Baked chicken with vegetables, forty cents; half a gallon of marvelous spaghetti, twenty cents. Endurable wine, fifteen cents a glass. However, most of the customers drink near-beer. Oddly enough they seem to like it, perhaps because it costs only ten cents a pint. These customers are thrifty laboring men who consider values at some length before parting with a nickel.

About forty were assembled for the mid-day meal when I came in. Almost immediately behind me came two Prohibition enforcement officers. They sniffed some of the glasses on the tables, then disclosed their mission to the proprietor, requesting him to conduct them into the cellar. There they found a barrel of wine and informed him that they would send a truck for it right away. Then they went out. Immediately the proprietor leaped for the telephone to warn all of the neighboring restaurateurs that wolves were prowling. At the same time the chief cook emerged from the kitchen, waving his hairy, tattooed arms and speaking volubly. Eloquence poured from his gorilla chest, which was draped in a flimsy cotton undershirt and nothing more.

Seldom have I witnessed such immediate results from oratory. Every customer leaped to his feet and volunteered to man a bucket, a tea-kettle, a stew pan, a cauldron, or whatever the kitchen afforded. Like the boarding party of a man-o'-war they scampered down the dark, narrow steps into the cellar, each carrying something that would hold wine. Then up they came, walking as fast as they dared. The cook directed traffic out into a corridor,

then up a stairway. What happened up there I do not know. Perhaps empty barrels were available in the living quarters aloft. At the time, it occurred to me that bath tubs might be pressed into service. Anyway, three minutes at the outside sufficed to remove the wine and return all of the kitchen utensils to their proper places. The customers sat down again. When the enforcement agents returned to the restaurant all was quiet, or rather as quiet as one may expect when forty laboring men are eating.

The enforcement agents and their assistants went into the cellar, followed by the proprietor. Just what aroused their suspicions I do not know; perhaps some of the wine had been spilled on the floor; anyway the enforcement agents tested the barrel and found that it contained only hydrant water. Then something else happened down there; something that I didn't see, but when the proprietor came up his face was very red and swollen, so that he was a ridiculous caricature of his former self. Later he remarked that two men held him and another slapped his face.

"They should not do that," he said.

"We are all here and we have got to live. We might just as easily live in peace with each other. [He was speaking not of all humanity, but of enforcement agents and wine sellers.] In this life one hand has got to wash the other. It was foolish to slap me because that wine turned into water. Here in this place we are just cooks and hard-working poor people. If we get slapped then we must be slapped; worse things could happen, so I shrug my shoulders and forget it. But Enforcement will find that he has other kinds of men to meet in his business and he can't go on forever this way slapping people. Some of them will get mad. He is very foolish. All of us have got to live. If he does not change his ways some day he may get hurt."

Six months later I was informed that the enforcement agent in question had been killed. Not knowing his name, and by that time having forgotten his appearance I could not have verified the information even if I had been of a mind to do so.

"Too bad," was the proprietor's comment. "We could just as easily live in peace together. But thus it goes now that we got Probeesh."

AN AMERICAN MASTER

BY THOMAS CRAVEN

As a boy, standing before my easel with its square of stretched canvas, I realized that I had in my possession the wherewith to create a masterpiece that would live throughout the coming ages. The great masters had no more.—*Albert Pinkham Ryder.*

ON THE western shore of a fair harbor looking down into Buzzard's Bay lies the city of New Bedford. Today it is a poor sort of place, a New England mill town with foundries and textile factories in which sullen youths, prematurely old, and hard, horse-faced girls, hammer and spin to uphold the material position of the tenacious remnants of Massachusetts' culture. At night the mill hands swarm the streets hunting for sensual excitement to relieve their pinched-in souls, and the survivors of the old aristocracy are driven into the gloomy seclusion of their distant Georgian abodes. The picturesque waterfront serves no maritime purpose, and the fair harbor is empty of craft, save the ancient New York boat, the Martha's Vineyard packet, and an occasional barge or coastwise schooner. As a symbol of its former glory the city maintains at one of its deserted wharves an authentic whaler, fully equipped and captained by George Fred Tilton, the last of the buccancers. Captain Tilton, a great bull of a man, powerful for all his years, with enormous hands, a massive head, and a booming laugh that can be heard as far as Nantucket, is already a legendary hero. Beside being the most fearless whaling skipper who ever sailed out of New Bedford, he is reputed to have walked 1000 miles in the Far North to obtain relief for shipwrecked companions, to have broken Joe Chynski's jaw in a fight over a girl in a San Francisco dance-hall, and, during the late

war, to have served his country as commander of a barge engaged in the pleasant business of carrying high explosives to and from various points near New York City.

In the year 1847, three important events occurred in New Bedford. The town, numbering within its limits more than 15,000 inhabitants, was incorporated under the laws of the Commonwealth as a full-fledged city; ships were dispatched for the first time into the Arctic zone, and the city, by increasing the field of operation, became the greatest whaling port in the world; and on March 19 Albert Pinkham Ryder was born. A few years before this date, in another Massachusetts town, James A. McNeil L. Whistler was born. Whistler, however, repudiated his birthplace and lied about his unromantic origin to the end of his days. He preferred to come into the world by way of St. Petersburg, and forsook America. To justify his homeless cosmopolitanism, he denied the existence of a national art on the same ground that one refuses to believe in a national mathematics, and he was at particular pains to assert, with the borrowed accent of European authority, that the uncivilized Yankees had never produced an object, which, properly speaking, could be called beautiful. While Whistler was barking his brilliant sophistries at London snobs, and parading up and down Paris in a fashion which led Degas to remark that he was, "genius or no genius, the most ridiculous ass alive," Ryder was living in a little room in New York, unostentatiously and with infinite patience bringing to perfection the most original painting in the annals of American art. The happiest phi-