

THE CLINIC

In Defense of Uncivilized Drinking

BY MALCOLM LOGAN

LESS than two years ago everyone was talking about something quaintly called civilized drinking. Yet none of those who discussed it so interminably in the days before Repeal has put it into practice, and even the phrase itself has been expurgated from our vocabularies. Indeed, I may even be accused of bad taste for bringing up something most of us would prefer to forget. For that phrase expressed all the illusions with which we invested the end of Prohibition, and no one likes to be reminded of forgotten credulities.

During those months when good liquor was just around the corner we began to believe the anti-Prohibition propaganda, just as we had swallowed the arguments of the Prohibitionists fifteen years before. The drys had promised that Prohibition would make teetotalers of us all. When it did not, the wets asserted that the Eighteenth Amendment was the cause of our deplorable drinking manners. We drank, they said, out of sheer contrariness; if drinking were made legal, they argued, we would turn to light wines and beer, thus becoming mild, respectable tipplers. This was smart politics because the American's desire to improve himself is overpowering and those who drank hardest deplored it most. But no sensible person should have believed that Repeal would usher in an alcoholic millennium. However, as I have said, we all did.

Pre-Repeal conversation revealed an almost unanimous conviction among

Americans, who had put away enormous quantities of hard liquor without complaint during the previous decade, that secretly they had always hated the stuff. All of us, it appeared, had drunk cocktails and highballs solely as a lofty gesture against the tyranny of Prohibition. It was amazing and inspiring to discover how many martyrs to liberty had lived among us, quietly ruining their livers in the sacred cause of freedom. It should have made even Mrs. Ella Boole happy to think that as soon as Repeal came, we could all indulge our frustrated desire to drink like gentlemen and cultivate what was left of our palates.

It was a magic phrase—civilized drinking. It conjured up a delightful picture of the future. We were all going to amaze and humiliate our friends with a profound knowledge of the mysteries of wine. We could picture ourselves, looking rather like Adolph Menjou, holding grave and learned converse with a wine waiter or, having tested some fine vintage, pronouncing the considered judgment of one who had obviously made a fine art of dining. It took an unusually strong character to resist this temptation. Very few of us did.

The newspapers and magazines were quick to exploit this popular vanity. They printed articles, seductively illustrated, calculated to make theoretical connoisseurs of all readers with reasonably good memories. We were instructed in the names of the choicest wines and the best years; what to serve with the soup, roast and dessert; the

specifications for a wine cellar; the kind of glasses from which sherry, champagne and Rhine wine should be drunk. Of course, we city dwellers had no cool, musty, cobwebbed cellars in which to store anything save our trunks, and it was rather discouraging to compute the cost of all the stemware necessary for the equipment of a true gourmet. But, ignoring these practical considerations, by the time Repeal arrived anyone interested in acquiring it had all the necessary knowledge except an acquaintance with wine.

Let me admit here that this is written in humbleness of spirit by one who succumbed to the current delusion. Doubtless I would be a connoisseur today had I been able to afford the tuition fee for the practical part of my education. But, being one of the Repealists' horrible examples—a man who learned to drink during Prohibition—I was childishly ignorant of the cost of civilized drinking. It never occurred to me, when I was memorizing those mellifluous names, that I could not afford Château Mouton-Rothschild, Château Yquem or Romanée Conti. So, with thousands of others, I felt swindled when the first bottles of imported wine appeared in the alluring windows of the liquor stores and I discovered that the lowliest Burgundy would be a rare luxury. And with these same thousands I inveighed against the tariff, forgetting that not even Frenchmen of my own modest station in life drink vintage wines with every meal.

As the débris of my fine dreams cleared out of my mind, I began to realize that even before Prohibition, civilized drinking must have been a luxury as far out of reach of most Americans as dinner every night at Rector's. I resolved, therefore, to cultivate an appreciation of native wines. Here I was entering unexplored territory, with

only my taste as guide, so at least I would not have to swallow things I really did not like because the experts said they were good. My explorations did not carry me far. I was soon convinced that American wineries were taking shameful advantage of my ignorance, or that I was not by nature a wine drinker. In one of my notebooks I have the results of my research. As I do not flatter myself that it will be of assistance to anyone, I have substituted letters for the trade names of the native wines in the record:

Brand	Type	Price	Quality	Remarks
A	Sherry	\$1.65	Poor	Too sweet
A	Sauterne	1.50	Poor	New and sour
A	Burgundy	1.65	Excellent	
B	Burgundy	1.05	Terrible	Demanded money back
C	Burgundy	.79	Fair	

My investigation stopped at Brand C, but I went quite thoroughly into its merits. In sampling it I had the assistance of a friend who had lived long in Europe and was one of my few acquaintances who qualified as a *bon vivant*. We drank five bottles in rapid succession one afternoon, ending in a pleasant state which reminded me strongly of some of the happier moments of my life as an uncivilized drinker. In this temporary glow, I decided to buy this wine for half a dozen guests who were coming the following evening.

But the next day when I computed the amount and cost of sufficient wine for half a dozen, I realized that I had reached the end. If two persons could drink five bottles, six could drink fifteen, and fifteen times seventy-nine cents was—Summoning all my moral courage I faced the ugly facts. Not even semi-civilized drinking, i.e., drinking American wine, was within my means. So I put on my hat, went around to the drug store, bought a gallon of alcohol and in my kitchenette mixed up a batch of

gin. My guests drank cocktails that evening and the last one went home at five o'clock the following morning. The bad old days were back again.

Since my fall from grace, I have consoled myself with the thought that I have plenty of company. Americans, I suspect, are not the stuff of which civilized drinkers are made. I saw no great revolution in drinking manners when Repeal came. The iron grille and the buzzer disappeared from the entrances of the speakeasies; a framed license was displayed behind the bar; and you could get more drinks for the same money, even though the quality did not noticeably improve at first. But everyone continued to drink with the earnest idea of getting the maximum effect from his liquor. When anyone made a critical inspection of a bottle, it was to discover whether the contents assayed 200 proof or only a paltry 180.

During the first few weeks, hotel after hotel opened bars, celebrating these occasions with free cocktail parties. To these were invited writers, commercial artists, radio announcers, stylists, Broadway columnists and others whose favor the deluded innkeepers considered of value. These were the very persons who had done most of the talking about civilized drinking, so there was plenty of opportunity to observe how they were putting their doctrines into practice. The drinking I observed at these functions was of heroic proportions, but it was not high in the cultural scale. Cocktails and highballs, Scotch and rye, brandy and bourbon, were consumed in ruinous quantities, but not so much as one glass of sherry.

The worst vice of drinking Americans is the cocktail party. Theoretically, guests come around five and leave for dinner in

two hours or so. Actually, things do not work this way. The cocktail hour, coming at the end of the day's work, is the precise time when we are able to carry our liquor with the least grace. Generally everyone miscalculates his capacity, gets tight on a few drinks and remains until carried out, missing his dinner and awakening the next day ravaged by hunger as well as a hang-over. The advent of Repeal has not, according to authorities who should know, ended this blight on civilization. A recent article in a New York newspaper quoted Oscar of the Waldorf as saying that his hotel, which sold hundreds of cocktails a day before Prohibition, now sells thousands. And Louis H. Wagner, wine and liquor steward of the Commodore, told the reporter that the cocktail hour was the longest hour known to any time-reckoning devised by man. "It starts," he said, "at 2 P. M. and ends at 2 A. M."

Well, we might have known it. I recall certain complaints made during Prohibition concerning the behavior of visiting Americans in Europe, Canada and other wet spots. The only wine for which these tourists had any respect was champagne, because one could get tight on it in a pleasingly brief time. Reflecting upon their behavior, which we will all agree was deplorable, I am surprised that anyone believed Repeal was going to sober us up. It is about time for us to admit that Americans will never drink like Frenchmen. We are not moderate in any of our other habits, and we should stop expecting ourselves to be in this one. It has always been our way to drink hard liquor with the idea of getting drunk without delay. I doubt that Prohibition, Repeal or the millennium will ever change us.



The Present State of Television

BY THOMAS COULSON

THE announcement that the British Broadcasting Company is about to open a station for the transmission of television programs has provoked considerable speculation upon the condition of the new art in this country. The absence of an undertaking to provide similar facilities here has aroused the uneasy feeling that the British have advanced their development beyond the achievements of American engineers. To questions as to why we have lagged behind, there have been many replies, but their variety only serves to confuse the issue. The reasons offered vary from the pessimistic assertion that television is still in its experimental stages, to the other extreme, equally tinged with pessimism, that manufacturers are awaiting a more favorable opportunity for exploiting the purchaser of receiving sets. The truth lies midway and beyond these extremes.

The lag in America cannot be attributed to deficient engineering, for our engineers have established a comfortable lead over their foreign competitors. In order to achieve successful transmission of an image, a device is required which will rival the human eye in ability to register a picture. This has presented immense difficulties in overcoming inertia and in securing adequate light for the fractional periods of exposure, and it was not until mechanical methods were replaced by vacuum tubes and fluorescent surfaces that satisfactory progress was made. Now we have an electric eye represented by a vacuum tube containing an electron-emitting gun and a photo-sensitive surface. The picture to be transmitted is broken up into about 70,000 portions or elements, which are scanned individually twenty times a second by the

electron-beam gun bombarding the photo-sensitive surface. Thus the engineer has overcome the difficulty of furnishing illumination for an exposure lasting only $1/1,400,000$ of a second. In its present stage of development the sensitivity of the electric eye is equal to film operating at the speed of a motion picture camera.

What most concerns the prospective customer, however, is the device for reproducing these transmitted images. The present television receiver resembles in size and appearance the now discarded floor type of phonograph. The cabinet contains a power unit, a cathode ray unit, two radio receivers (one for sight and one for sound), and a loudspeaker. The cathode ray unit represents the greatest advance in the art. The impulses from the transmitter are conveyed by short waves and modulate the electron beam in the cathode tube. This, in turn, is transformed by a fluorescent screen into variations of light that make the picture visible. The reproduced image is viewed in a mirror mounted in the lid of the cabinet. Since the whole unit is electrical it is absolutely noiseless and as simple to operate as a modern radio receiver. Such a reproducing set could be placed upon the market today at a price between \$350 and \$500.

The perfection of the most recent models is sufficient to allow the picture to be observed without first plunging the room into darkness and the detail is, at first, astonishing. Owing to the efficiency of the electric eye, any scene now within the range of the motion picture camera may be transmitted. Where ordinary street scenes are broadcast, the accuracy of reproduction is so perfect that numbers on automobile plates may be identified. In the transmission of a football