

face the facts. What are some of the facts that these idealists should face?

One fact is that National prohibition did not come as the result of an effort to make people moral by law. Undoubtedly in some cases, notably in Maine, State prohibition was the result of a moral crusade to enforce total abstinence; but as such it did not gain much headway. Prohibition became National for reasons that had nothing to do with individual morals. It was only when public opinion became convinced that the legalized liquor trade was hopelessly corrupt and corrupting and that traffic in alcoholic drink was an economic burden which the Nation could not afford to bear that prohibition became National.

Protests against prohibition as an effort at moral reform are therefore beside the point. If anti-prohibitionists are to get a hearing, they must prove that the lawlessness of the illegal traffic is as great and as corrupting as the lawlessness of the legalized traffic, and that the outlawing of the liquor trade has either not brought economic benefit or has brought evils that outweigh that benefit. Opinions about comparative lawlessness before and since prohibition are not facts. The burden of proof is upon those who wish to make a change.

Another fact which anti-prohibition idealists should face is that the present legal definition as to what constitutes an intoxicating beverage is not a device of the prohibitionists. It is the definition that was in the liquor law before National prohibition was adopted. It is said that the provision making one-half of one per cent of alcoholic content the legal limit for non-intoxicating beverages was put into the liquor law originally at the instance of the liquor interests, so that they would be assured of freedom from competition by manufacturers of what are now called "light wines and beers." At any rate, the law had that effect of preventing competition between the licensed saloon and the unlicensed seller of "soft drinks." The attacks on the supporters of the Prohibition Law as hypocritical because prohibition is alleged to make illegal the selling of drink that is in fact non-intoxicating are therefore beside the point and should have no weight.

Whether the Eighteenth Amendment should have legislated the legal sale of liquor out of existence was at one time a live question. At that time The Outlook held that the Amendment should have been confined to a grant of power to

Congress to pass a prohibition law. That question, however, is now academic. Arguments about it get us nowhere. The only live question about prohibition is that of such enactment or modification of laws as will remove or minimize present evils and retain all possible benefits resulting from the Eighteenth Amendment, and the development of such public opinion as will secure respect for the observance and enforcement of law.

In "Antioch Notes," a semi-monthly publication of Antioch College, Ohio, we find, in the issue for January 1, the following:

Mechanical engineers speak of "tolerance," or the permissible range of imperfection in fitting parts, to allow for limitations of tools, material, and workmanship. A wagon-wheel bearing may have a "tolerance" of half an inch; a fine watch bearing, less than a ten thousandth.

As society advances, many social tolerances are reduced. When society has conclusively found a course to be wrong, it does well to act on that find-

ing. It has done this as to opium, the effects of which are so obvious that its use is properly restricted to physicians. The case of alcohol is no different in principle, but only in the decisiveness of the evidence. The effort to make this an issue of personal liberty, rather than of fact, is not justified.

On the other hand, a speeding automobile must not be thrown into reverse gear, even though a signpost shows it to be going the wrong way. Prohibitionists erred in social mechanics, underestimating the momentum of the social mass. More gradual stopping would have put less strain on the social machinery.

If, as thus defined by "Antioch Notes," tolerance in practices that was once safe ceases to be safe in modern society, at least tolerance of opinion can be preserved. There is no surer way of preserving it than by developing respect for facts. Idealism which disregards facts is the greatest enemy of that form of tolerance which modern society most needs.

For Smith College Girls Only

By LAWRENCE F. ABBOTT

Contributing Editor of The Outlook

I HAVE found out by sad experience that it is dangerous for an ignoramus to intrude upon the domain of the classical oracles—dangerous both to one's own reputation and to the reputation of the oracles themselves. Now I am an ignoramus if judged by the standards of the College Boards. To pass an entrance examination of one of the smallest fresh-water colleges would certainly be beyond my powers. I cannot conjugate any of the Greek irregular verbs, nor can I repeat the rule, and its exceptions, that governs the use of *a*, *ab*, and *absque* with the Latin ablative. My I. Q. is very low in this respect. And yet—*mea culpa*!—I presumed in these columns a few weeks ago to make a classical allusion that has led to a long train of perplexing and at the same time amusing consequences. I am both perplexed and amused to find how far from infallible the oracles are!

It all happened this way. Having ventured to criticise the mechanical tendencies of the College Board examinations, I drove home my criticisms in a subsequent article by printing some letters from teachers who approved my stand. Two of them compared the College Board examiners to Procrustes. With self-

complacency—how true it is that pride goeth before a fall!—I made this comment upon their classical analogy: "Perhaps I may add—not, however for the benefit of the twenty Smith girls who are studying Greek literature—that Procrustes, to whom my correspondents allude, was a mythical Greek robber who had two beds. He hammered or stretched out his short victims to fit the long bed and cut down his tall victims to fit the short one." Whereupon a gentleman in Pennsylvania wrote me as follows:

The twenty Smith girls referred to in your article "Those College Boards Again," in The Outlook for December 16, will certainly not be edified by your allusion to Procrustes, and some of them may already have called your attention to the fact that Procrustes, if my mythology and those authorities which are available to me are not at fault, had only one bed. There would be little point in the story if he had a double standard to which he made his victims conform.

Much shocked by this revelation of my ignorance, my first resolution was one of repentance. I determined never to set my unworthy foot again upon the sacred precincts of classical lore. Who



Photo by Eric Stahlberg

O tempora! O mores!

A group of Smith College girls in the year 1883, gathered together in room "8," in Hubbard House, one of the oldest dormitories

am I, said I to myself, to presume to consort with the classically cultivated? But when my mortification cooled a little I decided to investigate and discover, if possible, how I had made so colossal a blunder. To my relief and amusement, I found that the classically cultivated sometimes are as confused and blundering as those of us in the common herd.

I first turned to that *vade mecum* of the editorial office—it goes wherever the office goes—the Encyclopedia Britan-

nica. Surely, I thought, this monumental work, published under the ægis of that noble institution of classical learning, the University of Cambridge, will settle the question. True enough. The Britannica in its article on Procrustes says:

He had two bedsteads (according to some, only one), the one very long, the other very short. When a stranger claimed his hospitality, Procrustes compelled him, if he was tall to lie down on the short bed, and then cut off his extremities to make him fit. If,

on the other hand, he was short, he was placed on the long bedstead and his limbs pulled out until he died of exhaustion.

This seemed final. But I had a dim recollection that Plutarch reported that Theseus killed Procrustes, so I turned to the Britannica article on Theseus. Imagine my surprise to find the following:

A little further on he [Theseus] slew Procrustes, who fitted all comers to his only bed: if his guest was too



Photo by Eric Stahlberg

Εἰς τὸ Πρόσθεν

Room "8," in Hubbard House. A bevy of present-day students. See if you can discover a Greek text-book in either picture

short for the bed, he stretched him out; if he was too long, he cut him down to the requisite length.

Here was a pretty how-d'ye-do! One Cambridge don speaking of Procrustes and "his only bed" as if the statement was axiomatic; and another Cambridge don classing as mere *somebodies* all those who do not accept the two-bed version!

Clearly, I must go further. The Britannica dons referred to Hyginus and Plutarch as their sources of information. Now, so far as I can learn, there is no English translation of Hyginus, a collector and recorder of Greek and Roman folk-lore, who was a protégé and chief librarian of Augustus Caesar. So I appealed to my friend Dean West, of Princeton, and by his courtesy one of his colleagues sent me a passage from the Latin text of Hyginus—perhaps from the edition published in Hamburg in 1676, which I later consulted in the New York Public Library. The passage reads as follows:

Procrustum Neptuni filium, ad hunc hospes venisset, si longior erat, minori lecto proposito, reliquam corporis partem præcidebat: sin autem brevior statura erat, lecto longiori dato, in-

cudibus suppositis extendebat eum, usque dum lecti longitudinem æquaret: hunc interfecit.

On examining this passage (with the laborious aid of a lexicon), I found that the article in the Britannica by the two-bed don is almost a literal translation.

It was easier to get at Plutarch. I had only to consult the splendid and munificent Classical Library designed and endowed by Mr. James Loeb, the New York banker. There I found the following passage in which Plutarch tersely reports the slaying of Procrustes by Theseus:

καὶ μικρὸν προελθὼν Δαμάστην ἐν Ἐρινεῷ τὸν Προκρούστην, ἀναγκάσας αὐτὸν ἀπισσοῦν τοῖς κλιντήρσιν ὥσπερ τοὺς ξένους ἐκείνους

The only question is as to the idiomatic use by Plutarch of the phrase τοῖς κλιντήρσιν. If it cannot be stretched to mean "only bed," as the Cambridge don appears to think it can, then the one-bed version has not a leg, or rather a caster, to stand on. I am not enough of a Greek scholar to decide, so I leave the final judgment to the twenty classical students of Smith College, only remind-

ing them that Hyginus, who was born nearly a century before Plutarch, was a specialist in folk-lore, while Plutarch was a specialist in moralistic biography. When one wants to find the origin of a myth or legend, does he go to a biographer or an antiquarian?

There is one question, however, in this connection about which I do feel competent to express an opinion. My Pennsylvania correspondent says that there would be little point to the myth if Procrustes had kept two beds—had, in a word, maintained a double standard. On the contrary, the cruel shrewdness of the torturer is best revealed by the two beds. Procrustes cared nothing about the fitness of things. What he wanted was to gloat over the agonies of his victims. With only one bed a certain number of his guests would have escaped mutilation, for they would fortuitously have fitted it. But with two beds he was always sure of his prey. For no man can fit two beds of different lengths.

It vaguely seems as if there were a lesson lurking somewhere in this discussion. I wonder if it is that a double standard of morals is cruel and vicious?

Unsun'd Treasure and Some Doings

Staff Correspondence from Washington by DIXON MERRITT

JOHN MILTON never made an American tour, so far as the records reveal. Certainly he never poked around among the cave dwellers of arched underground chambers who compose the superstructure of the Treasury Department organization. But when he sat down to write "Comus" he must have provisioned that edifice and organization. Else why did he write about "the heaps of unsun'd treasure" where the newspaper man's inquisitive torch, turned upon the acquisitive vaults, only served to make the deeper darkness visible?

Three weeks ago I decided to devote a day or two to gathering the facts for a contribution on the Treasury to that series of Outlook articles elucidating the how rather than the what of Federal departments. First, I talked to a man who does Treasury articles for a living.

"Who," I said, "can tell me the story of the Treasury Department?"

"There is," he replied, "no story of the Treasury Department, and therefore nobody knows it. There are twenty-six stories of the Treasury. If you want Story No. 1, you go to Mr. A. If you

want Story No. 26, you go to Mr. Z. And so on or back, up or down."

I abused him for a chucklehead and went out to get the story. He was—and is—a chucklehead. It is sheer idiocy to attempt designation by the characters of the English alphabet. Nothing short of a Chinese-type case would serve. I worked on his system until long after I had exhausted the alphabet and had to resort to such expedients as *x* one-half and *z* square. Then I decided to start all over again, but, as a preface, went to another man, who recently had published an article on certain work of the Treasury.

"How," I demanded, "did you find out about the workings of the Treasury?"

"I didn't," he resented. "After eight months of hard digging, I decided that I knew enough of one very minor branch of the Treasury to write a decidedly superficial article about it."

There was one last hope. I sought the man who wrote the chapter on the Treasury Department in a certain mighty popular book. And I asked him this:

"How can I find out how things are done in the Treasury?"

He sighed in a tone of utter weariness and said, with an air of finality, "It can't be done."

But it can. I promised the readers of The Outlook the story of the how of the Treasury. It will not, however, be printed next week. I do not know how the story is to be got, but there is a way. It would be desirable to have Congress make an appropriation to pay the salaries of a staff of expert researchers to spend a few years pulling the material together. The Treasury Department wants the material pulled together. It has made efforts to find men who could do it, but I am assured by the chief clerk that the funds available were not sufficient to command the services of men capable of doing the job.

It appears to be a fact that the work of the Treasury Department does not "head up" anywhere. There are numerous men who have marvelous knowledge of particular phases of the work. There is no man or set of men, apparently, with a comprehensive view of the essential how of the whole thing.

Articles on other departments will likely precede the Treasury article in the