

On a Highly Desirable State

By PARKHURST WHITNEY

A MAN who has been studying the effects of prohibition in a hand-picked group of States in the West and Southwest tells me that the conclusion of his quest for reliable statistics is simply: "There are none."

He did report a few disquieting minor discoveries. Hip flasks were for sale in Kansas cigar stores. Forty thousand gallons of Jamaica ginger were shipped into Texas in 1924-5; the normal consumption is estimated at about three hundred gallons. (I am told that Coca Cola fortified with Jamaica ginger makes a drink with a powerful kick.) In Oklahoma he saw the can of malt with the familiar legend telling the customer what not to do—or fermentation will take place. But trustworthy studies on a scale that would show a relation between the Eighteenth Amendment and bank deposits, or crime, or public health, were not available.

"Well," I said, "suppose you had come back with a car-load of prime figures. What then? What have bank clearances to do with this issue?"

I was serious; but he seemed to sense flippancy and refused to argue.

THE drys know what I mean. It is the wets, it seems to me, who contribute most to the present confusion. They are skirmishing about with such arguments as that the legal sale of light wines and beer will quench the thirst for whisky. That is questionable; in fact, it is not true. Climate determines alcoholic content; races of the higher latitudes always have craved, probably always will crave, the more potent cup. The American, breathing the dry, stimulating air of his native land, is peculiarly prone to strong and excessive drinking.

They—the wets—say they do not want the saloon to come back. They needn't worry. But what, precisely, do they want? Government control of distribution? I see a million orators rising to smother that proposal. Subjects: Shall Old Glory Wave O'er the Demon Rum? Shall Uncle Sam Be a Dram Seller?

They talk of the disrespect for the law that is encouraged by unpopular and unenforceable legislation; of the invasion of individual rights, of graft, of the high-handed acts of enforcement officers,

and of good citizens ruined by bad gin.

I don't mean to sneer at their arguments or their statistics; but when will they match the honest belief of the drys with an equally honest belief in the harmless, even beneficent properties of alcohol?

"I want the law modified," I should like to hear a wet spokesman say, "because there are times when I need a drink. Life isn't invariably a cheerful business. There are days when I like to look at it through the bottom of a glass. Do you mean to say that makes a sinner? Don't be silly! It makes a better man of me, more tolerant, more companionable."

Unless they do believe just that there is no real strength in their opposition. Their cause is a tree with many branches and no root. And unless they do speak their minds frankly what is one to conclude? Is prohibition a moral issue, after all? Are the wets themselves haunted by the thought that alcohol is in itself evil and the drinking man in danger of hell fire?

I shouldn't be surprised.

PROHIBITION appeals to the employer for reasons that are economic and obvious. It has derived animus from the anti-alien, Americanization movement. The drys will use figures, as they will use any club to beat the devil; but you can confound their figures and still find that you have a fight on your hands. There is one position from which they will not retreat.

So much is platitude; or should be to any American who was a boy, as I was, in an American village twenty-five years ago. Blue Ribbons and White Ribbons. "Lips that touch liquor shall never touch mine." The signing of pledges. "Touch not, taste not." The Band of Hope. "Ten Nights in a Bar Room." The Loyal Temperance Legion. The Temperance Catechism. Temperance Rallies. The resolute faces of the women whose lives were long since dedicated to the defeat of the Demon Rum.

Can any American of my generation, or earlier, contemplate a cocktail without seeing the serpent in the glass? Can he adopt a hedonistic attitude toward any human activity?

Alcohol was evil. It "weakens the

muscles, inflames the stomach, injures the nerves, retards the digestion, diseases the liver, affects the brain, exhausts the strength, and shortens life." Do you remember your catechism, reader of forty, or fifty, or sixty?

Tobacco was evil. I see the earnest ladies of the Loyal Temperance Legion using the blackboard to prove to us some of the solid benefits accruing to non-smokers. "If a man doesn't smoke three five-cent cigars a day, in twenty years he will save—let's see, children—\$1,095."

Round dances were evil.

Cards were evil.

Billiards were evil.

The theatre was evil.

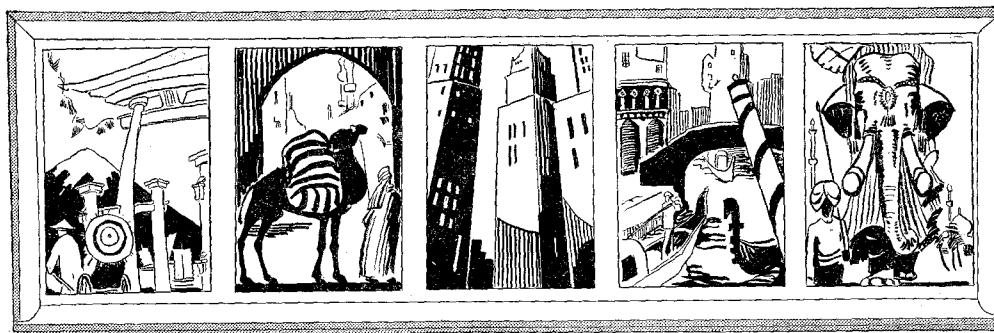
The list is capable of expansion. In brief, the world was evil. Little boys and girls who wanted to become good men and women must watch their steps. The good life was not so much lived, as denied.

A YOUNGER generation may snicker at those interdictions. The mature American will admit, I think, that they were imposed with such force, and at so many points, as to make an indelible impression. His moral instruction was not left to his Sunday-school teacher; it began at home, got into his public school readers and histories, colored his literature, and studded the speeches of his heroes. If my experience was typical, and I believe it was, his youthful thoughts, and those of his sister, were often fixed on a state known as moral perfection.

So when a man of my age or older tells me, with a highball in his hand, that prohibition is a good thing for the country, I am not so ready as some to cry, "Hypocrite!" Strictly speaking, the hypocrite sees clearly and dissembles to his advantage. The man I have in mind is certainly no dissembler; he is plainly and pathetically muddled.

But what can you expect? What is moral perfection, anyway? I don't know. I used to brood about it as a boy, because I knew it was a highly desirable state; but my imagination never went beyond catalepsy; or, at the best, a sleep-walking that enabled one to move through life not touching and not touched by it.

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Windows on the World

By MALCOLM WATERS DAVIS

A QUARREL that threatens the peace of eastern Europe—and consequently of all Europe—is up before the Council of the League of Nations for settlement. Poland and Lithuania are to defend before this jury of their peers in Geneva their claims to the city of Vilna and the region around it.

However limited the powers of the League as an international organization, however it may represent the unreadiness of the nations to surrender the right to determine their own interests so far as they can, it still is the only continuous agency for dealing with such disputes as this before they become wars. And in this way it has done a great deal to check those small blazes that might grow—as the Austrian controversy with Serbia did in 1914—into Continental conflagrations.

So this conflict over Vilna will interest Americans aware of the concern of this country with the peace of Europe. Lithuania, it may be recalled, claimed Vilna as her capital. Poland wanted it, mainly as a junction on a strategic railway, and seven years ago the Polish General Zeligowski annexed it. Since then Lithuania and Poland have been technically at war. Lately there has been a confusion of charges and counter-charges of mobilization on both sides. These have issued in an agreement to take the case to the League. It will be a test both of the statesmanship and the authority of the body at Geneva which is the main bulwark of such tranquillity as Europe has.

EUROPE CAN PAY America what she owes—so Roger Auboin calculates in the well-informed weekly *"L'Europe Nouvelle"*—and America can absorb the payments, great as is the balance due. The reason is that America's "invisible yments" to Europe—such as the

tourist expenditures, immigrant remittances, and other items—are greater even than the amounts payable annually on European debts. The difficulty seems to be that the taxes by which Europe would have to pay these debts are often equally invisible—at least in the receipts of some European treasuries.

SOVIET RUSSIA is making a significant economic drive both for American interest and for American technical aid in building up her industries. The Moscow Government has just placed with Percival Farquhar, of New York, a contract to build a large steel plant in southern Russia. This is in line with the Communist policy of developing industries as a means both of national independence and of strengthening the class of factory workers, the mainstay of Bolshevik power in Russia. To be sure, some of the financing seemingly remains to be completed, and I note reports that attempts are being made to secure capital in Germany, through banks that co-operate with certain powerful New York houses. But the project appears to be strongly backed. And at the same time the State Department has announced that it will not oppose long-term credits for purchases of American goods for Russia.

The Soviet Government, finding foreign gold not easy to get, is planning to mine more of its own. It has sent a commission of engineering experts to study American methods in California, Nevada, and other mining States.

Finally, it proposes to enlarge substantially its export of oil. Two American companies—the Standard Oil Company of New York and the Vacuum Oil Company, a Standard Oil subsidiary—dispose of a large part of the Russian oil output. They do so against the protest of the powerful Royal Dutch-Shell group of oil interests in Great Britain

and Holland, which object to dealings with the Soviet Government. The Standard Oil Company of New York—which, oddly, is opposed also in this policy by its sister company, the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey—has concluded a new contract for the purchase of Russian petroleum products to supply its markets in the Near East.

LUIS MORONES has quit his post as Minister of Industry, Commerce, and Labor in Mexico, and that means an end of Mexican opposition to the oil and mining property claims of United States citizens in Mexico, according to a "prominent Mexican" close to President Calles. This "prominent Mexican" arrived lately in San Antonio, where he said that Ambassador Morrow had convinced the Mexican Government of the necessity of changing entirely its policy towards the United States. If Morones is out of politics, it is highly significant news. As leader of the Mexican Labor Party, he was largely responsible both for putting Calles in office and for the Government's attitude on oil property rights.

IRELAND is to get her first loan in the United States. The Free State Government has arranged with New York bankers to float a bond issue of \$15,000,000, which the Americans secured in competition with London banking houses. This first external financing of the Irish Free State is part of a national development program which will call, in all, for about \$75,000,000.

George Bernard Shaw recently uttered a characteristic warning against sending money to Ireland, on the ground that she is "an incorrigible beggar." But this is a case in which even he would probably coin no epigram of protest.