

# THE CANADIAN THRESHERMAN AND FARMER

CANADA'S LEADING AGRICULTURAL MONTHLY



PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY

E. H. HEATH COMPANY, Limited - - - WINNIPEG, CANADA

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AUTHORIZED BY THE POSTMASTER GENERAL, OTTAWA, CANADA, FOR TRANSMISSION AS SECOND CLASS MATTER

Nov.

## The Bootlegger and the Boy

1919

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ON the surface of Canadian citizenship there has never been absent a frothing not unlike the fermented stuff one has seen on a fine body of "preserves." This, however, is usually found to be but the harmless accumulation of air bubbles, the last expiring discharge of "wind" from the wholesome stuff underneath as it settles down to its real function. So with the rank and file of Canadian manhood and womanhood, as was so wonderfully demonstrated in Ontario the other day when the people of that province expressed themselves on its Temperance Act. In spite of a thin film of heated seum, the body and the soul of the nation is charged from core to circumference with an indefeasible decency that is proof against all odds.

Of all the inherited sin that society suffers from, surely strong drink, the stuff that robs a man of his reason, has bred more mischief than anything in human frailty the world knows of. This is admitted even by the most uncompromising champion of the drink interest, who can "take his glass when he may or leave it when he may not." It is for him the whole damned thing is permitted to live; but for him, the drinking habit would have been swept off the face of the earth ages ago. He is the chap who keeps it going, and in seeking to rid the people of its curse, he is the one obstacle we may seriously consider.

The old stock "arguments" used on him are as hopeless as shrapnel showered on twelve-inch armorplate. But there is one "reason" he can never face up to or skirmish around—the child. Let us bring the boy into court, your own boy, for preference, Mr. Tippler, if not, your neighbor's lad—that bright young promise of manhood who, as he stands in your presence is the very incarnation of physical health, the best image of God's love we know of. Will you say just at what point that boy may begin to "sow" as you did on the night you had your first drink, and was carried home insensible to a broken-hearted mother?

In defiance of the best, the administrators of the law are able to do, the drink traffic still flourishes. Notwithstanding the prohibition act, drunken men are becoming common objects of the city streets, notably on Sundays. A daily newspaper records that "a veritable river of booze from Canada is flowing into Minnesota and North Dakota." Who are they who are engaged in this illicit business, and how are they being encouraged to carry it on? The bootlegger, a type of dirty hog who has neither the capacity nor the con-

honesty to earn a decent living. And he is fed by men and women masquerading as "respectable citizens," society leaders many of them, who will have it in their cellars by any means so long as it can be got.

"Fines" are a perfect farce. In Winnipeg police court men and women are turning up daily with "previous convictions" against their names and paying their \$200 and \$300 fines with all the gaiety and unconcern of children taking a teaspoonful of Gregory's mixture. The other day a miserable little, unwashed proprietor of a shoe shine "parlor" was convicted for the fifth time, fined six hundred dollars and dug the money out of his jeans in a way that left no doubt in the minds of any one who witnessed the transaction that he had been prompted by some one who knew exactly what he might expect and had also prepared him for it.

This, however, is not what excites one's indignation and disgust so much as the fact that because of the facility with which those miserable cads—buyers and pedlars alike—are enabled to distribute the liquor, some of the very best and brightest of our young manhood (if not womanhood) are being fast recruited into the ranks of the drink-sodden dead beat. Humanly speaking, the old "booze artist" is hopeless and may be left to die out, but what is your attitude towards that feature of the curse which creates the common spectacle of young lads, still in their teens, not only incapably drunk but glorying afterwards in the fact that they were smart enough to obtain the wherewithal to make them drunk?

A young soldier citizen gives the best four years of his life to the service of his country in France and Flanders. He wears three stripes on his sleeve, cloquent of his courage and constancy under fire. He is on his way home to mother, sister and a little brother who is counting the very hours "till Bob comes home." Bob was never in his life under the influence of drink till he landed at Halifax. Two days later that devoted mother received the cruel information that her brave and beloved boy had been the victim of "an unfortunate and fatal accident." Who shall fit the word to the miscreant who, under the specious name of "friendship" gave that splendid young Canadian the drink that sent him reeling in front of "a passing freight" within a day's ride of his home town? The incident is true to the letter and is but one of many occurring daily that are "kept out of the papers" in deference to the lacerated feelings of the breaved ones.

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