

TEXT OF PROFESSOR LEACOCK'S LETTER TO THE LONDON TIMES

As Published in That Newspaper on the 23rd March Last, and Which Drew Forth the Reply from the Bishop of Fredericton.

THE AMERICAN LESSON TO ENGLAND.

To The Editor of the Times,

Sir:—I should be very glad to have an opportunity to express through your columns the appalling disaster which has overtaken the United States of America and eight of the nine provinces of Canada in the form of prohibition. I use the words "appalling disaster" without exaggeration. What has happened is appalling, and it is a disaster. It is proven so by the treatment which it is exacting already on national character and social life.

It is most important that people in England should understand the warning of prohibition in America. There is every indication that a crusade of the same kind is to be organized against the British Isles, financed by the same teetotal and philanthropy and inspired by the same brutal and intolerant fanaticism.

In America the facts are these. The whole of the United States is now "bone dry." No man may buy or sell, import, export, or transport intoxicating liquor. A citizen may have "liquor" in his home provided that it was there before July 1, 1919; otherwise not. This is the Federal law under the 18th amendment to the Constitution. Added to this is the State law of each State. In many cases, as in Illinois and Kansas, this prohibits even the possession of "liquors." In these States the prohibitionist has achieved the goal of his efforts. He now enters into the kingdom of his enemy, the joy of persecuting his fellow men. Herein lies the main inspiration of the prohibition crusade: it renews the age-long passion of a century of mankind for imposing by force upon its fellows the full rigour of its own particular creed of conduct. This is not to say that there are not in Canada and the United States a great many active workers in the cause of prohibition who are inspired by the very noblest of motives. Personally I know many such men. Yet I am sure that among 110 million people there must be quite a number of them. But the typical "active worker" for prohibition is either a relentless fanatic inspired by bigotry or a self-interested hypocrite.

Let it be noted that the people of the United States and Canada have never realized prohibition by a general vote, nor ever been offered an opportunity to reject it. The prohibitionist took care of that. The policy was adopted in the United States by a vote of the "politicians" of Congress and the 48 State Legislatures. This means a total of only a few thousand persons. Under the theory of representative government these people spoke for the nation. Under the facts of representative government they did nothing of the sort. They spoke only for the vociferous, fanatical minority—organized, hysterical and threatening. These are the voices that the "politician" hears. To others he is deaf. Where the people were silent the politicians would not speak. No one wanted to be conspicuous in opposing a movement which professed to be a campaign of religion and patriotism. Each left to his neighbor the defence of common sense and common right. And the cause went undefended.

The same thing will happen in England unless people of plain, authority, influence, and brains will speak out—fearlessly and emphatically—their opinions. It does not do to say that in England all the decent people are opposed to prohibition. So they were in the United States. There is no doubt that the vast majority of the decent people, all the gentlemen, if one may dare whisper the word nowadays, were and are against the movement. But their opposition now leaves only a vain regret for what they might have done and a new understanding of the workings of democracy.

What the "bone dry" regime means in practice needs to be seen to be understood. Social life and hospitality are reduced to the level of a Sunday school feast. A dinner party becomes a "rogor," followed by somnolence. A banquet is as a feast of comarants followed by public lectures in place of after-dinner speeches. A deadly seriousness pervades all ranks, rendering work and recreation all of a piece and indistinguishable.

Not the least feature of the new regime is the host of police, detectives, spies and informers turned loose against society. In the United States the Federal Government has set up all over the country a special police to enforce the prohibition law. The "commissioners" of this body on January 18, when the fatal amendment came into force, issued their licenses as to what they would allow. They would permit no carrying of flasks; they would allow no "presents" of "liquor" as between friends; a man might give to a bona fide friend in his own bona fide house a drink of "alcohol" if it had been in his bona fide possession since July 1, 1919, but this only if the friend did, bona fide, then and there drink it, and not carry it away outside of himself.

Observe that in the United States

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CO-OPERATIVE STORES ARE TRIED IN EGYPT

Carlo, April 20.—The present high cost of living may indeed be accounted a blessing, if as a result a genuine co-operative movement is established in the country. Many years ago the Government made great efforts to start agricultural co-operative societies, but out of some fifty only four or five are at all successful and most of the balance have been deserted.

Obviously the people were not yet educated up to this ideal of mutual service, but the war with its results has been a stiffer schoolmaster and signs are not lacking that the movement stands a very much better chance of success today. One of the first practical developments along this line came from the Egyptian State Railways whose employees have for some months past been able to obtain necessities from a co-operative society of their own, organized upon capitalist principles. Further, a leading Nationalist, Amine Bey Ghazal, has shown most commendable zeal in floating a co-operative society with a capital of £10,000 subscribed by local capitalists for the purpose of supplying the poor of Demietta with cheap foodstuffs. "This," as he says, "is only an experiment, and if successful, but a first step toward extending the benefits of co-operation to other parts of Egypt."

The Government appears to be giving him and his society every assistance and encouragement, a help which he gratefully acknowledges. He starts with a splendid opportunity of proving his title to nationhood and every one sincerely interested in Egypt's welfare will wish him all success.

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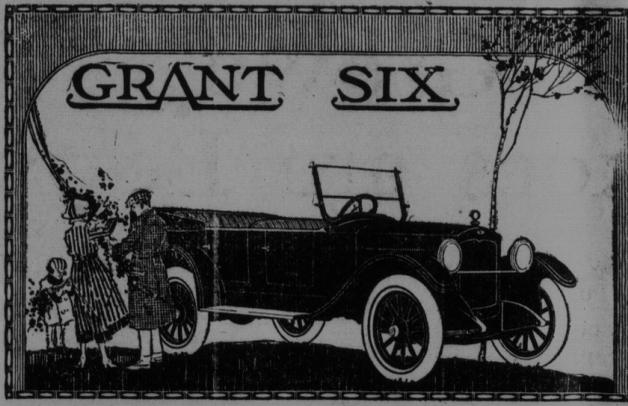
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