



The
CHICAGOAN

JULY 2, 1927

The Deluge

A Sounding of Chicago Prohibition

THROUGHOUT the solemn decades from 1865 to 1918 the federal constitution drowsed along as no very exciting document, a dreary ruling upon which was based the outward and visible form of our governing bodies. Even the negro amendments written in the white blood of a civil war were forgotten by the North and casually disregarded by the South.

To be sure, aliens were required to learn at least the opening paragraphs of our articles of union, together with what passed for a gist of its contents. But the native citizen was not so harassed. His innocence of constitutional lore was part of his privilege as a home-grown American. It was scrupulously preserved.

Then came the 18th amendment. pursuant to it, the price of Kentucky whiskies jumped from \$6.75 a case to \$95. Native business instincts caused their bearers to snort violently and move fast. Overnight a new and lusty business was born. Without venturing upon the history of bootlegging the writer must content himself with observing that the infant industry has grown up into a blue-joweled and formidable youth, a hustler, a go-getter, and A-1 business man.

Chicago is the present capitol of large-scale bootlegging. Her prestige, with due acknowledgment for the thirst of her citizens, rests on the fact that Chicago is the distributing center for the dry states of the Middle-West. Chicago bootleggers are the merchant princes of the profession. Seaboard "racketeers" are very literally mere peddlers as seen against the powerful liquor traders on the corner of Lake Michigan.

Bootlegging proper, which is the importation and distribution of delicacies, as well as beer and alcohol running, which is the supplying of bulk goods to the intemperate common voter, rest on the corner stone of the "fix." The "fix" is simply an arrangement of effective law breaking with public servants who are willing to listen to reason, and with profit. Unlike the noisy alcohol wars which thunder even more violently in print than up dark Chicago alleys, the "fix" is silent and efficient in its workings.

Liquor vendors insist that nearly all officials "take." At least a number of

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law enforcers do. Certainly the American scheme of popular government has revealed itself capable of a flexibility in this regard totally undreamed of by the Fathers.

THE personnel of a modern liquor dealer's organization is made up of all types. Recruits are drawn in by some members of the profession who vouch for the neophyte as an honest industrious youth, and in due time become "salesmen" for this or that Loop "Sales Corporation." It is a sober truth that many young fellows graduate from bootlegging to the positions of trust and confidence usually reserved for graduates of mail order colleges.

Since high-grade potables are sold to commercial houses almost exclusively, the better organizations avoid high-pressure selling. "Cold Turkey" soliciting is frowned on.

The security of such dealings is consequently so high that excellent service is maintained. Any good bootleg office should guarantee a loop delivery in 30 minutes. If the customer is skeptical, samples of goods are cheerfully submitted together with a laboratory analysis. The analysis does not mean much, it is true, other than that the "package" is non-poisonous. Taste and quality of liquor are such ethereal, impalpable attributes as to defy most chemists. The palate is, after all, the final arbiter of quality. Yet it may be here definitely stated that even "bunk packages" are so carefully put up that the ordinary purchaser cannot detect the real from the manufactured. Good firms usually scorn to adulterate their wares. They attempt to win and hold patronage by solid merchandising value.

IN the beer and alkey industry, where the quality of liquor is low, profits comparatively small, and competition bitter, business methods are more brutally stripped of the amenities. Hijacking is likely to be more frequent, since deliveries are harder to disguise. Monopolies in any one district are seldom decided by the virtues of the products sold, but by the gangster rule of quick-firing armaments, not against customers, but against rival alkey runners. The struggle for fertile Chicago areas is thus rightly known as a "beer war." It is conducted by beer and alkey men; bootleggers (technically) stand aloof. At the present writing Chicago beer chiefs have agreed to a truce and on the whole that truce has been scrupulously kept. Even of the beer runner it must be said that the killer is a spe-

cial, hired individual, by no means typical of the general calling.

It follows, naturally, that the beer runner seldom comes in contact with the ultimate consumer of his goods—a source of divers abuses. In this respect he is unlike the bootlegger. The beer runner's product trickles to the public through the multitudes of blind pigs, speakeasies, drinking clubs, and booze joints which (alas!) harass the peace of the Second City. The identification of patrons of these dens is a matter entirely up to the proprietor. But satisfaction of customers is alike imperative, even in the lowest places.

Alcohol is indirectly handled. Like beer it is distributed by one industry, and sold by a second dealer, who meets the final consumer across the counter. Adequate, if not highly aesthetic gin is manufactured by the retailer usually; it comes cheaper that way. Home-brew, of course, requires no explanation as to its origin. Many a beer-flat thrives on the income mamma is able to cajole from neighbors who like her particular brew. Such traffic is large in the bulk, very large. But the organization behind it is at once so simple as to defy detection, and to obviate the necessity of research.

FINALLY, the temptation to boost profits a little through the sale of illegal intoxicants is so great that a vast number of small business people avail themselves of it. Groceries, restaurants, cigar stores, laundries, barber shops, all are tempted to dabble a bit; a distressing number of such places do.

Now and then some unscrupulous wretch peddles deadly stuff. His crime is unjustly laid to the whole profession, as a premeditated slaughter. At worst such sad incidents are accidental. Only a manifest idiot would kill off a solvent customer.

But let us not end on a lethal note. Bootleggers are not morbid or harassed fellows; these days they are quite the reverse. "Hell," as one explained to this investigator, "we got no kick coming. Our business is gettin' better and better. We're all makin' money. Everybody's happy!" There is the authentic finale.

—F. C. C.