

Can This Woman Make America Dry?

Well, if She Had the Authority and 300 Picked Men, She'd Like to Try It



I KNOW a way to make any "wise" bootlegger in the United States shiver in his boots. How? Easy! Just slip up behind him and whisper, "Mrs. Willebrandt is after you!"

That's all. He won't turn around and ask you who Mrs. Willebrandt is. If he knows anything at all about the bootleg game he knows that Mabel Walker Willebrandt is Assistant Attorney General of the United States, and that she is the woman who broke up the Big Four bootleg ring of Savannah, Ga.; put George Remus, one-time real king of booze venders, in Atlanta Penitentiary; wrote most of the opinions which hamper booze running and rum smuggling, and is the one person in official Washington who could and, if vested with proper authority, would make America almost bone dry.

Back in 1921, when Harry M. Daugherty, then Attorney General, placed Mrs. Willebrandt in charge of a division of the Department of Justice which had jurisdiction over all matters pertaining to the importation, exportation, manufacture, and traffic of liquor, and all matters arising under the National Prohibition Act, the bootleggers and smugglers patted each other on the back and cried, "Hooray!"

At that time, you may recall, it was pretty generally believed that official Washington wasn't particularly anxious to have the Volstead Act strictly enforced. So, in the appointment of Mrs. Willebrandt bootleggers and smugglers thought they had concrete evidence that such was the case. If the Government "really wanted to get somewhere with prohibition they'd put a real prosecutor in office," they argued.

The hegira of bootleggers to Washington began. They went straight to Attorney General Daugherty to get the "low down" and have some of the tightest screws loosened at once. Daugherty listened, nodded his head and said: "See Mrs. Willebrandt."

One by one they filed into her office expecting to find a timid little creature who would yes them to their hearts' content. Their first impression of her fitted perfectly into the picture. She was smiling. That was as it should be! She was gracious too. Fine! And she didn't look at all like a reformer. Her hair wasn't short and she didn't wear spectacles and she wasn't fussy. She looked rather jolly and human—a woman who should *understand!*

She Jailed the New Wallingford

THEY told her their troubles. This one's business was being all shot to pieces by this blooming Prohibition Act, and that one's "pardner" had been arrested for transporting "just a little bit of liquor." All that any of them wanted was a "square deal."

OldMagazineArticles.com

Mrs. Willebrandt

They got just that and no more. Mrs. Willebrandt read the letters they brought from powerful politicians, congressmen, big business men, and Who-not. As she read, they intimated that it "was all right with Harry," meaning Daugherty.

"Did Mr. Daugherty tell you to tell me it was all right with him?"

When they admitted that he hadn't but that he hadn't said no to their requests, she smiled sweetly and graciously disposed of their requests according to the letter of the Enforcement Act. Bootleggers soon learned that Mrs. Willebrandt couldn't be approached, fixed or flattered. "There's no use going to her," they told each other.

And just as soon as they stopped going to her Mrs. Willebrandt started going to them. She went to Cincinnati, where George Remus, the Wallingford of bootlegery, was making monkeys of the regular prohibition officers. In a few weeks she had Remus on the run.

She and her under-cover men dug up evidence which showed that Remus was dealing in distilleries, \$50,000 batches of forged permits, transportation companies, farms for storing large quantities of liquor, and a string of drug stores where he was selling bad booze to good customers.

Working with the United States District Attorney at Cincinnati, she developed the salient points of the case, brought Remus to trial, and sent him to the Federal Penitentiary at Atlanta.

About the time she finished the Remus case the Big Four of Savannah, Ga., the most powerful bootleg ring ever developed in America, was at the peak of its power. It was trading in booze on a tremendous scale. It had a fleet of ships bringing the stuff to American shores, where it was unloaded and sent into ten or fifteen states by motor truck, freight, and automobiles. They were reputed to be buying sheriffs, judges, district attorneys, and prohibition agents. Their annual business ran into millions.

The Prohibition Unit of the Internal Revenue Department sent its men to Savannah to clean up. They were bought off or failed to get evidence. Special agents of the Internal Revenue Department were sent in. They too muffed their opportunity.

The Big Four became so notorious that their existence became national scandal. It worried the Administration. In desperation, high officials in Washington put the problem up to Mrs. Willebrandt. She, working with William J. Burns, chief of the Bureau of Investigation of the Department of Justice, sent picked men to Savannah. These men couldn't function properly because of interference by the special agents of the Treasury Department. They came back and admitted as much. Then Mrs. Willebrandt picked fifteen men from the Bureau of Investigation and sent them to Savannah under cover.

While they were gathering evidence there Mrs. Willebrandt combed the lakes and big business concerns of the Atlantic Coast and found that Willie Haar, ringleader of the gang, owed the Government \$1,243,254.29 income tax! Others of the gang owed enough to bring the total up close to \$2,000,000.

She lulled the Big Four into a false sense of security by starting proceedings to recover this back tax. Think-

Mrs. Willebrandt

ing they could pay this money and escape further trouble, they grinned and prepared to settle. A million or two wouldn't break the Big Four.

But the storm broke a short time later when, through the leads she had gathered in looking up their tax delinquencies, together with the information her under-cover men dug up, she slapped the whole gang into jail, brought them to trial and convicted the four principals and sixty-odd confederates. Thus was the biggest bootleg ring in the United States completely smashed.

"Who is this woman and where does she come from?" you may ask. Well, she's a Western product. She was born in Kansas, learned to fight her own battles at the tender age of four when she accompanied her mother and father in a covered wagon from Missouri to Oklahoma when that Territory was opened to settlers back in '93, and picked up her education in schools and colleges in Kansas, Missouri, Michigan, Arizona, and California.

I don't know much about her childhood or her young womanhood, but I'll wager that whenever she played Follow the Leader she was doing the leading. She has never been satisfied to follow. When she went to teaching school she wasn't satisfied to be a teacher. She worked hard and became the principal.

When she settled down to the practice of law in Los Angeles she wasn't satisfied to be just a lawyer. She worked fifteen to eighteen hours a day and won the respect of bar and bench by her able work. But she found time to participate in women's activities on the side. Here too she was a leader. She was president of two professional women's clubs, chairman of the legislative committee of five others, and during the war was chairman of the Legal Advisory Board for District No. 11 in Los Angeles, the second largest district in the city, with thirty attorneys serving under her.

Yet, when I wrote to Mrs. Willebrandt requesting an interview for Collier's she replied: "There is nothing out of the ordinary or particularly interesting about me, and I have an idea you will be bored with the assignment before you are through."

False modesty didn't prompt Mrs. Willebrandt to make that statement. She has been too busy doing her stuff, as the saying goes, since President Harding appointed her Assistant Attorney General, that she hasn't had time to indulge in introspection. If some one were to tell her that she is the outstanding feminine figure in American political life she'd probably say: "Don't try to kid a busy woman!"

But the fact remains she is the first legal lady of the land.

Still, she's not satisfied with the progress being made in the task of drying up America.

Prohibition's "White Hope"

"GIVE me the authority and let me have my pick of 300 men and I'll make this country as dry as it is humanly possible to get it," she said without the slightest trace of braggadocio. "There's one way it can be done—get at the sources of supply. I know them, and I know how they could be cut off. I have no patience with this policy of

Mrs. Willebrandt

I have no patience with this policy of going after the hip-pocket and speak-easy cases. That's like trying to dry up the Atlantic Ocean with a blotter!"

And I agree with William J. Burns, who says: "If Mrs. Willebrandt had the authority she could clean up this prohibition mess." She knows how it should be done, has the courage to do it and there isn't anything under heaven that could stop her once she got started. She doesn't bow to any political god and she places honesty above party expediency.

She is the "white hope of prohibition!"



There was once an old lady who tried to push back the ocean with her mop. Mrs. Willebrandt, Assistant Attorney General, is trying her broom on bootleggers. But she's having better luck than did Mrs. Partington. She says the way to make this country dry is to "get at the sources of supply."