

THE LITERARY DIGEST

May 21, 1919

p. 27

SHALL LITERATURE GO DRY TOO?

A NEW ANTHOLOGY of a farewell sort seems about due, made up of the prose and poetical allusions to the strong drink we are about to forswear. The indirect prohibition will fall upon literary allusions to drinking as well as celebrations of wine, even if a direct assault, as some perhaps facetiously aver, is not made by the "antis." For who will dare celebrate, save in a dirge, that which is prohibited; and who will portray the indulgences of a law-breaker and expect to enlist the reader's sympathy? If we attempt to revise and expurgate existing masterpieces the *Adrian Telegram* points out that we shall have to begin with Homer's "Odyssey" and go all down the line, for "wine has flavored the writings of every author whose works are read to-day." The new movement is humorously alleged to be taking "Noah for its guide, Ben Jonson's 'Drink to Me Only With Thine Eyes' as its motto, and a tea-kettle for its vignette." Of course there is always Shakespeare's "O God, that men should put an enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains!" to quote on the other side; but the approving and applauding expressions are many and various:

"Those who would banish the ghost of alcohol from literature will find they have a job on their hands. Starting with the 'Odyssey,' they will come to the fourteenth book and will find it written,

And wine can of their wits the wise beguile,
Make the sage frolic and the serious smile.

"Milton had a few ideas, even if he did write 'Paradise Lost.' In 'Comus' he sang out:

Bacchus, that first from out the purple grape,
Crushed the sweet poison of misused wine.

"Emerson, the authority of the highbrows, was a connoisseur of good wine, for he demanded:

Bring me wine, but wine which never grew
In the belly of the grape,
Or grew on vine whose tap-roots, reaching through
Under Andes to the Cape,
Suffered no savor of the earth to escape.

"Lord Byron must have had a prophetic vision of the bad days to come when in 'Don Juan' he wrote:

Few things surpass old wine; and they may preach
Who please, the more because they preach in vain—
Let us have wine and women, mirth and laughter,
Sermons and soda-water the day after.

"And again Byron agreed that 'Sweet is old wine in bottles, ale in barrels.'

"Oliver Goldsmith, too, appreciated his little nip. In the first act of 'She Stoops to Conquer,' he sings:

Let schoolmasters puzzle their brain,
With grammar, and nonsense, and learning;
Good liquor, I stoutly maintain,
Gives genius a better discerning.

"And Sam Johnson—good old Sam!—do you remember? He wrote in 'Boswell's Life of Johnson,'

Claret is the liquor for boys; port for men; but he who aspires to be a hero must drink brandy.

"George Arnold wrote something in the style of the much-detested free verse, but read this and decide if he wrote not well:

Here
With my beer
I sit,
While golden moments fit:
Alas!
They pass
Unheeded by:
And as they fly,
I,
Being dry,
Sit, idly sipping here
My beer.

DRY LITERATURE?

"Now what do you think of George?"

"The Peacock' was a favorite meeting-place of Dickens and his friends and in 'The Holly-Tree Inn' he wrote of it, 'When I got up to 'The Peacock'—where I found every one drinking hot punch in self-preservation.'

"How will they paraphrase that?"

"Horace had a little supply hidden in the cellar when he wrote 'Virgil,' and while he wanted to be sociable, he didn't feel that he could pass it out too freely. So he invited:

If you'd dip in such joys, come—the better, the quicker!
But remember the fee—for it suits not my ends
To let you make havoc, scot free, with my liquor,
As tho I were one of your heavy-pursed friends.

"In many of the works of Horace are there to be found warm praises of wine. 'Whom has not the inspiring bowl made eloquent?' he asked, and again, he invited, 'Now drown care in wine.'

"Then to the spicy nut-brown ale,' was Milton's expectation in 'L'Allegro,' and he offered solace in 'Comus' with 'One sip of this,' which he promised, 'will bathe the drooping spirits in delight, beyond the bliss of dreams.'

"Beaumont and Fletcher, to whom are accredited some of Shakespeare's best ideas, were thinking of the dry days ahead when they sang:

Drink to-day, and drown all sorrow;
You shall perhaps not do it to-morrow.

"And so far as Shakespeare himself is concerned, you can't go three pages in any one of his plays without running into a party. The Bard of Avon never allowed one of his characters to retire for the night without a warming nightcap.

"He didn't agree with the prohibitionists, for in 'Othello' he advised,

Come, come, good wine is a good familiar creature, if it be well used;
exclaim no more against it.

In "Richard III" the hero was feeling low and he asked:

Give me a bowl of wine; I have not that alacrity of spirit, nor cheer of mind, that I was wont to have.

"Give me a bowl of wine,' he again requests in 'Julius Cæsar.'

"Shakespeare liked it, but he wanted to die a dry death, for in 'The Tempest' he said:

The wills above be done! but I fain would die a dry death.

"That last is a bit far-fetched, but it is what is coming to all of us."

Not so exalted a flight is taken by the *Chicago Daily Journal*, which sets about gathering up "Drinking-Songs," and thus commends itself to *The Hotel Monthly*, which doubtless thinks of its coming songless halls:

"In salvaging the estate of John Barleycorn, what shall we do with the drinking-songs?"

"Wine and song—or the equivalent of wine and something which the operators believed to be song—have gone together for at least five-and-twenty centuries. From the days when Anacreon celebrated the vintages of the Ægean Isles to the days when Alfred Noyes proclaimed

While earth goes round, let rum go round,

and sang of

Sea roads paved with pieces of eight, that lift to a heaven by rum made mellow.

the connection has been unbroken. What shall be done with the fruits of this long union?

"There are drinking-songs enough to fill a large volume. Leaving aside ancient history and foreign languages, consider a few known to every one, even to millions of persons who never touched any alcoholic drink. There is the one which every college glee club sings:

For it's always fair weather
When good fellows get together,
With a stein on the table, and good song ringing clear.

"There is the classic ditty in which the singers declare:

We won't go home till morning!