

## Prohibition in New York

(Henry B. Curry, in New York Evening Post.)

"The results of the disuse of alcoholic liquor have been more astounding, to my mind, than even the claims of the most ardent advocates of prohibition."

This emphatic tribute to the local benefits of the Eighteenth amendment was offered by Bird S. Coler, Commissioner of the New York Department of Public Welfare, formerly the Department of Public Charities. His declaration merited special notice from non-partisan observers of prohibition developments because he was speaking not as a "dry," but was telling only what he had learned as head of a great municipal activity which, in his own words, "covers every phase of welfare work known to humanity. We occupy the one place in all the country where the effect of prohibition can be first and best observed." For the Department of Public Welfare is invested with official care of the city's dependents—the homeless, the unemployed, the dependent children and all dependents who are aged or disabled or injured or ill. It is the department which conducts all the city "homes" and city hospitals.

"Any one sitting in my place," said Mr. Coler, "with its chances for observing what works for the welfare of the people and the betterment of civilization could take no other stand than to make a firm resolution to present the facts to the American people. No one having at heart the welfare of the people as a whole could take any other course."

In answer to a request by the Evening Post that he make public the official facts upon which he based his announcement Commissioner Coler has obtained reports from the leading institutions in his charge and has supplemented these reports with related data, obtained through the De-

partment of Correction, upon the number of local arrests and the totals of the local prison population.

One learns from the facts so collated that during the first quarter of the year, despite many thousands of additional patients cared for during the epidemic of influenza, the number of admissions to the Kings County Hospital in Brooklyn was one-third less than during the first quarter of last year; to Greenpoint Hospital, one-fifth less; to Coney Island Hospital, 15 per cent less.

At the Municipal Lodging House in East Twenty-fifth street the number of men lodged (during the same three months) was only one-sixth of what it was in the same months of last year.

The number of arrests for intoxication fell off more than one-half during the last six months of last year although only a feeble effort was made to enforce the "dry" enactments.

The prison population decreased by 15 per cent last year as compared with the preceding year, and in the case of women prisoners, by more than 30 per cent.

Patients suffering from alcoholism, who formerly averaged 102 each day at Bellevue Hospital, diminished last month to three or four per day; at Kings County Hospital the common total of forty such patients was reduced last month to five or six.

Ambulance calls received by the department are often due to drunkenness and its attendant disorder, so that the number of calls transmitted to Bellevue Hospital were 138 in January, 1919, but only nine in January of this year. And the total number of department ambulance calls, Mr. Coler believes, "would have been decreased by 50 per cent since July 1 of last year except for the 'flu' epidemic, and they were, in fact, despite the epidemic, reduced by 30 per cent.

Commenting upon the remarkable improvement in condition Mr. Coler said:

"The Municipal Lodging House is practically vacant. With a capacity of 900 beds they have only forty 'customers.' The type of people who go there now are old-time vagrants who are properly work-houses cases. The man or woman who lost a job thru excesses and went to the lodging house to sober up until he or she could get a new place—this type has entirely disappeared.

"The alcoholic ward at Bellevue Hospital, as such, has been closed. Formerly they treated in this ward thousands of patients every year; of late the average number has been only fifteen or twenty per month.

"About 700 vacancies for tuberculosis patients are now reported in our department hospitals and 300 more in private hospitals. According to Dr. Dillingham of St. Joseph's Hospital, this decrease is largely due to prohibition. The man who drank much and ate little, contracting consumption and developing hemorrhages, has practically disappeared.

"There's a marked decrease as well in the commitments of children to homes because of poverty.

"Our employees, moreover, are holding their places more steadily. There are many less than the 15,000 changes which formerly occurred in our personnel each year. Pay day at present doesn't mean a drunken exodus."

The effects of general prosperity, to which are attributed many current ameliorations, should not be unfairly credited with benefits more truly due to prohibition. In the first place, none of the changes considered in this article dates back further than last year; yet prosperity was even more marked in 1917 and 1918, when

idle men were fewer, war contracts were paying prodigious profits and wages, soldiers' families were receiving allowances and prices were much lower.

Furthermore, prosperity brings many contradictory effects, as it relates to welfare problems. "Fifty-fifty," as Mr. Coler briefly observes, describes such neutralization. Prosperity, for example, would decrease the number of certain arrests, but would increase those for drunkenness and disorderly conduct; would diminish some imprisonments and augment others; would reduce commitments to some homes, but, as explained later, would add to the number of the feeble-minded children so committed. Prosperity would lessen sickness due to destitution, but would extend the sickness due to alcohol.

Except, therefore, that prosperity had reduced the sum of suffering consequent on destitution in the private home, and so lessened the amount of "outdoor relief," little effect would be recorded upon conditions reported by the welfare department even if prosperity had increased in the last ten months—which was not the case.

It is happily true that prohibition, which has been largely a woman's victory, has, in proportion, conferred more benefit upon women than upon men, even outside of the domestic circle. Relatively speaking, there has been a larger decrease in arrests of women since liquor became scarce; and as compared with the male patients, the number of female "alcoholics" in the hospitals has shown a greater falling off.

Generally speaking the economic benefits of prohibition have been manifested through the improvement in the service of municipal employees as well as in the reduced number of institutional inmates. The employees "have taken on a new mental attitude," to quote Medical Superintendent Vivasour of the City Children's Hospital. They are more self-respecting, they are beginning to save money, they do not so often change their jobs.

"The conduct and the health of employees have been decidedly improved," says Superintendent Bacon of the City Hospital. Yet at certain institutions neighboring facilities still enable the employees to "get it," with more or less frequency, and with all the former ill results—an outcome, of course, due to the reverse of prohibition. And one superintendent half complains that the "higher spirit of independence" in his more sober employees has supplanted the "surliness" that formerly reacted upon the patients with an "arrogance" that distressed the executives.

As to details, the City Hospital reports "a decreased patient census, patients arriving less frequently in a dirty, degraded condition," and only half as many employees dismissed in the first two months of 1920 as in the corresponding months of 1919.

Metropolitan Hospital—Fewer "alcoholics," great reduction of cases of delirium tremens following surgical shock, influenza and pneumonia.

Kings County Hospital—Total number of cases admitted one-third less, January 1 to March 15, 1920, as compared with like period last year; "alcoholics," same period, less than one-fifth as many men, only one-twentieth as many women.

Greenpoint Hospital—Admissions first quarter of this year and last year show reduction from 904 to 722.

Coney Island Hospital—Admissions, first quarter, 1920, reduced by 15 per cent; accident cases, "mainly due," says Mr. Coler "to intoxicated auto drivers," reduced one-third; several former "worst offenders" among

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