

REVISED VIEWS ON PROHIBITION?

Johnson City Chronicle and Staff-News, Sunday, December 13, 1925

Editorial by Editor Carroll E. King

Today, instead of one of our own editorials, we present an editorial which appeared during the past week in the leading newspaper in the city which is known as “The Home of Prohibition.” This is a paper – which has staunchly supported prohibition from the initial “Crusades” in the early seventies. (1870s) *Note – the newspaper is never identified.*

This editorial presents in a frank and straightforward manner, conditions of today – stripping bare the facts as they are and stating what it sees and believes, irrespective of its personal preferences.

The *Chronicle* and the *Staff-News* likewise believe that there are many strong points developed in this editorial which are deserving of the deepest thought on the part of our citizenry. The statements made therein may not meet with the approval of many of our readers – may not be to their liking. But they must admit that the writer is sincere and has been giving the problem deep study. We are therefore reprinting the editorial in full and suggest that after reading it, if you have views that coincide with those set forth, that you write the editor to that effect. If you disagree with the editorial, we would be glad to have you present your views in full and the local newspapers will gladly publish your replies. It is a matter of vast import and great seriousness and we believe that the coming year will witness a crisis in the matter of National Prohibition. The views of our sincere citizens will be of interest and value. The Editorial mentioned is as follows:

“This is not a policy editorial.” By a policy editorial, we mean one of the kind that makes such obviously true statements, and so thoroughly in line with the general sentiment in a community, that there is little left for a reader to do, after reading it, but applaud. It is easy, but utterly cowardly, for an editor to fall into the habit of writing such matter. It is cowardly, because it is always a safe ground on which to tread. Demagogues use the “policy” appeal with success. Public speakers have been guilty many times of neglecting to give their view of an important issue, and hiding instead, behind grandiloquent references to “star spangled banner, our country, God bless her,” and similar combinations of words – all true enough, when uttered sincerely, but meaningless when coming from the lips of a demagogue, or from his pen.

This is a roundabout prelude to our subject, but seemed appropriate for the reason that this article is apt to be misconstrued, and strike a note of dissension among

many of our readers. It is to comprise certain observations on prohibition as we view its application locally.

At the time the prohibition amendment became a law, we hoped and fully believed that its most important affect would be to divorce almost at once, the influence of drink over the younger generation. We fondly foresaw a day when children might be born into the world without being subjected to any temptation of this character. We made the assertion frequently that “when the older boozers pass on the young generation will know nothing of liquor.”

How far wrong we were in our brave assumptions is best demonstrated by the activities of the younger set in every community. We discover instead that the bootlegger is a glorified deity. And rotgut whiskey instead of being the badge of reproach, is the badge of smartness. We do not intend railing at young people, because we always place the major responsibility for their actions on the generation preceding them. But if we are correct in our observations, the past few years has produced a class of young people whose sophistication knows no bounds.

And their follies are not confined to any one class. Those most defiant of convention very frequently come from our so-called “best families.” We know this, because, within the past few months there have been some exceedingly trying scenes enacted in this, and we presume every other editorial office in the country; when heartbroken parents and friends, overcome with distress over prospective disgrace, use every wile and every inducement to have the unhappy editor keep some lurid account out of the paper.

It is a situation that very frankly we do not understand. In a day not so many years ago, the male youth practiced their indiscretions, as they do today. But unless our memory fails us entirely we boys, of that day and age, got little or no co-operation in our follies from “the nice girls.” To go further, the odor of liquor on the breath – and you didn’t have to visit a bootlegger to get it then – was not exactly a calling card into the parlor of our lady love in those days. In fact, we sort of took it for granted that “her old man” would kick us out bodily, and place a permanent injunction against our ever darkening is threshold again, if we appeared in any other condition than one of perfect sobriety and circumspect demeanor.

How different today. Drinking is still a violation of the rules of polite conduct, and likewise a violation of the law of the nation. But it does not seem to be a social handicap. If we are wrong, correct us, but we haven’t seen the 1925 girls making social outcasts of the fellows who think it quite the thing to take on a jag in a public place. Have you?

Perhaps this places too much responsibility on the girls. It has always seemed unjust to us, but true, that in the eternal scheme of things, women are vested with majority control of the world’s morals. In other words men shape their code to the standards

demanded of them by their women. And when the women fall down – God preserve us.

And in another particular, we have changed our view. Once we believed that prohibition represented the will of the majority of this nation. We are now sorry to say that we do not believe this is true – and to defend our position.

It is possible, but by no means certain, that a popular vote on the question might return a small majority in favor of prohibition. It is certain that it would be small taking the country as a whole. We do not believe that a return to the old saloon days is desired by a majority of the so-called “wets.”

But we note this startling fact – that out of say a hundred men who would vote “dry” a hundred times out of a hundred – a goodly number – we believe more than half of them, will take a drink under certain circumstances. We are not complaining. We are simply drawing conclusions. And in this case the conclusion is very apparent; namely that while the ballot might reflect a prohibition sentiment, the real sentiment has not arrived that far.

We think it is unwise to deceive ourselves. Every time that a citizen of this commonwealth takes a drink, whether he is a deacon in the church, or a gutter snipe, he is lending aid and succor to the institution of illegal liquor trafficking. Law is a regulation, agreed to by those it is to govern; for better protection; to promote a higher state of happiness for those affected. **It depends on its success solely upon the degree of sentiment for it.** And we say flatly, though with the most profound regret, that sentiment is not for the prohibition laws as they now exist. There are too many homes where quiet violations of the law are carried on under the mask of self respect. There are too many individuals who say one thing and do another. And it is no fault of our officials that these people seldom pay the customary penalties of court action and publicity. They are temperate; they are discreet, they give no outward cause for fault finding.

We do not know the answer. But few informed people will have the hardihood to deny that these things are facts. The whole prohibition enforcement act eclipsed in magnitude, even the institution of slavery. To change the custom of a free nation would always be a staggering task. Perhaps the good effects altogether overbalance these manifest defects. We hope so, although some of the reactions we have named – especially that of the youth, are not cheering. One thing that appears certain to us – the prevailing law is some stages advanced over the moral and mental standard of the people generally at the present time. If the people can adjust themselves to the law, it would certainly be fine. **History, however, indicates that laws must be adjusted to the people, or they will rebel.**

The *Chronicle* and *Staff-News* believe that the writer of the above editorial has placed the responsibility for present conditions squarely where it belongs. What do you think?