

THE PESTILENCE OF FANATICISM

By United States Senator James A. Reed (Mo., Dem.), *The American Mercury*, May, 1925)

The present-day reformer supplants the ancient and foolish doctrine, "Everything that is, is right," with the still more foolish doctrine, "Everything that is, is wrong." In a world which an intelligent and patriotic ancestry lovingly handed over to us in a reasonably well-ordered condition, he runs amok. Our inherited liberties, guaranteed by a Constitution and code of laws, together forming a homogeneous system, are recklessly attacked until the whole structure is seriously imperiled.

The modern reformer insists upon substituting statutory commands for ethical precepts and official surveillance for the restraints of morality. He undertakes to force the acceptance of his peculiar doctrines by penalty of fine and imprisonment. The old and true concept of freedom embraced the right of the citizen to choose his own religion, think his own thoughts, indulge his own habits and live his own life without interference by the state, save that he should not trespass upon the rights of others. For this condition of personal freedom and responsibility, the reformer proposes to substitute legal regulations which, like a web of steel, shall encompass the citizen from birth to death. Man will live and die the slave of the majority which enacts the laws.

Natural rights may be as effectively destroyed by the laws of a republic as by the decrees of a despot. The doctrine that the world can be made virtuous and happy by substituting for the natural right of choice, with responsibility, the prohibitions and regulations of law, is as old as human tyranny. It has been resorted to in every age and has uniformly failed. It established the Inquisition and equipped it with instruments of torture. It forbade freedom of thought, of speech and of the press. It compelled men to embrace certain creeds upon pain of death, ordered people to attend particular churches or suffer barbaric penalties. It imprisoned, tortured or put to death all who did not accept every word of the Old and New Testament exactly as defined by the exegetes of the dominant hierarchy. It regulated the habits of the people in the minutest detail. It punished a blasphemer with death. And occasionally, as every school boy knows, it burned a witch.

The modern intolerant differs from his ancient prototype only in degree. Alike they have resorted to the logic of brute force. In the past, the penalty was pillory and scaffold; to day it is fine and imprisonment. Legal restrictions are to take the place of ethical instruction, parental precepts and enlightened reasoning. The

statutory reformer nominates himself as doctor-general of public morals and insists that all mankind shall swallow his physic or go to jail.

Let it be admitted that this statutory moralist is generally honest and in earnest. Unfortunately, honesty of opinion and earnestness of purpose are only too frequently accompanied by gross ignorance. Zeal, honesty and ignorance in combination always produce intolerance, and intolerance increases to fanaticism, eager to destroy all the natural liberties of men if thereby the zealot's ends may be gained. Regardless of the university degrees he has attained, the fanatic is invariably ignorant. Tolerance is the offspring of intelligence. The intelligent man knows he may be mistaken. The ignorant man is certain he is right. Give me the radius of a man's intelligence, and I will describe the circumference of his tolerance.

Regardless of divergent creeds and cults, modern reformers all agree:

1. That our plan of government has not worked with perfection and that therefore the plan ought to be destroyed;
2. That all who oppose them are "in league with hell and have made a covenant with death";
3. That they possess an infallible specific which every human being should be by law compelled to swallow, and that, thereupon, evil will disappear, sorrow will cease, men and women will be transformed into statutory angels, and "everything will be lovely and the goose hang high"-- particularly if the reformer succeeds somehow or other in grabbing a lucrative job.

Accordingly, the agitation begins, proselyting proceeds, the morons are mustered, the chautauquas chautalk, and the club-women weep. All the while numerous hired males and females, masquerading as disinterested representatives of morals, pull the strings and gather in the shekels. The political candidate, observing the gathering storm, promptly trims his little sail to catch the wind and scuds before it for the port of office. Commonly, he pledges himself in advance. Wherefore, he arrives in Washington hog-tied beyond squealing. And so we have had an array of reforms based upon the kind of reasoning I have described. Examine, if you please, the foregoing articles of the reformer's creed.

II

Of course, no plan of government ever has been or ever will be absolutely perfect; even if perfect, its administration would necessarily be faulty. Intelligent persons know that in this latter fact is lodged nearly all the difficulties attendant upon governmental activities. Defective administration is inseparable from the frailty, dishonesty and ignorance of human agents. What is needed is better execution of the law, not the destruction of the governmental plan. Clearly, the

new-hatched schemes must be enforced by men as inefficient or as corrupt as those embarrassing the present system. Accordingly, thoughtful and patriotic men agree that no principle of our government should be abandoned or changed, except for grave reasons, and then only when there is approximate certainty that the proposed substitute will not only remedy the evils that now exist, but will not bring worse and greater ones in its wake.

These considerations, however, do not appeal to the modern reformer. Like the patent-medicine quack he proclaims himself the master of human ills and drives straight on. All too often the public is convinced. More frequently, an active and organized minority is converted, and timorous congressmen, although unconvinced, hunt cover. Thus, half-baked schemes, commonly promoted by intolerants, mountebanks and dreamers, are put upon the nation. And before the great, good-natured public is aware, it has been placed in leading strings, its rights circumscribed and its natural privileges abolished. More appalling is the fact that little by little, the great edifice erected by the toil and wisdom of the past is being defaced and its very foundations undermined. As one contemplates these occurrences, one instinctively contrasts the character of the men who established and preserved the Republic with that of these modern tinkers. Ponder the names appearing below in parallel columns:

George Washington	Wayne B. Wheeler
Benjamin Franklin	Andrew Volstead
Patrick Henry	Roy A. Haynes
John Hancock	William M. Anderson
John Adams	Lincoln J. Steffins
Thomas Jefferson	John D. Rockefeller, Jr.
Alexander Hamilton	Henry Ford
James Monroe	Richmond P. Hobson
John Marshall	Thomas Sterling
Andrew Jackson	Billy Sunday
Daniel Webster	George Creel

Though it seem sacrilege to place in juxtaposition the names of the architects of the temple of liberty with those who desecrate its altars and deface its marbles, I still insist that impiety does not exist. The nobility of the mighty dead cannot be lessened by the puerility of the living.

The statutory reformer has a single and invariable method of procedure. He magnifies the wickedness and sufferings of mankind and attributes them all to the object of his special malediction. Witness the Prohibition propaganda. Its literature blazed with assertions that all vice, crime, poverty, and human agony were directly chargeable to the Rum Fiend. He was the devil incarnate who produced virginal incontinence, marital infelicity, theft, arson, rape, robbery and

murder. His remorseless hands, holding the white throat of innocence in an iron grasp, were dragging myriads of unfortunates to untimely graves and condemning them to the fires of an endless perdition. He it was who filled the jails and penitentiaries with pitiable creatures who otherwise would have stood resplendent as pillars of the state and ornaments of society.

The reformer cried aloud: "Amend the Constitution, pass the Volstead statute and in the twinkling of an eye evil will vanish! Close the saloons and the jails will empty themselves; cries of poverty will be turned to songs of joy; childish wailings to melodious laughter; drunken blows to fond caresses; and hatred be transmuted into tenderest love. Highwaymen will give up their bludgeons and become ministers of justice. Thieves will no longer 'break through and steal!'" and so on, *ad infinitum, ad nauseam*.

The legal revolution occurred, but the moral miracle did not come off according to schedule. Men still go philandering, and sometimes maidens listen to their amorous wooings. The fashionable swain, bottle on hip, is received in polite society. He presses his flask to the lips of a girl whose pre-Volstead mother would have scorned a boy with liquor-tainted breath. The fires were put out in the furnaces of the distilleries and breweries, but were lighted under ten thousand illicit stills. Moonshining became a profitable trade, bootlegging a dignified profession, rum-running a romantic calling. An army recruited from elevator boys, taxi drivers, bell hops, soda fountain girls--every occupational class from hod-carriers to church sextons--is engaged in the retail traffic. Colored gentlemen drive Pierce Arrows and dusky maidens sport the furs of the arctics. Drug stores are liquor emporiums, ready supplied with prescriptions sold by physicians at the rate of \$300 a book, containing one hundred blanks.

And who, pray, are the customers? The answer is, everybody who wants a drink and that "everybody" embraces hundreds of thousands of women in homes from which, prior to the Reformation, liquor was banned and barred. Other thousands are boys who, under the old regime, would have understood that their safety depended upon the exercise of self-restraint, but who now seem to rely upon the law for protection, and yet regard the breaking of the law as a pastime, and guzzling liquor from a hip flask as an enviable prank. A vast multitude of men who formerly revered the law now deliberately and avidly conspire for its breach. The leprosy of hypocrisy has become epidemic. Half-drunken legislators enact dry laws and celebrate the achievement in moonshine. Judges sometimes (let us hope rarely) impose merciless sentences and anaesthetize their human sensibilities in bootleg. Police officers, sheriffs, constables, and bailiffs, their breaths reeking with rot-gut, drag to jail an occasional victim selected as a sacrifice to public clamor. But not one out of a thousand violators is ever arrested or prosecuted.

Meanwhile the Prohibition force revels in blackmail, subornation, venal immunities, treachery, fraud and crime promotion, revolting practices inseparable from the spy system. Tyrannous acts are of hourly occurrence. In violation of the Constitution, the homes, the business houses, baggage, vehicles, and persons of citizens are indiscriminately seized and searched. In 1924, in a single judicial district, more than eight hundred out of one thousand searches were illegally made. But all the while the great tide of traffic proceeds.

Now comes the most inhuman product of Prohibition: the Poison Squad. Its business is to poison the alcohol turned over to the industries under the name "denatured." The Prohibition Unit knows that one gallon out of every ten of the diabolic concoction is diverted from industry and drunk by the people. The chemist of the Bureau of Internal Revenue recently testified that according to his best estimate in the year 1924, 6,000,000 gallons of denatured alcohol were used as a beverage. He asserted that many of the substances used in denaturing were deadly poisons, that the lethal nature of the concoction can be so concealed as to deceive the unsuspecting victim who drinks it. He admitted that sometimes the denature product is sold without any attempt to remove its fatal properties. In any event, small portions of the poison remain and are gravely injurious to the health. The Prohibition Unit knows it has killed or injured thousands of persons. It persists in and seemingly enjoys the infamous practice.

Once the distiller turned out pure whiskey. Against its use the clamorous tongue of protest was raised and it was outlawed. The distiller now makes pure alcohol. The Prohibition Unit transforms 60,000,000 gallons of it into coffin varnish each year, knowing that 6,000,000 gallons will reach the stomachs of human beings. That extinct animal, the "respectable saloon-keeper," was denounced for selling rot-gut, but not even Wheeler [head of the Anti-Saloon League] ever accused him of deliberately and maliciously putting into his whiskey barrels such death-dealing toxins as strychnine, wood alcohol, formaldehyde, carbolic acid or mercury, all of which are employed by the Prohibition Unit. The vilest of saloon whiskey could be swilled by the habitue' for years. The Poison Squad compounds a potion which kills its unsuspecting victim within a few moments. One could drink gallons of the old stuff and survive. A single dose of Dr. Wheeler's Chemical Compound has produced blindness and death in fifteen minutes. The old stuff acted slowly and hence its user had time and opportunity to reform. Dr. Wheeler kills 'em quick.

When the old-fashioned drunkard, at the end of years of hilarity, laid him down to a peaceful death or made a jovial exit astride a purple dipsosaurus or some other animal of the alcoholic menagerie, the Anti-Saloon League gathered around his coffin and wept for a good man gone wrong. Today when an upright citizen gets a dose of Wheeler's Ready Relief and is sent to the eternal bar of Judgment

without time for repentance or benefit of clergy, the same crowd chuckle and declare: "It served him right. *He broke our law.*" But be it remembered that each time the old fashioned drunkard accumulated a jag, he also broke the law. Nevertheless, for him there were "sorrows, plenteous tears," while for the victim stricken blind or writhing in the convulsions of poison unwittingly taken, there are only ribald and contemptuous jeers.

III

Similarly proceeded the Suffrage Crusader. To her, the man-governed world was a cesspool of iniquity which would be purified by a touch of her angelic hand.

The "purification" early became manifest. Suffragettes thronged the Capitol boldly offering to swap women's votes for congressmen, at the impending election, for congressional "votes for women" on the pending bill. All who refused to agree were threatened with extermination. In vain they might protest that the amendment stripped the States of a very high attribute of sovereignty, or that to force a State to grant, was quite as unjustifiable as to compel a State to refuse, the suffrage. The only effect of argument was to accentuate feminine acrimony.

Even those who assured the crusaders of their friendship for, and willingness to aid, the suffrage movement as a State measure did not go scatheless. Such, indeed, was the attitude and fate of President Wilson. He journeyed to New Jersey especially to vote for suffrage in that State. He gave out powerful interviews urging all the States to proceed similarly, but he ventured to protest mildly against forcing suffrage upon the States by an amendment to the Federal Constitution. This cordial and just attitude seemed only to arouse additional venom. Amazonian furies, bearing aloft insulting banners, marched against the White House, posted their pickets and declared a state of permanent siege. Another detachment invaded Lafayette Square and at the foot of the heroic Frenchman's monument the President's message was derisively burned, whilst in the uncertain light these weird sisters screamed their incantation: "Votes for women! Votes for women!" in rhythmic harmony with the barbaric war dance of the Sioux.

The zealots were seeking and deserved arrest. They finally got it. In Court their conduct was contemptuous and in jail, riotous. One of them kicked and terribly injured a poor woman whom the vicissitudes of life had driven to the hard post of jail matron. Congressional poltroons, shivering with fear, simulated conversion and capitulated for votes and favor. Moreover, they actually raced with each other for the suffrage goal, and engaged in heated disputes as to who got there first. It was a scurvy business.

In some of States the ratification of the amendment was characterized by lamentable scenes of disorder and irregularity, if, indeed, they were not stained with fraud. In other instances, "yellow" legislators were intimidated into violating their State constitutions. In still others, they were coerced or cajoled into voting directly opposite to the recently expressed will of their constituents. But to the suffragette crusader, what booteds the vote of a sovereign State?

The amendment was passed. What then? What became of the promised "disappearance of crime, the regeneration of politics, the moral purification?" Strain your eyes as you may, you will be unable to observe even the faint auroral dawn of the prophesied millennium. *Per contra*, the dresses are a little shorter, the flapper is a little flappier, the hair-bobber becomes more opulent, and the cigarette vendor enjoys a boom. These fortuitous conditions may be the result of the new freedom, or mere coincidences. I venture not to say.

But why worry? As there was little to rebel against, the revolution can be neither of great violence nor of long duration. We may confidently await the hour when the hysteria of a few agitators will be neutralized by the sound sense of tens of millions of good women who never adopted the doctrine of discontent nor became converts to the fantastic notion that their fathers, brothers and husbands were imposing upon them a brutal enslavement. Wherefore, the philosopher contemplates the change in the serene certainty that nature's law of love and life will prove supreme; that men and women will continue to link their fortunes and go down the road of time sharing each other's burdens and joys; that bonds of affection and mutual interest will prove stronger than political party ties; that man will remain the master in external conflicts, including politics, and that woman will continue mistress of the home, the mother and guardian of the generations yet to be.

The women having been rescued from "the slavery imposed by brutal husbands, fathers, and brothers," what more natural than to start rescuing the babies from "their unnatural mothers"? He who listened to the clamorous tongues of the advocates of the Baby Control bill was astounded to learn that nearly all mothers were ignorant, incompetent or vicious, and that babies were generally grossly mistreated and allowed to die of hardship and neglect. In wonderment, he asked how a race, so cruelly mothered, could have not only survived but advanced from barbarism to a high state of civilization.

The remedy proposed by the baby-savers was, of course, statutory. A Washington bureau was created to regulate and reform the motherhood of the land. The humor of the project was accentuated by the fact that the members of the bureau, almost without exception, were spinsters beyond the period of hope,

and therefore necessarily devoid of experience in either the pangs or passions of motherhood.

The uplifters contemplated a thorough job. Among other things, they demanded that any woman *enceinte* should be compelled to register the fact at the town hall, to the end that a government snooper might give her a thorough going over and decide whether she really knew how to have a baby. Midwives were to be selected. Rules for the accouchement were to be laid down. Some strange freakishness led to the importation of a Jap to help devise rules for the government of American motherhood!

Shorn of its more monstrous terms, the law was enacted. But--oh, marvelous to report!--women continue to have babies in much the same old way. Children roll in the dirt, make mud pies, and thrive almost as well as did their troglodytic ancestors. Mothers still cover with kisses the smudgy faces of their offspring, tuck the little forms in at night, and like the mothers of all time, guard them from evil with an infinite and deathless love--a love that can never be supplanted by a government agent, whether a superannuated spinster or a town constable. But what of the Society of Spinsters? It still exists on government bounty, and tells the world how to raise babies!

IV

This by no means concludes the gamut of current reform schemes, some of them half socialistic, some half bolshevistic, some half idiotic--the other half in each case being usually a compound of maudlin sentimentality and a natural desire to nose into the business of others.

The city of Washington affords a recent and ludicrous illustration. Good-hearted busybodies, themselves living in sumptuous homes, concluded that all "alley-houses" must be torn down. An alley-house is so called because it fronts on an alley. The plumbing is not modern and bath tubs are not sufficiently in evidence. Accordingly, it was decreed that the alley houses must be forthwith demolished. After the order had gone forth, it was discovered that more than nine thousand poor people would be turned into the street without roof or wall to protect them from the elements! The law had to be disregarded. Whereat the reformers gathered the skirts of their righteousness about them, gave their feathers a scornful shake, picked up their sables, and packed themselves off to their customary afternoon teas, bridge parties, or cigarette confabs. Thereupon the poor alley darkey moved back into his home and thanked God he had been saved from the reformers.

Truth to tell, Washington has become the universal Mecca of human freaks. To

that city protagonists of vagaries gravitate by all known routes, some by election, some by appointment, and some by "divine command." The great majority, however, merely follow noses that itch for the business of others. There they bed and breed. They haunt the corridors of the public buildings, crowd into the offices of congressmen, and insist upon displaying their fantastic and sometimes loathsome wares. Consumed by passion for experimentation, they regard the public corpus as a legitimate subject for ceaseless exploratory operations and clinical vivisection.

To this array of freaks, the Constitution is not a bulwark of liberty but a shackle upon progress which they hold in contemptuous disregard. Congress itself is full of men who do not think of the Constitution save as an obstacle to their desires. They study it only to devise some plan for its circumvention. There is no subterfuge they will not employ, no deceit to which they will not resort, if peradventure the limitations imposed by the Constitution may be cheated.

A favorite device is, by a false recital of the real objects of a bill, to bring it apparently under some specific power granted to the federal government. Witness:

The Mann Act which, pretending to be an exercise of authority to regulate commerce between the States, in fact sought to regulate commerce between the sexes.

The penalization of doctors for prescribing beer as a *medicine* under the pretended authority of the amendment prohibiting liquor as a *beverage*.

The attempted prohibition of interstate commerce in the products of child labor on the pretext that the use of such goods was injurious to the public health.

The recent effort of the Nebraska Legislature to forbid the teaching of any other than the English language on the false recital that the child's *morals* would be thereby impaired.

Under another grouping, but even more monstrous, is the proposal by Congress of a constitutional amendment empowering the federal government to pass laws denying to all human beings under eighteen years of age the right to work. Happily, that barbarous and tyrannical proposition is being rapidly rejected by the States. Evidently, there is an awakening of the States, if not of Congress.

A single further instance. Very recently, a joint committee of both Houses proposed a bill to send to jail in certain cases any citizen who failed to inform

against himself or his neighbor. Seemingly no member of the committee ever heard of the constitutional provision: "nor shall [any citizen] be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself." Instances might be indefinitely extended. The Capitol is choked with the advocates of changes.

What shall the end be? Will that race of men who for a thousand years have asserted the "right of castle," rejected governmental interference in domestic affairs, proclaimed the right of free man to regulate his personal habits and to rear and govern his children in accordance with the law of conscience and of love, now become subject to a self-imposed statutory tyranny which from birth to death interferes in the smallest concerns of life? Shall we endure a legal despotism, the equivalent of which would have provoked rebellion amongst the Saxons even when under the Norman heel?

I doubt not these statutory bonds will be eventually broken. The right of the free man to live his own life, limited only by the inhibition of non-infringement upon the rights of others, will again be asserted. But before that day arrives, will the splendid symmetry of our governmental structure have been destroyed?