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THE SOCIAL VALUE OF THE SALOON.

WHAT is the saloon in society? What is its social value? What are the demands which it supplies? are questions which have received a variety of answers. In general it may be said that these answers have fallen under two main heads, determined in each case by the point of view of those giving them. The patron of the saloon speaks: "It is a necessary feature of my life. It furnishes me with many things which I cannot get elsewhere. It does me no harm;" and his words savor of conviction. But another is heard: "I am opposed to the saloon and to the liquor traffic in all its forms. It is unnecessary; it is waste; it is more than that; it is positive evil and vicious in the highest degree. It represents no necessity and supplies no legitimate want." Diametrically opposed to each other, yet both have spoken from conviction and each has stated the truth as it exists for him. But there is no truth in a contradiction until it be resolved. Society has at least become conscious of the contradiction; its resolution can follow only upon a complete statement of its terms; and it is in the hope that certain partially neglected facts may herein be brought forward, which shall contribute to such a complete statement, that this paper is submitted.

The nineteenth ward of Chicago according to the school census of 1896 has a population of 48,280. It is a workingman's

district and the population is typical of unskilled labor in general. The largest foreign elements in the ward are the Irish, German, Italian and Bohemian, stated in the order of relative numerical strength. Of those of foreign parentage about one-half

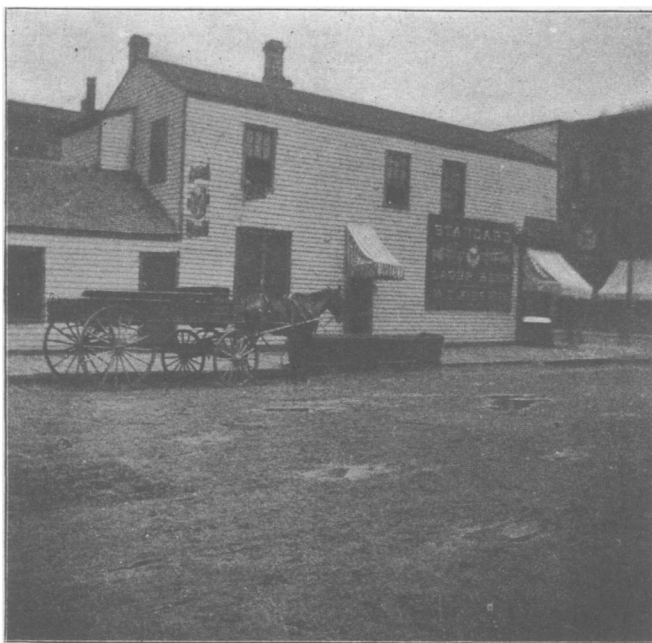


FIG. 1.

are American born. As to moral condition, neither the extremes of vice nor of virtue are reached, while the general moral tone is rather healthful. It is believed that so far as population and worldly condition can be held to affect the saloon problem the conditions of the nineteenth ward are typical of the problem in general. A careful study of the saloons in the ward has been made, of which this does not profess to be a report. It is merely a statement of impressions gathered in the course of the investigation; the report itself belongs to a larger whole not yet completed in details. The laboratory method was employed. The

saloons were visited, an attempt was made to escape that bane of social investigation—the psychologist's fallacy. In so far as possible, conditions were exchanged. Purse and scrip were left behind. The saloon became an integral feature of life. It



FIG. 2.

was loafing place, news center, and basis of food supply in its free lunch counter; a complete orientation was made into its life. Trammeled neither by an abstinence pledge nor by a predisposition for its wares, it is believed that the freedom necessary to unbiased judgment was obtained.

It was assumed in beginning the investigation that an institution which society has so generally created for itself must meet a definite social demand; and that the demand was not synonymous with a desire on the part of society to commit suicide by means of alcoholic poison was taken for granted. The question

became that of fixing the demand, of determining the social value. What does the saloon offer that renders it so generally useful, in the economic sense, to the great mass of those who patronize it? For it is use, not abuse, that it stands for. It does not personify "the vilest elements of modern civilization." It does not "trade in and batten upon intemperance." It supplies legitimate needs and stands alone in supplying them. It transforms the individual into a *socius* where there is no other transforming power. It unites the many ones into a common whole which we call society, and it stands for this union amid conditions which would otherwise render it impossible, and intemperance is but its accident. The evils it produces have been portrayed in glowing terms: "Men and women glorying in drunkenness and shame;" "The sotted beasts who nightly gather at the bar." The more uncommon particular has been declared the universal. The exception has been made the rule. If the evils of liquor drinking were in fact what they have been in imagination the human species would have become extinct in Europe within any three centuries since the rise of the Roman Empire. The man who speaks of drunkenness and intemperance only, when treating of drink in general, does not exhaust his subject. Indeed it may be questioned whether he reaches it. That intemperance is an exception can be proved only by careful observation. It is believed that the personal use of this method will support these statements. That great waste is incident to every movement of our social machinery cannot be doubted; that the waste is even greater here than elsewhere need not be denied. The machinery is still useful, though many refuse to look beyond its waste, and it will be employed until a better machine is invented.

Primarily the saloon is a social center. Few will deny this. It is the workingman's club. Many of his leisure hours are spent here. In it he finds more of the things which approximate to luxury than he finds at home, almost more than he finds in any other public place in the ward. In winter the saloon is warm, in summer it is cool, at night it is brightly lighted, and it is always clean. More than that there are chairs and tables and

papers and cards and lunch, and in many cases pool and billiards, while in some few well-equipped gymnasiums can be found which are free to patrons. What more does the workingman want for his club? He already has all that most clubs offer their mem-



FIG. 3.

bers—papers and cards and food and drink and service—and being modest in his wants their quality satisfies him. But his demand for even these things is not fundamental, they are but means to his social expression. It is the society of his fellows that he seeks and must have.

To say that the saloon is the workingman's club does not answer a single objection which its opponents raise; one must first prove the necessity of workingmen's clubs and of the kind that the saloon represents. The common laborer works ten hours per day, his pay is small. In many cases his family is large, at

best his food would not be found sufficient for his gentler brother ; add to this that his work is hard and his food poorly cooked, and the whole result will be a subnormal life. Given a human being, a center of life force, and among his first expressions will be a demand for society, nor does the family alone supply this want. History does not supply a single illustration of the self-sufficiency of the family. The social activity reaches beyond the immediate tie to the brother who is a brother only by courtesy. Social need outgrows the family and creates its own larger society, and this is what my workingman must do. He does not desert his family. He is not disloyal to them in seeking it, but he must find a larger circle in which to move. He must himself articulate in a larger life, and where shall he find it ?

Does not the church offer what he seeks ? In the first place four churches are somewhat inadequate to the needs of a population of 48,000, and yet if all places of worship in the ward, both Jewish and Gentile, be counted, four will be the net result. It is conceived that there is a difference between religious and social need—a difference between the organs of religious and social expression. The church is primarily devoted to worship. We seek *sociality*, and even a reconstructed church open seven days and nights in the week might fail to recognize our want. Indeed it may be questioned whether the church is called upon to note it. With us it does not, and our question remains unanswered.

But someone may say : “Are there not clubs where he can go?” No, and if there were they would offer conventions instead of freedom ; must offer conventions of order of business, officers, etc., because of the inherent nature of clubs. The democratic element which is most essential—the absolute freedom to come and go and do as one pleases—cannot be incorporated into a club. But this reservation must be made, that in so far as the club expresses his vital interests, in the same measure does it become the institution which we seek. The trade union answers to this description. It is a much higher form of social expression than the saloon, and among its members it has supplanted the saloon

in a large degree, but at present a very small percentage of workingmen belong to trade unions and their demand for social expression is not thus supplied ; yet the reformer's greatest hope lies along this line, while his energies are largely given to more



FIG. 4.

futile forms of social service. Of other organizations created for the purpose of ministering to this social need, most have been failures. They have come from the outside, splendid schemes to impress men, but alas ! not to express them. But they succeed only as they express the human energy which they seek to convert to better uses.

Four churches, a few trade unions and impressive social forms cannot hope to meet the social needs of 48,000 people. Remember that there are no music halls or theaters beside. "What else have they but the saloon," and to the saloon they go. It was created for this purpose and still functions to this want.

The saloonkeeper is the only man who keeps open house in

the ward. It is his business to entertain. It does not matter that he does not select his guests; that convention is useless among them. In fact his democracy is one element of his strength. His place is the common meeting ground of his neighbors—and he supplies the stimulus which renders social life possible; there is an accretion of intelligence that comes to him in his business. He hears the best stories. He is the first to get accurate information as to the latest political deals and social mysteries. The common talk of the day passes through his ears and he is known to retain that which is most interesting. He himself articulates in a larger social center composed of many social leaders like himself who, each representing his own following, together come to have a much larger power and place than the average citizen. My workingman is not too democratic to respect the ready intelligence, the power, and the better dress of the leader in his social center. They draw him to the saloon, and once there they continue to hold him. In addition the saloonkeeper trusts him for drinks—a debt of honor—yea more, he lends him money if in greater need. But the saloonkeeper is only one element in this analysis of attraction, and by no means the strongest. The desire to be with his fellows—the fascination which a comfortable room where men are has for him is more than he can resist; moreover the things which these men are doing are enticing to him; they are thinking, vying with each other in conversation, in story telling, debate. Nothing of general or local interest transpires which they do not “argue” out. Their social stimulus is epitomized in the saloon. It is center of learning, books, papers, and lecture hall to them, the clearing house for their common intelligence, the place where their philosophy of life is worked out and from which their political and social beliefs take their beginning. As an educational institution its power is very great and not to be scorned because skilled teachers are not present, for they teach themselves. Nay, verily, the apostle of the new education may welcome this as an illustration of education not divorced from social life by bonds of convention.

No one who is familiar with this life will deny the great educational value of the saloons, and this social expression, this freeing of human activity is rendered possible by the stimulant which the saloon offers. It stands not for social opportunity

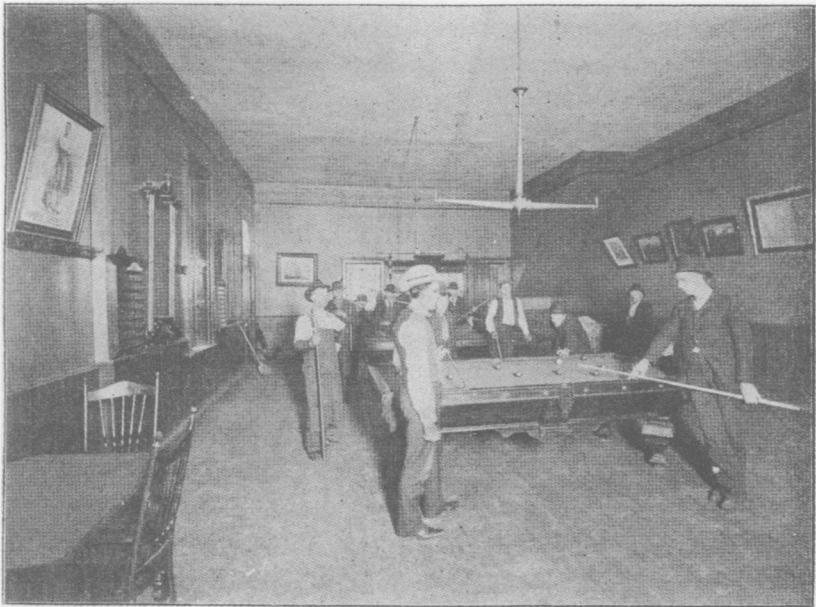


FIG. 5.

only. It affords also the conditions of sociality. "The first action of ethylic alcohol," says Dr. Kerr, "is vascular relaxation, commonly called exhilaration or stimulation, when a glow of warmth spreads over the whole system, when the heart beats faster, when 'happy thoughts' crowd in upon the brain, when all seems life and light and joy, when everything without and within wears a roseate hue." The heart beats more rapidly—there is an exaltation of the mind, a freeing of emotional life, pleasurable ideas, rapid thought, unusual merriment. Is it not a social ideal—a condition in which each one would appear before his fellow? Only there are different ways of reaching it. The demanding power of individuals is here wanting. The

stimulus of books, pictures, and good music is absent. The constant stimulus of purposive intelligence is denied—a thousand things which stimulate to swift and happy thought in other forms of society are entirely wanting here. But human energy, which is after all the primal social fact, demands an avenue of escape and finds its conditions in the best way it can.

Moreover this stimulus not only supplies immediate social need. It has all the value for present-day civilization that stimulants have ever had in the formation of history. It helps to preserve the idea which as yet cannot become an act, and failing in its function must otherwise die. Such, psychologists tell us, is the value of the stimulant—to free the individual from the consciousness of the limitation which prevents the realization of his ideal, and to preserve his ideal for him and for society. It is here that the saloon gets its ultimate social value. The bacchanals were promoters of the Greek state, and the drinking of the Dark Ages contributed to the realization of the modern individual. Upon what beside shall the emotional life feed? or where shall it find its resting place of achievement, while the act itself is impossible save in the heightened activity of an exhilarated self? In this way it is believed that the saloon is aiding in the development of a higher form of society by preserving in its patrons a higher social hope. This is but a part of the social need to which it ministers, but by no means the least part.

There is another primal need which the saloon supplies and in most cases supplies well. It is a food-distributing center—a place where a hungry man can get as much as he wants to eat and drink for a small price. As a rule the food is notoriously good and the price notoriously cheap. And that air of poverty which unfailingly attends the cheap restaurant and finds its adequate expression in ragged and dirty table linen is here wanting. Instead polished oak tables are used and upon them reposes free an abundance such as to constantly surprise a depleted purse. That the saloon feeds thousands and feeds them well no one will deny who has passed the middle of the day there.

As to the physiological effects of the use of alcohol, the

experiments conducted in the Yale laboratory, as they are reported in *Nature*, would seem to indicate that when the quantity of alcohol used is not in excess of 2 per cent. of the digestive fluid, digestive activity is aided by its presence. "Whisky can

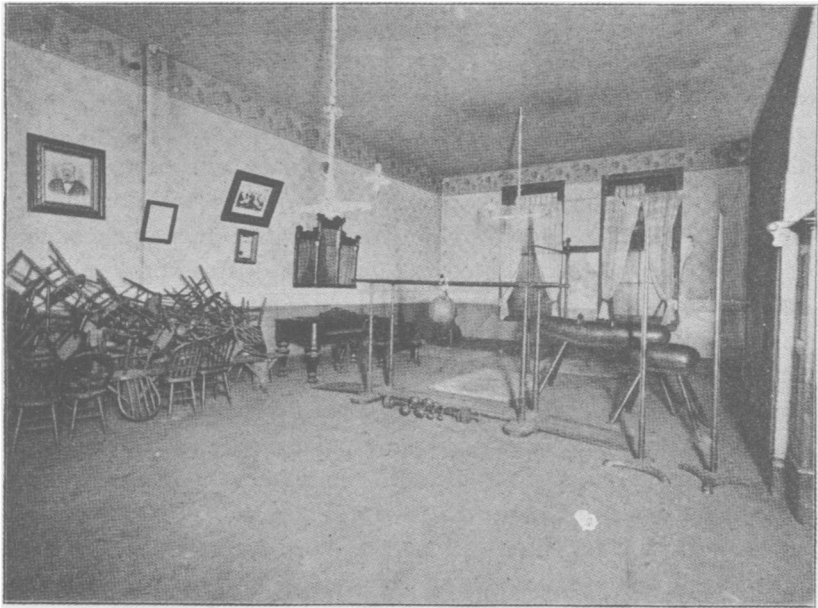


FIG. 6.

be considered to impede the solvent action of the gastric juices only when taken immoderately and in intoxicating quantities." It is believed that a large part of the ordinary beer drinking contributes less than 2 per cent. in alcohol to the whole digestive fluid—but the proof is almost inaccessible. Dr. Keeley declares that "in the laboring man a certain quantity of alcohol will preserve the body weight with the same foot pounds of labor, and with a given quantity of food; and if these other things are equal the absence of the alcohol will require more food, or a decrease either in the labor or in the body weight." He contends that its action is not to build up tissue but to prevent its breaking down. "It has an inhibitory action on cell metabolism." He adds: "I understand that these things are matters

of demonstration, and that the everyday use of alcohol among laborers satisfactorily proves the value of the use and not the abuse of alcohol as a food — direct and indirect.”

Such it is believed is the social value of the saloon. That it functions to certain social wants otherwise not supplied is our thesis. That its wares are poison is nowhere lost to sight, but that the poison appears in their abuse and not in their use is our contention. It is also admitted that social want is very inadequately supplied by the saloon. That a condition in which the idea can express itself in emotional terms only is essentially pathological. But it is believed that the saloon will continue to supply it as long as its opponents continue to wage a war of extermination against all that it represents, instead of wisely aiding social life to reach that plane where its present evils shall no longer be its accidents. The saloon is a thing come out of the organic life of the world, and it will give place only to a better form of social functioning. That a better form is possible to a fully conscious society no one can deny. When and what this form shall be remains for society's component units to declare. The presence of the saloon in an unorganized society is proof conclusive that society can wisely organize the need which it supplies.

It is hardly necessary to enlarge further upon the evils of the saloon in a protest against the predominance of one-sided statements in that very particular. They are many and grave, and cry out to society for proper consideration. But proper consideration involves a whole and not a half truth, and the whole truth involves its own power of proper action. In the absence of higher forms of social stimulus and larger social life the saloon will continue to function in society, and for that great part of humanity which does not possess a more adequate form of social expression the words of Esdras will remain true: It is wine that “maketh the mind of the king and of the fatherless child to be all one, of the bondman and of the freeman, of the poor and of the rich. It turneth every thought into jollity and mirth, so that a man remembereth neither sorrow nor debt; and it maketh every heart glad.”

E. C. MOORE.

CHICAGO.