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## NEGRO CRIME AND STRONG DRINK.

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In the agitation of the liquor question incident to the attempt to pass prohibition laws in Georgia, Alabama and other Southern States a great deal was said about the relation of strong drink to crime, particularly crime among Negroes. This is a very important subject because from two-thirds to three-fourths of the prisoners in the penitentiaries, jails and chain gangs in the South are Negroes.

During the past year I have attempted to find out definitely what relation liquor sustained to crime among my people; that is, how much of a contributing cause liquor was to their crime rate. One reason why I became especially interested in this inquiry was that the sheriff of Macon County, Alabama, the county in which Tuskegee Institute is located, told me that since prohibition had gone into effect in the county that crime had been reduced from sixty to seventy per cent. I have always tried to keep in touch with the officers of the law in my state and have frequently had occasion to ask their opinion concerning the needs of my people. After conversing with the sheriff I determined to look further into the relation of crime and liquor among the people of my race.

In order to learn if other counties in Alabama had had an experience similar to that of Macon County I sent out a circular letter to the sheriffs of various counties in Alabama and to the chiefs of police and recorders of courts of the more important cities of the state.\* In this letter the following questions were asked:

What in your opinion are the chief causes of Negro crime?

What effect does strong drink have in making the Negro a criminal?

Since the prohibition law has gone into effect has there been any decrease in the crimes committed by Negroes in your County, especially rape, murder and other serious offenses?

The sheriffs of fourteen counties, chiefs of police of the four principal cities of the state and the recorders of the police courts of Montgomery and Selma sent answers. The replies of the city magistrates concern the urban; the views of the sheriffs the rural Negro.

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\*Since the material for this article was gathered several counties in Alabama under the revised liquor law have gone back to saloons.

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I will consider first what was given as the chief causes of Negro crime.

The chief of police of Mobile was of the opinion "that the chief cause of crime among the Negroes was a lack of necessary education and the excessive use of alcohol combined with the drug habit (cocaine)."

The sheriff of Mobile County in which the City of Mobile is located wrote that "The chief causes of arrests here are principally gambling and vagrancy."

The recorder of the police court of Selma wrote: "In my judgment intoxicating drinks are now and have for years been at the bottom of all the crimes of a grave nature committed by both Negroes and whites."

The recorder of the police court of Montgomery said: "In regard to your question as to the chief causes of Negro crime I am not prepared to enter into a lengthy discussion, but the impression I have gained from my experience in the court leads me to believe that the two chief causes, especially for misdemeanors, are drink and jealousy with its attendant passions."

The sheriff of Madison County in which Huntsville, a city of 10,000 inhabitants is located, wrote: "I will say that whiskey and gambling are the chief causes of crime among the Negroes. A great many misdemeanors are caused by strong drink."

The sheriff of Jefferson County in which Birmingham, the chief city of the state is located, wrote: "I can say without hesitation and the records in the criminal court will bear me out that more crimes are committed by the Negro race on account of strong drink than all other vices combined. Eighty per cent of the colored men confined in the County jail are there for crimes caused either directly or indirectly, by whiskey."

The sheriffs of the rural counties are also of the opinion that strong drink is the chief cause of crime among the Negroes. The sheriff of Randolph County wrote: "Strong drink tends to make the Negro vicious and to have less regard for themselves and for the laws of the country." The sheriffs of Autauga and Elmore Counties said that whiskey and women were the chief causes of crime among the Negroes. The sheriff of Walker County was of the opinion that "ignorance and whiskey are the chief causes of crime." He added: "Combined they make a brute of any man." The sheriff of Jackson County said: "I am of the opinion that whiskey is the chief cause of the majority of crimes committed by Negroes in this county." "We all understand," said the sheriff of Conecuh County, "that whiskey and crime go hand in hand."

The Biennial Report of the Attorney General of the State of Alabama for the years 1908-1909 gives further interesting information con-

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cerning crime. Under the heading "Relation of Intoxicating Liquors to Homicide" this report said:

"I am including a statement here showing, for the present period, the number of homicide cases disposed of in a number of the counties and the number of cases in which the evidence showed that the defendant or deceased had been drunk or drinking at the time of the killing. This statement deals with about 40 per cent of the total homicides reported for the period and with about 25 counties of the State.

"For the purpose of making this report, I addressed letters to all solicitors of the State during the past few months, requesting this information. Most of the solicitors of City and County Courts and several of the Circuit Solicitors furnished the data.

"This statement shows 236 homicide cases, of which 142 of the defendants were Negroes and 94 were whites. In 97 of the cases the defendant or the deceased was drunk or drinking at the time of the homicide. The percentage of liquor homicides in the several counties included in the statement ranges from 20 per cent to 83 per cent. It also shows that 60 per cent of the defendants were Negroes and 40 per cent were whites; that the general percentage of liquor homicides was 41 and non-liquor homicides 59.

"In my previous report, 1906-08, on this subject which included reports from 45 counties and embraced only nine months of the 24 months, during which the general prohibition laws were in effect, 368 homicide cases were recorded, showing Negro percentage 67.8 and liquor homicide percentage 53; non-liquor homicide percentage 47.

"Applying the liquor percentage thus obtained, to the total homicides for the period it appears that intoxicating liquor caused, or contributed to, the killing of 258 men in Alabama for the two years ending September 30, 1910, and in 372 homicide cases during the same period, there was no evidence of any intoxicating drink. That is, according to these statistics for the two years, 129 men were killed annually as the result of liquor and 186 men were killed annually without such influence.

"For the previous period, 1906-08, when the liquor percentage was 53, the annual liquor homicides were 174 and the annual non-liquor homicides were 154.

"One solicitor in reporting statistics on this subject, says: 'You will observe there has been nothing like as many homicides in this county since prohibition. We have far too many now, but conditions have been greatly improved within the last year or two. There had been no homicide in this county up to the 1st of October of this year, hence the grand jury which convened 19th Sept., was able to report there was no homicide for

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their investigation committed in our county during this year. The grand jury for the Spring term was able to make a similar report. However, the grand jury in order to influence enforcement of the prohibition law took a recess after three weeks' work and adjourned to reconvene or return to work November 21st, instant. Most all the homicides I have tried—and the same may be said of assaults with intent to murder—have been influenced by liquor.' The experience of several other prosecuting officers of the State is given to the same effect."

It might be said, however, that strong drink and crime are accompaniments of each other and may not in reality have a direct influence one upon the other. For that reason I have attempted to study the effects of prohibition. An examination of the effects of prohibition upon the crime rate of Negroes gives us information bearing upon this point. As in the foregoing I will give the facts as reported by the officials. I take up first the cities and the counties in which the larger cities are located.

The recorder of the police court of Montgomery reported that although the number of arrests for drunkenness had increased from 1922 for the year 1908-09 to 2175 for the year 1909-10 the total arrests had decreased from 5766 to 5430; also the arrests of Negroes had decreased from 3908 to 3444. "Speaking from recollection," said the recorder, "I would say that the number of Negroes charged with being drunk since prohibition has increased by possibly 20 per cent and the number of petty crimes largely traceable to drink has increased by 40 per cent. I have noticed particularly that in the last year a great number of Negroes who have been tried by me charged with minor offences testify that the last recollection they had was of taking a few drinks and that they had no recollection whatever of subsequent events until they awoke in the city prison. This is, I am quite sure, traceable or due to the inferior grade of liquor sold under prohibition."

The city of Montgomery contains about 40,000 inhabitants, about 19,500 of whom are whites and 20,500 Negroes. There are in Montgomery County in which the city of Montgomery is located 26,000 whites and 57,000 Negroes.

The recorder of the police court of Selma reported that since prohibition has gone into effect there has been little opportunity to observe the effect of prohibition upon Negro crime for "in spite of our efforts to enforce this law by making many arrests and imposing large fines and in many cases hard labor, whiskey and all kinds of intoxicating beverages have been easily had in Selma and vicinity. In most cases in the police court, where drunkenness was charged I have been informed on inquiry as to where the liquor was obtained that it was obtained from a Negro.

This is not always true where it is asserted; but it is a known fact that whisky is very generally "boot-legged" by Negroes, probably in many instances for others. In town there has been little opportunity to make a test of the effect of prohibition. I will add that I have been informed by reliable people that during the first period of prohibition in the country districts the absence of whiskey had a most salutary influence. Men worked more and provided better for their families. It soon became known to the Negroes, however, that their liquor orders could be filled quickly in Pensacola, Florida, and other places, and I am told that they now get what they want in that way. This keeping of liquors at home by the country Negroes and their drinking at home accounts for the large decrease in drunkenness on the public roads."

The chief of police of Selma wrote: "I think that there is not much difference in the amount of crime committed by the colored race since prohibition in this state was established. I think a certain class of women use less whiskey; for formerly they were in the habit of lounging or hanging around the barrooms and sending in these places for beer and whiskey. I think that the situation is now possibly worse than formerly. More of the men were engaged in selling, taking large chances for the amount of gain to be derived from the sale."

Selma is a town of 14,000 inhabitants, 6,000 whites and 8,000 Negroes. In Dallas County in which Selma is located there are about 10,000 whites and 44,000 Negroes.

The chief of police of Mobile reported that so far as he had been able to observe prohibition had not materially affected the crime rate among the Negroes. He said: "Prohibition has little effect in decreasing crime. The Negro is still able to obtain any manner of intoxicants; liquor in large quantities being dispensed; a bottle being now purchased in place of the customary drink, probably followed by another or more than could be obtained in the legitimate barroom. And I may add that an inferior blend of liquor has been substituted; for the majority of alcoholic cases coming under observation of the police department have been bereft of all reason and are classed as "drunk and down." This condition I attribute to the quantity and quality obtained from the average blind tiger. I do not state that alcoholism is on the increase among the Negroes, but I do say that the number who fall by the wayside in a drunken stupor appears to be greater than the usual tipsy fellow who staggers along the thoroughfare. The drug habit (cocaine) is in my opinion a greater evil among the Negroes than the whiskey habit, notwithstanding as a rule it is invariably a combination of both. While there

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is no increase of crime among the Negroes the situation is apparently unchanged since the institution and operation of the prohibition law."

The sheriff of Mobile County said: "In our county the Negroes are very temperate. Very few cases of drunkenness are reported and in proportion to the population consisting of all other nationalities it is my opinion that less drunkenness occurs amongst the Negroes than amongst the others. The prohibition law has had a good effect upon them." Mobile City has a population of 51,500, of whom about 25,000 are whites and 20,000 are Negroes. The County of Mobile has a population of 80,000, about 46,000 of whom are whites and 34,000 Negroes.

The sheriff of Madison County, in which as above mentioned the city of Huntsville is located, said that "Since the prohibition law went into effect crime has decreased among your race wonderfully in this county, especially felony. There has not been a case of assault to rape by a colored man on a white woman in this county for four years. There is now but one colored man in jail charged with a felony." Madison County has a population of 47,000, about 20,000 of whom are Negroes.

Let us now turn from these inconclusive facts to what the strictly rural counties have to show. The sheriff of Autauga County, in which there are about 9,000 whites and 11,000 Negroes, reported that crime has increased "from one-third to at least one-fourth. Prohibition has made the Negroes worse in my county. They now send off and get large quantities of whiskey and we have blind tigers all over the county. When we had places where they could go and buy whiskey lawfully these places were policed."

The sheriff of Walker County reported that since prohibition had gone into effect there was very little if any difference in the crime rate among the Negroes. This county contains about 30,000 whites and 7,000 Negroes.

The sheriff of Elmore County, in which there are 15,000 whites and 13,000 Negroes, said: "If the prohibition law were enforced, Negro crime would be reduced."

In Randolph County, which contains 19,000 whites and 6,000 Negroes, according to the sheriff, the effects on Negro crime have been as follows: "It seems that in the policed places it has done some good in checking dissipation, but outside of the policed places the Negro and those of other races who are so inclined to disobey the law have almost absolute control of the liquor traffic and if there is any improvement among them I fail to see it; that is among the classes I have mentioned."

In Bullock County, where there are about 26,000 Negroes and 4,000 whites, the conditions, according to the sheriff, were worse than before

prohibition went into effect. The chief cause, however, according to his letter was that the law was not enforced.

The sheriff of Jackson County reported that "Crimes of all nature have decreased materially in this section since the prohibition law has gone into effect, and I feel satisfied that the prohibition law has had more to do with, than anything else, the decrease of crime among the colored race." Jackson County has a population of about 29,000 whites and 4,000 Negroes.

The sheriff of Blount County, in which there are about 20,000 whites and 1,100 Negroes, wrote that "The Negro race in this county is above the average. We have no criminals here. We have not had a Negro criminal in jail in 18 months. I do not think that prohibition has decreased crime here, for we do not have any to decrease."

The sheriff of Bibb County sent a very interesting letter in which he said: "This county has been under local option for the past twenty-five years and the law for the sale of whiskey has been rigidly enforced. For that reason, therefore, no relative deduction could be drawn by me as to the increase or decrease of crime on that account. Your race in this county is far above the average in honesty and integrity and as a rule live in perfect harmony with the whites." Bibb County contains 15,000 whites and 7,700 Negroes.

The sheriff of Conecuh County, which contains 11,000 whites and 10,000 Negroes, said that "We have had prohibition in this county twenty-six years, and it has been in operation too long for me to give you an intelligent answer as to its effect on crime here. We all understand that whiskey and crime go hand in hand whether it is sold legally or otherwise. There have been but two cases of rape by a colored man on a white woman in the history of this county—the first in 1859 and the second in 1866. In both cases the offenders were legally executed."

Although the data presented above is inconclusive, yet when all the facts are considered, strong drink, I believe, is one of the chief causes of Negro crime in the South. It appears that where prohibition has really prohibited the Negroes from securing liquor their crime rate has been decreased. On the other hand, it appears that where the prohibition law did not prevent the Negroes from securing whiskey there has been no decrease in the crime rate, in fact the introduction of a cheaper grade of liquor has apparently had a tendency to increase the crime rate. In every instance, however, where the prohibition law has been rigidly enforced and the Negroes have been unable to get liquor, there has been a decrease in the crime rate.

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This is the case in Macon County, Alabama, where I live. In this county there are about 22,000 Negroes and 4,000 whites. The sheriff of my county recently reported that he had only one deputy and did not have enough work to keep him busy. Sentiment has a great deal to do with the enforcement of the prohibition law and indirectly with the increase or decrease of the crime rate. In my own county there is a healthy sentiment both among the whites and the Negroes in favor of prohibition. There is published in the county a Negro farm paper, the influence of which has been very helpful in aiding the prohibition effort. Another thing that has helped has been the attitude of the Negro ministers. All the Negro ministers in the county are organized into an undenominational association. This association has given its support to the enforcement of the prohibition law and has even gone so far as to organize a Law and Order League to work in co-operation with the officers of the law. Although this League as such has not accomplished much, yet the moral effect on the people of the county has been very salutary.

A further proof that prohibition when enforced does cause a decrease in crime is shown by the reports that came from Atlanta, Georgia, and Birmingham, Alabama. During the first two months that prohibition was in effect in those cities there was a remarkable decrease in crime. At the end of the first month in Birmingham Judge N. B. Feagin reported to the mayor that "the decrease in arrests averaged about as follows: In comparing January, 1908, under prohibition, with January, 1907, with saloons, aggregate arrests decrease 33 1-3; for assault with intent to murder 22 per cent; gambling 17 per cent; drunkenness, 80 per cent; disorderly conduct, 35 per cent; grand larceny, 33 per cent; vagrancy, 40 per cent; wife beating, 70 per cent."

The Birmingham News, in commenting upon the first effects of prohibition said: "For ten years Birmingham has not enjoyed so orderly a period as it has since the 1st of January (1908). The moral improvement of the city has been marked since prohibition went into effect. The newspapers are no longer giving space to shootings, murders and cutting scrapes, personal altercations and other disorders as they formerly did for the reason that the regard for law and order in this community is very much more in evidence since the removal of the whiskey traffic.

In Atlanta there was a more extraordinary decrease in crime than in Birmingham. During the month of January, 1907, 1,653 cases were put on the docket of the recorder's court. During the month of January, 1908, there were but 768 cases on the docket, a decrease of considerably more than 50 per cent. During January, 1907, there were 341 cases of

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drunkenness tried, but in 1908 only 64, a decrease of more than 80 per cent.

A further confirmation of the fact that prohibition tends to reduce crime is shown by the statement of Chief Justice Watler Clarke of the State of North Carolina, who says that since prohibition has gone into effect in the state the general crime rate has been reduced 50 per cent. Murder in the first degree has decreased 32 per cent; burglary, 20 per cent; attacks with deadly weapons, 30 per cent; larceny, 40 per cent; manslaughter, 35 per cent; murder in the second degree, 21 per cent; minor crimes from 25 to 55 per cent. Justice Clarke, I understand, has prepared a five years' comparison which shows that some crimes have decreased more than 60 per cent since the saloons have been abolished. According to his report in five years there had been only two lynchings in the state of North Carolina and none in the last two years.