

DR. NORRIS ASSAILS

DRY LAW FATALITIES

Declares Liquor Death Rate in 1927 Was Higher Than Ever Before.

Quoting voluminous statistics to show an unprecedented death rate from alcohol following prohibition, Dr. Charles Norris, Chief Medical Examiner, delivered an unqualified condemnation of prohibition in an address before the New York Academy of Medicine last night.

Dr. Norris was followed by Chief Toxicologist of the city, O. A. Gettler, who, with a score of bottles of liquor that had caused death to illustrate his talk, discussed the conclusions which have been reached at Bellevue from autopsies performed on alcoholics. Dr. Haven Emerson, former Health Commissioner, replied to the two speakers, defending the position that alcohol is a poison, and a social menace when freely consumed by the general public.

Dr. Norris in his address produced figures, both for New York City and for the entire country, to show that alcohol had caused more deaths during 1927 than in any previous year, either before or since prohibition. He produced other figures to show that murders, accidents of every description, and suicides were in many cases directly attributable to the effects of alcohol.

In rebutting Dr. Emerson's remarks, Dr. Norris declared that no matter what the figures showed in respect to alcohol, they were actually a reduction of the real situation. The fact that all death certificates on which alcohol was given as a principal or contributing cause are now turned over to the Medical Examiner's office for investigation, he said, resulted in private practitioners omitting the mention of alcohol in making out certificates in all cases wherein they conscientiously could.

"The evils of the saloon could readily have been eliminated by judicial police action," Dr. Norris said in the less technical part of his address. "It must be remembered the saloon was the home of large numbers of our poor population. Many had no other place to go for comfort and social relief. It is undoubtedly sad to realize that we possibly will never again see the charmingly decorative wicker swinging door in the good old Summer time—something entirely American and seen nowhere else."

Against this picture of the saloon Dr. Norris contrasted the present day speakeasy, far more numerous than the saloons ever were, according to Dr. Gettler's remarks. Today, Dr. Norris said, places where liquor is sold are beyond the law and therefore not subject to police regulation.

As to the quality of alcohol, Dr. Norris insisted that either denatured or raw spirits were responsible in a considerable degree for the increasing death toll. He disagreed with those who claim that current alcohol deaths are due principally to excess, and explained that in many cases, while the impure alcohol might not act as a specific poison, the poisons which it contained were nevertheless largely responsible for the fatal result.

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