Prohibition and Crime.

(Ida M. Tarbell, in Liberty.)

The United States Attorney General has had in seven years a tremendous rise in the cases he has prosecuted. In 1920 he terminated 5095 cases: in 1927, 40,748; 283,780 in the inclusive seven years. What has been done in efforts to enforce by State and municipal authorities is not noticed. These are Federal activities—a statistical proof that the Government has been obliged to increase steadily its efforts to stem the steady rise in liquor supply and in liquor drinking.

Another gauge of the Government’s efforts is the increasing amount of money spent by the United States agencies in dealing with enforcement. There is the prohibition unit. In 1920 it spent $3,759,000; in 1921, $13,332.45. The Coast Guard’s appropriations for prohibition were first separated from those of its regular activities in 1924, when the former amounted to $14,545,830. In 1927 they amounted to $14,500,011. The United States Customs spent $10,023,315 in enforcement in 1920 and $17,383,077 in 1927. The Treasury Department spent $17,814.308 in 1920 and $24,819,057 in 1927.

These accusing figures from Government sources are reinforced by State and municipal findings from all parts of the country. The rising crime wave is everywhere coincident with liquor drinking and liquor selling. No matter what the evil deed there is almost invariably a bottle in the picture. Indeed, it is usually the first thing looked for. Prohibition has made it possible for every form of crime to organize around liquor selling and drinking. It has become the ally and tool of crime.

What has happened is what Chief Justice Taft warned us would happen when the act was under discussion. Take the business of manufacturing and selling liquor out of legalized hands, he said, and it will go into those of the “quasi-criminal.” “Quasi” can now be dropped. In Chicago the Illinois Association for Criminal Justice has recently finished an exhaustive survey of that city’s predicament. What is its conclusion?

“With the coming of prohibition the personnel of organized vice took the lead in the systematic organization of this new and profitable field of exploitation. There is no blinking the fact that prohibition has introduced the most difficult problems of law enforcement in the field of organized crime. The enormous revenues derived from bootlegging have purchased protection for all forms of criminal activities and have demoralized law-enforcing agencies.”