"Progress" in Enforcement

Mrs. Mabel Walker Willebrandt, director of the division of prohibition, says that the number of criminal prohibition prosecutions instituted during the fiscal year was 85,725, an increase over the preceding year of 12,025; that the aggregate fine and penalties imposed was much higher than during the previous year, the total amount being $7,903,503; that jail and prison sentences totalled 17,760, and that, according to the best information available, the number of permanent injunctions obtained was 5,000, an increase 880 over the preceding year.

This is, after-eight and one-half years of prohibition, criminal prohibition, despite all the difficulties and obstacles, shows an increase, jail sentences and fines are more numerous than ever, more speakenettes are palpated and more cases go to trial by jury, does this indicate that prohibition is working well? Does it indicate any diminution in the offenses against prohibition? Are the increased activities of the departments of justice directed against prohibition and thereby imposing total abstinence upon a far greater number of people, which is of course the real intent and purpose of the law?

We find as least a partial answer to these questions in a further perusal of Mrs. Willebrandt's report. She says that the prevalence of liquor smuggling from contiguous or nearby foreign countries "continues to be one of our greater problems.

Whereas distinctly patrol-cutting running boats were selected in 1925, only 370 were caught during the past fiscal year, and of these 47 were caught in Florida. In Florida fewer boats are engaging in this illicit trade or more of them are cutting cuisine; we do not know which, since Mrs. Willebrandt enlightens us beyond saying that she thinks "some progress is being made." But the foreign vessels locating so much of their activities of violation of prohibition, the coast of the United States continues to be a source of trouble along the seaboards east, west and south.

However effectively the government may be dealing with this problem, Mrs. Willebrandt frankly admits that she has been able to find the liquor smuggling traffic "directly from Canada into the United States." The great bulk of the trade is conducted on through the waters of the Great Lakes and their connections, in theory the liquor runner carries his cargo through the Canadian customs and from that source Mrs. Willebrandt is able to estimate roughly the amount of whiskey that is getting into this country.

In gallons the amount has grown from 605,800 in 1923 to 1,108,022 in 1928, and in Canadian dollars from $10,972,988 to $18,983,541. Mrs. Willebrandt, "no one would contend that all of the liquor which is smuggled across the northern boundary passes regularly through the Canadian customs. The volume is probably much greater than the records show." Indeed it is.

The Canadian customs' report show that in 1927 the total value of all alcoholic beverage exported to the United States during the year ending June 29, 1928, amounted to 30,387,997.48, while Mrs. Willebrandt finds that in three years the volume of this traffic has increased more than 75 percent, although it is 100 per cent illegal so far as this country is concerned.

We find it difficult to reconcile the cold hard facts contained in Mrs. Willebrandt's report, either with her eulogistic references to prohibition during the recent political campaign or with the optimistic attitude expressed by the Prohibition League and other propaganda that prohibition is succeeding abundantly well. It really looks as if "very little progress" is being made. In fact, some of the more realistic prohibitionists say that it is too early to condemn prohibition because it has never yet been tried, and the "imperfect noble in motive" certainly appears to have developed plenty of grave abuses with respect to smuggling, that will continue in a diminishing that is going on all over the country, especially in the "dry" South. And naturally Mrs. Willebrandt's report contains a few ominous terms to the effect that corruption, hypocrisy, and other evils that have attended the experiment, "those who are quick to see certain evils who attribute to prohibition should not be blind either to the difficulties of enforcement or the evils that have multiplied under attempted enforcement.