



Is the Use of Wine Decreasing at Dinners?

A COMPILATION OF INTERESTING OPINIONS

By MRS. WILLIAM C. WHITNEY CHAUNCEY M. DEPEW
MRS. EX-GOV. CLAFLIN GEORGE W. CHILDS
MRS. ADMIRAL DAHLGREN HON. RUTHERFORD B. HAYES
MADAME ROMERO HON. JOHN WANAMAKER
COL. ELLIOT F. SHEPARD

With "Wine at Women's Lanches," by MRS. BURTON HARRISON



Those who are accustomed to dine at public or fashionable dinners, it has been for some time apparent that the use of wine is steadily decreasing. Perhaps in no way could temperance interests be more directly advanced than that the wine-bottle should disappear from those tables where for many years it has held undisputed sway. Fashion has advanced more than one reform; perhaps it may yet be an important factor in the furtherance of universal temperance.

With a view of learning more definitely the extent to which wine is becoming a relegated fluid at large dinners, the editor of the LADIES' HOME JOURNAL recently caused careful inquiry to be made of those who either largely entertain, or who are frequent guests at social and public dinners. To each was submitted the question: "Do you find that the use of wine is decreasing at large dinners, public and private?"

WHY WINE DRINKING IS LESSENING

IT is an undoubted fact that the serving of many and heavy wines at large dinners is gradually becoming a thing of the past. Of course, I do not mean that wines are no longer served, for they are and will continue to be, so long as civilized men consider them a feature of dinners. But I do mean that of the varieties of wine there are fewer, of the quantities less, and of the qualities lighter, than was the custom ten years ago.

To illustrate the two former facts, let me say that were I preparing for a large dinner for men—which is always from the nature of things more heavily wine than an ordinary "mixed" dinner—I should not think it in the least degree necessary to order anything like the same amount or assortment of wines that would have been imperative a few years ago. And in extenuation of the statement that the qualities of the wines served are becoming lighter, the simple fact that at the average English dinner table port wine has been almost entirely superseded by claret, may be cited. It is also becoming a very ordinary thing at English dinners to meet prominent men who do not drink wines of any kind, and in our own country this is also becoming more and more a fact.

Of course, a dinner must have fluids: the best of solids require some liquids with which to relish them, and a dinner would be but wasted energy and material without them. But I think it is no longer imperative to serve wines, or at least we can serve with them some other beverage which will be of equal pleasure to the constantly increasing set of people who find that wining and dining together is rather too heavy a combination for their comfort. What shall this other beverage be? The question is one easily answered. Mineral water is a good choice, and many people rise from dinner tables where these waters are served now-a-days to call their hosts blessed. Mineral waters when drunk with a heavy dinner are not productive of headaches and kindred discomforts upon the following day as is champagne, for instance, and they furnish a really satisfactory, and so far as I know the only available substitute for alcoholic beverages. The dinner will taste the better for their use. The practice of serving mineral waters is becoming quite general, as much attention being devoted now to the selection of suitable waters, and to securing a sufficient supply of them for dinners, as is often devoted to the wine list.

Personally, I welcome the change. Although I have given a great many dinners, and have been a guest at many more, I never drink wine. I have also all my life made it a point of duty never to offer wine to young people, and to use such influence as I may have with them to secure their abstinence from liquors of all kinds. Stimulants rarely do good, and are often provocative of much harm. Everyone, I know, does not feel in this matter as I do, and, of course, every man is entitled to his own opinions. But, as I said, personally I am glad of a change which lessens wine drinking and provides enjoyable substitutes in the various mineral waters; the best of all I consider Apollinaris.

GEORGE W. CHILDS.

THE SUPPLY EXCEEDS THE DEMAND

I AM not confident that there is a marked decline in the practice of providing wine at banquets, public or private. But, if my observation is correct, the number of those who drink to intoxication, even in the least degree, is less than it was a few years ago.

RUTHERFORD B. HAYES.

MADAME ROMERO BELIEVES OTHERWISE

SO far as the use of wine at large dinners in Washington is concerned, my observation does not extend far enough to make a correct statement; but, so far as I have seen, wines are used as much now at a formal dinner as before, although, perhaps, there is not so great a variety as in former years. I must observe, too, that I have never seen wine drunk to excess at a dinner party.

LULA ROMERO.

MRS. EX-SECRETARY WHITNEY'S VIEWS

THAT the fashion in wines and wine drinking at table is surely changing, I think no one at all addicted to dining, either in the capacity of guest or host, at large dinners will deny. The causes for this change are numerous, perhaps the most potent of them being the dread of invalidism which attacks men even more generally, and with more remedial effect, than women. Perfect physical condition is an ideal much striven for, and one and perhaps the principal way of attainment thereto is by temperance in the use and selection of wines. Men appreciate that fact in this generation as never before, and are helped toward it in many ways—by fashion, by the spirit of the age which frowns upon self-indulgence, and by athletic training.

Between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one the average gentleman's son is at college, and at work usually in some department of college athletics. His training there forbids an excessive use of either wine or tobacco, and so during these years a habit of abstemiousness is inculcated, and almost never outgrown. Older men learn the advisability of such habits, perhaps after over-indulgence, and in sight of threatened disease, both of which act as decided curbs to a careless intemperance.

A change in the fashion of serving wines has come about, and a greater temperance in their use has arisen with it, although the custom itself is as firmly entrenched as ever. A mixture of claret and water, and champagne are the two beverages most usually served to guests now. How many of us can remember of how recent a date is this change, and appreciate it accordingly. Light wines are the order of the day, the heavy ports and Madeiras of our grandfathers being relegated to obscurity.

The amount of wine consumed at dinners, too, is much decreased. Most men, knowing their capabilities, seldom exceed them, and but rarely drink to reach them.

As to women, they are always light drinkers. Men study the effect of wine drinking on their digestion next morning, and are as a consequence the better in health, mind and happiness. Better, too, than those of their ancestors, who, to prove their manhood, would drink until nature advanced its own refusal.

Happily all this has changed, and mothers can, in this age, watch the growth and development of their sons with the serene consciousness that the common temptation to excess in drink is nullified in a great measure by the fashion of temperance and the hygienic tendencies of modern society.

FLORA PAYNE WHITNEY.

MRS. ADMIRAL DAHLGREN'S OPINION

THE decided tendency to a decrease of the use of wine at formal dinners arises in great part, it seems to me, from the changes that have been gradually taking place in the construction of these dinners.

The serving of a dinner holds to view, as in a faithful mirror, a reflex of the ultimate civilization of the age, and the finer æstheticism of the present day dispenses with the prolonged prodigality of the Lucullan banquet. Our dinners are perhaps no less costly than during the most sumptuous periods of Roman decadence; but it is now better understood that excesses are to be avoided. Formerly, where the prandial courses were endless, inasmuch as the gastronomic art requires that each dish shall have its appropriate wine in order to stimulate appetite and aid digestion, it may readily be understood that intemperance in eating and in drinking went together.

The real evil that existed, and in so far as it still continues, lies in the splendid gluttony of eating rather than in the sanitary use of wine that accompanies such indulgence. A score of years ago not less than sixteen courses made the regulation dinner, while at present half that number, most carefully selected as to relative adaptation and rarity, is deemed to be better form, and now constitutes the best served dinner. One may see at once that when eight courses are dropped you dispense with half as many varieties of wine. It is really cheering, and looks like the millennial dawn of a higher life.

MADELENE VINTON DAHLGREN.

MR. DEPEW'S VALUABLE TESTIMONY

THE use of wine at dinner has been decreasing for several years. In the novels and autobiographies of fifty and one hundred years ago, "one bottle," "two bottle" and "three bottle" men formed a feature of the description of the society of the period. They did not take light wines either, but solid sheries, ports and Madeiras. We learn that it was common at those entertainments for a number of the guests to be hopelessly intoxicated. The fact that the diner-out was apt to get in this condition did not impair his popularity or his standing among his friends. One may dine now every night in the year and never meet with a tipsy person. It is because we drink very much lighter wines, and less of them.

Within the last ten years a great change has come over dinners in the number and variety of wines served. This is especially the case in the United States and in England. Formerly there was a procession of wines, one with each course. Anyone who went through such a dinner, after astonishing his digestion with white wines and sherry, with claret, champagne, Burgundy, Madeira, brandy and liqueurs, became an early subject for Carlsbad waters and a premature grave.

I have noticed in London in the last two seasons that at the English dinner they now go almost to the other extreme, serving claret and champagne, according to the preferences of the guests for one or the other, through the whole meal. We have not come exactly to that yet, but at a New York dinner, while you still find several varieties of wine, champagne is the one which is served mainly through the entire evening. The amount of wine which is consumed per head is constantly diminishing at all dinners, and the number of men who abstain altogether is decidedly on the increase. The sparkling mineral water is largely performing the functions formerly filled by the stronger beverages.

An infrequent diner-out is much more apt to indulge unduly in both food and drink than a veteran. When one's social obligations compel him to appear in evening dress at his own house or some one's else every night, he finds that to have a clear head and sound stomach for the business of the next day he must practice self-denial and temperance. We are all creatures of habit, and self-denial can become as much of a habit as over-indulgence. As the cares of business become more exacting, and the pace in life more rapid, we pay greater attention to the loss of health. We find not only longevity but comfort in avoiding those things which impair or unduly excite our organism. Thus, while our temptations increase we become more temperate.

As matters are now progressing in the social world, the next generation will be found dieting under medical directions. They will be enjoying better health, doing a larger amount of work and enduring a greater social strain in a festive way, and having a better time than their fathers did.

CHAUNCEY M. DEPEW.

OTHER REASONS FOR THE DECREASE

I BELIEVE that one cause of the unquestioned diminution of the use of wine at the table is that the most frequent and most acceptable toast—"Woman"—has so unanimously, through the Women's Christian Temperance Union, declared herself in favor of cold water. And it seems unreasonable to drink her health in red wine when she herself prefers the sparkling crystal.

Another reason for this decrease is the stringency in the money market. While financial panics will generally drive one or two people to drink themselves into drunkard's graves, yet their usual effect is to reduce the consumption of luxuries; and the use of wines, except in the cases of the aged and sick, is not a necessity of life.

Neither should wines be considered luxurious when all the headaches, redness of the eyes and disintegration of the vital organs which they produce are considered.

I am seriously inclined to think that neither as many kinds of wine, nor in the aggregate as large a quantity of wine, are used socially in the city of New York, at least at this time, in proportion to the population, as five years ago.

ELLIOT F. SHEPARD.

MRS. EX-GOVERNOR CLAFLIN, OF BOSTON

NO question has enlisted the attention of thoughtful people throughout the length and breadth of our country as has the temperance question. Every one who thinks at all seriously is interested in a matter which touches so many human interests and affects the life and happiness of so large a number.

During the last twenty years a marked change has taken place in public opinion concerning the use of wines and liquors, but this change has come about almost entirely in the great middle class—that is, in the industrious, well-to-do class who do the earnest thinking, and the best work of the world, and not among the fashionable and wealthy class, nor yet in the laboring classes. At the top and bottom of society there has been little change. Wine is used just as freely in fashionable clubs and at the dinner tables of the wealthy as it ever was, and the hard-working day laborer seeks just as eagerly after his day's work is done the whiskey bottle and the dram shop. The clubs formed for the discussion of the burning questions of the day by earnest men who have the interests of the country at heart, have almost wholly discarded liquors from their club tables. It is difficult to form an opinion as to the relative amount of wines used now and twenty years ago, for the reason that with the advancing civilization and population, society is broken up into sets and cliques, so that one can hardly write society with a capital S. There are as many societies as there are different interests, and the barriers between this set and that are quite as impregnable now as they were in other days.

MARY B. CLAFLIN.

THE ADVANCE TOWARD MODERATION

FROM personal experience I am unable to give any information, but I am told that the use of wines and liquors for social purposes is not increasing in proportion to the increase in population. At large dinner parties many guests do not use liquors, while at receptions lemonade has replaced punch in many households. I am led to believe that much of this moderation is due to temperance agitation and to the abundance and increased use of mineral waters.

JOHN WANAMAKER.

WINE AT WOMEN'S LUNCHEONS

BY MRS. BURTON HARRISON



WITHOUT undertaking to handle the moral aspect of the point under discussion, I shall limit myself to a question of good taste in the matter of serving a variety of wines at the luncheons for women which now play

so prominent a part in the entertainment of our friends throughout the country.

Look, for example, at the large parties to which, at half-after one o'clock in the afternoon, are convened ladies in visiting costume, bonneted and veiled, to be shut in a darkened dining-room, where gas and candles supplant the wholesome light of day. There, during two mortal hours, the guests are fed with delicacies of which each one seems to the taxed digestion to be—yet never is—the very last they will venture to accept. Cucumbers, caviar, truffles, foie gras, almonds, mayonnaise dressing are but a portion of the addenda of the feast. To relieve the thirst thus engendered the banqueter has recourse to what? Beside her plate stands exactly the same array of glasses—glasses of English cut, of Venice or of gilded Carlsbad ware, lending glitter or color to the board—glasses for sherry, for Rhine wine, for claret, for champagne, all that would be demanded for the service of the most formal dinner.

Beside this scintillating group of glassware is to be found a tumbler or goblet of water filled to the brim—there are so few houses where the servants are instructed on this point—with fragmentary ice! What woman having ordinary regard for the elements of hygiene presumes at such a crisis to insult her already disturbed digestion with a douche of iced water? Ten to one she does not care for wine, never thinks of touching it at home; as a matter of course lets the sherry, the Chablis, the Burgundy go by untouched; but unless it occurs to her to quietly demand a glass of water without ice, and, if need be, to tinge its clear substance with a dash of claret, she is compelled to drink champagne.

Latterly, as a natural solution of this recurrent difficulty, Clysmic, Apollinaris, and the Hygeia waters are continually served.

Champagne, curiously enough, continues to hold its own. "How very extraordinary that you Americans should set champagne before your guests at mid-day," said a traveling Englishman, from whom, naturally, he having received the best hospitalities of the best American society along his line of march, frank comment was to be expected. "With us, you know, except at races and picnics, it is a wine that is like an evening coat—never seen out until after dark." However little we may relish the condescending manner of this and kindred national rebukes, there is no disputing that the right is on their side. The whole matter of serving champagne in season and out is overdone in America. But especially does it seem inappropriate for an assemblage of ladies, who, if they were in their own homes, would not go beyond a glass of claret, and who, for the most part, are content with the bottled waters of their favorite Spring.

Tea drinking at luncheon, once so popular, has been elbowed out of place by the universal cup of tea at five o'clock. Women, unlike their predecessors of the Brick Lane Association, who could partake of the cheering beverage till detected in the act of "swelling wisely before the werry eye," have now found out that the philosophy of drinking tea consists in limiting one's self to one cup per diem. Chocolate as an accompaniment to food is found to be too heavy. Water, the beverage of Eden, and during so many years since respectively in vogue with a large portion of the civilized creation, has recently been pronounced fattening when absorbed with meals. What, in the eyes of many of our sisterhood, could be more condemnatory of any drink?

In connection with this question may be cited the experience of a young American girl on her first visit to an English castle, who, at luncheon, feeling thirsty, looked about her for something she could drink. Her host, next to whom she had the honor to be placed, demanded her need, and was informed that she would be glad of a glass of water. With a puzzled face he referred the matter to his wife, the servants being absent from the dining-room. "Water?" said the surprised lady. "won't she have beer or claret?" The American girl, rather depressed at this public notice, yet stoutly persisted in her demand. A bell was rung, the majestic butler entered, and on hearing what was required paused for a moment to collect his scattered faculties, bowed and retired. Some time later a footman, carrying upon a silver tray a small glass of a fluid that looked as if it had been dipped from the castle moat, appeared at the lady's elbow. After this she made prompt resolve to renounce her national beverage until again on her native shore.

What then poor dear women are to drink at luncheon must, it appears, be decided by climate, custom, health and individual bias. As it is becoming clear that on these occasions little wine is actually used, perhaps hostesses will some day wake up to the wisdom of suppressing the show of glasses which lends to the ladies' luncheon its chief reproach from outsiders.