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Robbing the Poor Man of His Beer?

By Aleister Crowley

Whatever may be the powers exercised by any government, there is one thing which cannot be done without a revolution. That is to interfere with the customs of the people. A custom may be the silliest superstition, or the most deleterious habit, but it is inviolable. History is full of examples of tyrants who fell because of attempts to interfere in such methods. I almost wish I had not forgotten my history, because I should like to quote a whole lot of examples. However, history is all lies; it will be just the same if I invent a few cases. Timur Bukh was assassinated by a child of twelve years old in the midst of his victorious army, only a month after he promulgated his infamous decree forbidding his use of toothpicks. Mamilius tried to alter the date of the festival of the God Rumtum, and his dynasty crumbled in an hour. The emperor, Chwang Myang, lost his throne through forbidding people to feed goldfish on oatmeal as formerly.

As a matter of fact there is a recent and rather terrible case the Sipahi Mutiny in India. The entire country had submitted uncomplainingly to all sorts of tyrannies and exactions. But as soon as the Mohammedan thought that he was to be compelled to defile himself with pig, and the Hindu with cow, there was an immediate outbreak. It is impossible to alter by an act of legislation those deep-seated customs which refer to the satisfaction of the primary needs of men, the need to support life and the need to reproduce it. It is notorious that a food riot is the most terrible of all the danger signals.

But the interference with those customs which contain reference to pleasure is even more dangerous. The man of the common people has so little in his life. It is as crazy as it is criminal to attempt to remove the little he has got. Robbing the poor man of his beer is a desperate adventure.

If prohibition were enforced in any State, revolution would instantly follow. Trouble does not arise in dry States under the present system, because in addition to the pleasure of drinking you have the pleasure of thinking that you are putting one over on the law. It is humiliating to reduce men to the level of school

boys. I shouldn't care to do it myself; but I dare say it is good fun for those who like it.

To attempt any such change in war time is entirely suicidal. I am perfectly convinced that the prohibition of Vodka was the determining cause of the Russian revolution. If any Russians hate Germans, it is not for any economic reasons. The Russian peasant does not understand political economy; he knows scarcely more than the average professor of that subject in a university. But the story was put about that the Germans had mutilated his ikons; and that put him into a baresark rage, although it did him no manner of harm.

The whole history of popular warfare is that of the attack and defense of sacred symbols, or superstitions, or customs, that could not be rationally defended for a moment. I do not know whether I like beer or not; for as it happens I have not tasted it. But I value my option. If any one of us has got to die. Any person not similarly irrational and violent has no just title to the name of man.