

THE CATERED DISEASE

An Oration

by
Charles Hagee



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The author, with this oration, won Missouri State Collegiate Contest, 1957.

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Goethe said, "Choose well; your choice is brief, yet endless."

In 1927, Charles Lindbergh made his famous solo flight to Paris. There were three things that held the attention of Europe. First, there was the achievement itself. No one had ever done what Lindbergh had done. Second, there was the splendid specimen of young American manhood--tall, strong, virile, and adventurous. Third, at a great banquet in his honor, Lindbergh had turned the wine glasses down.

The ideal of the youth of the world had the courage of his convictions! He turned the wine glasses down in Paris; and while Europe may not have entirely understood, they cheered him for it. He turned them down in Paris, and during his whole time on the Continent he kept them turned down.

The problem of alcoholism is not new and bright and shining; it is old and shoddy. Chaucer wrote in 1380 AD: "Character and shame depart when wine comes in." Milton wrote in 1634: "Soon as the potion takes effect, their human countenance, the express resemblance of the gods, is changed into some brutish form of wolf or bear."

Lincoln said in 1865: "The saloon and the liquor traffic have defenders but no defense." Gladstone said in 1880: "The ravages of drink are greater than war, pestilence, and famine combined." For Eugene O'Neill, the Iceman of "The Iceman Cometh," was a symbol of a vertical, perambulating death: Alcoholism.

Today the man who drinks is not pictured as the staggering, puking slob that he is, but as a suave, grey-at-the-temples man-about-town. In the old days, beer was bought in no-ladies-allowed saloons; today the "beer that made Milwaukee famous" is available in grocery stores, drug stores, package liquor stores, restaurants, drive-ins, cocktail lounges, and even state operated stores. Ten nights in a barroom have been replaced by the perpetual cocktail party. The man in the assembly line has b.o.--beer odor,--and the woman in the executive suite has bourbonized judgment. An enormous billboard pictures Washington and Lincoln facing a huge bottle of beer. This advertisement was captioned "Three great leaders." Even children are appealed to! The Seven Dwarfs of Snow White fame are shown commenting upon the flavor of a certain brand of beer. Brewers offer space ships to little boys for the accumulation of beer labels. A home scene is captioned: "In the family's inner circle, beer is welcome."

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