

ARE WE A NATION OF POISONERS?

Is Human Life Held More Cheaply in Darkest Africa?

A NATION of poisoners! Truly a startling arraignment, this, which is brought against the people of the United States by the officials most distinguished in the safeguarding of the public health.

Yet it is only one degree more shocking than the charge which, for many years, has been regarded by every country of Europe as having been proved against us—the charge that we are, pre-eminently, a nation of murderers.

That was a conviction upon the plain face of facts, for Judge Marcus Kavanagh, one of our own leading jurists, speaking in Chicago on "The Enforcement of the Law in Large Cities," in November, pointed out the statistical record: That, during the preceding year, 8760 persons were murdered in the United States, while but 317 murders occurred in all England and Wales; and that, in the course of five years, the murders here amounted to 45,000—a number greater than the total of deaths from typhoid fever.

But it was an indictment mild enough to justify acquittal when compared with the charges of wholesale, wilful, premeditated murder, committed annually by the scores of thousands, under the condoning guise of "accidents"—accidents of land and water, and especially "accidents" of the rail which were the outcome of causes whose effects were and are so assuredly known, deliberately and with complete aforethought set in motion to accomplish homicides as so many essential incidents to the procuring of money.

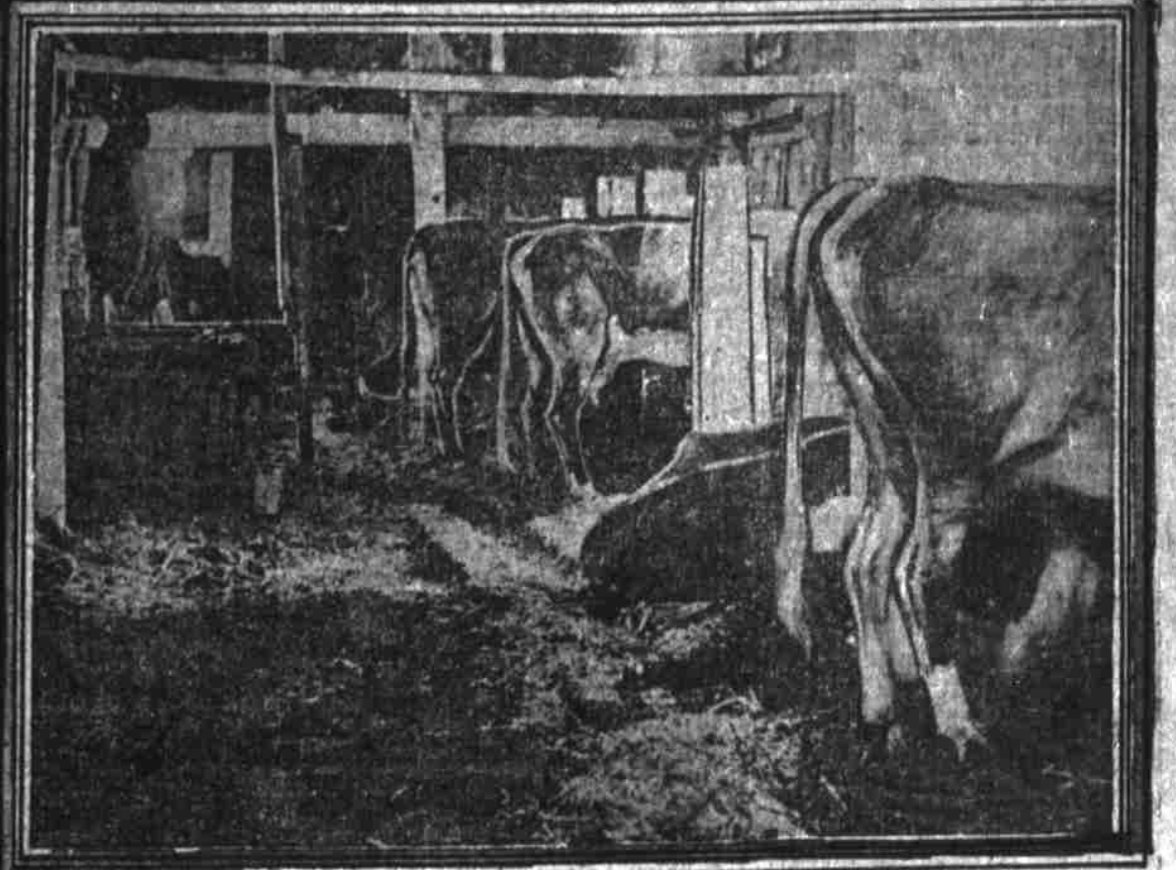
But all these murders taken together—the slayings in which some men actually wielded the weapons which deprived their fellowmen of life, and the slaughters in which stockholders and officials conspired to kill as many of their fellows as could not escape their grade crossings and their faulty rails—remain almost negligible in importance when contrasted with the terrible toll of death taken by the average citizen today who, in his private as well as his public capacity, appears as the arch poisoner of all the ages.

the law lags dodderingly behind science and civilization. It is a completely doubtful legal question whether, if a miscreant were, knowingly, to dump a barrel of typhoid germs into a town reservoir and start an epidemic proving fatal to one thousand people, the law would consent to hang him.

Wrathful survivors might string him up on general principles of justice after the law had imposed a fine of \$50 on him for polluting a water supply; but the law would still demur against any indictment of murder, because the prosecution could not produce in evidence the identical typhoid germ by means of which John Doe, the defendant here charged with wilful and deliberate homicide, did actually and with malicious intent poison, kill and murder the deceased Richard Roe.

Because the law of our national childhood still governs the growing intelligence of the nation's maturity, the minds among the people that, with infinite courage and by infinitesimal stages, drag our laws up to the level of our civilization, are now agitating for new laws, for laws which shall see as far beyond the legal nose as the laws we have today see beyond the puffed cheeks and purblind eyelids of the Dogberrys of the past.

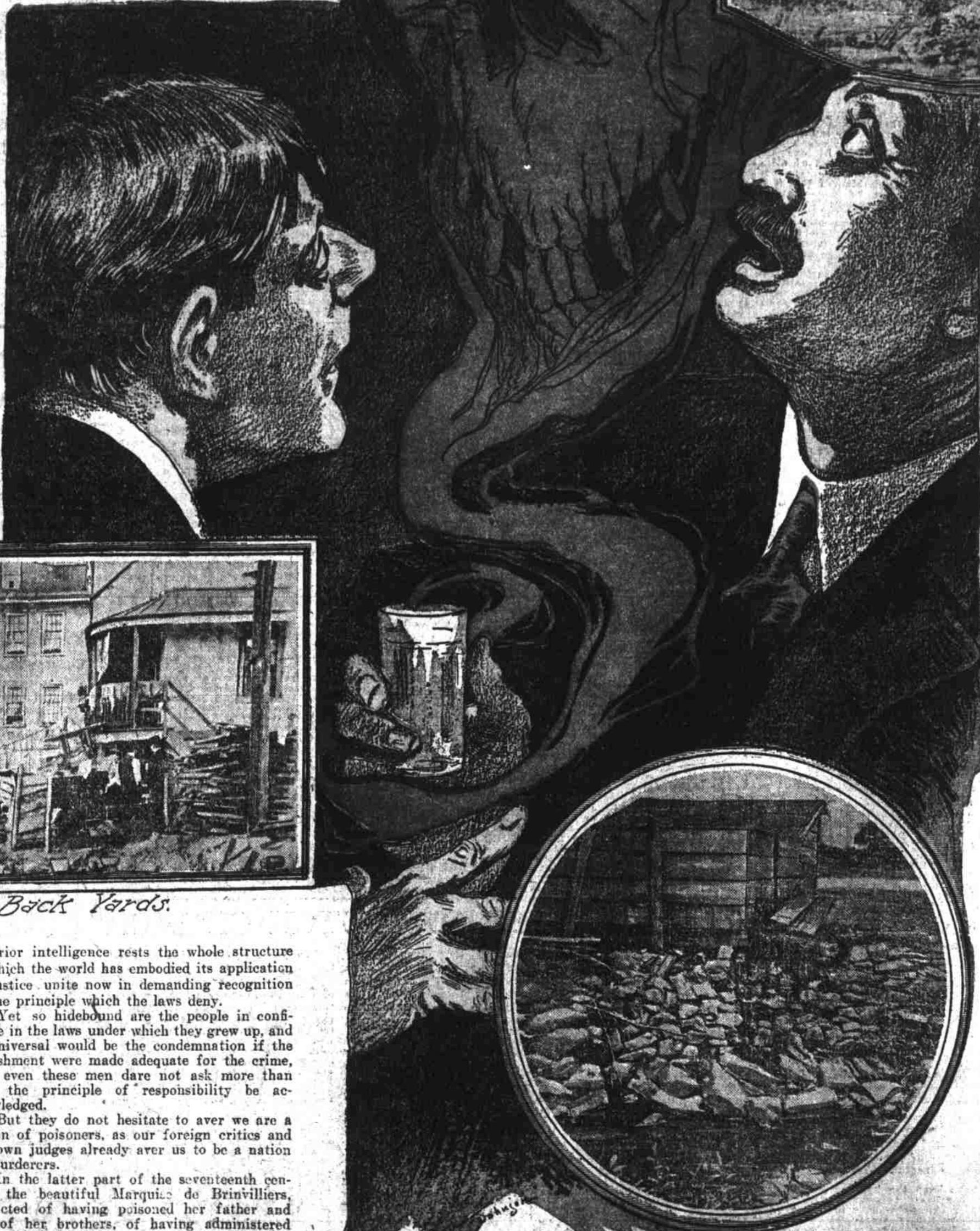
Those men, belonging to the type on whose



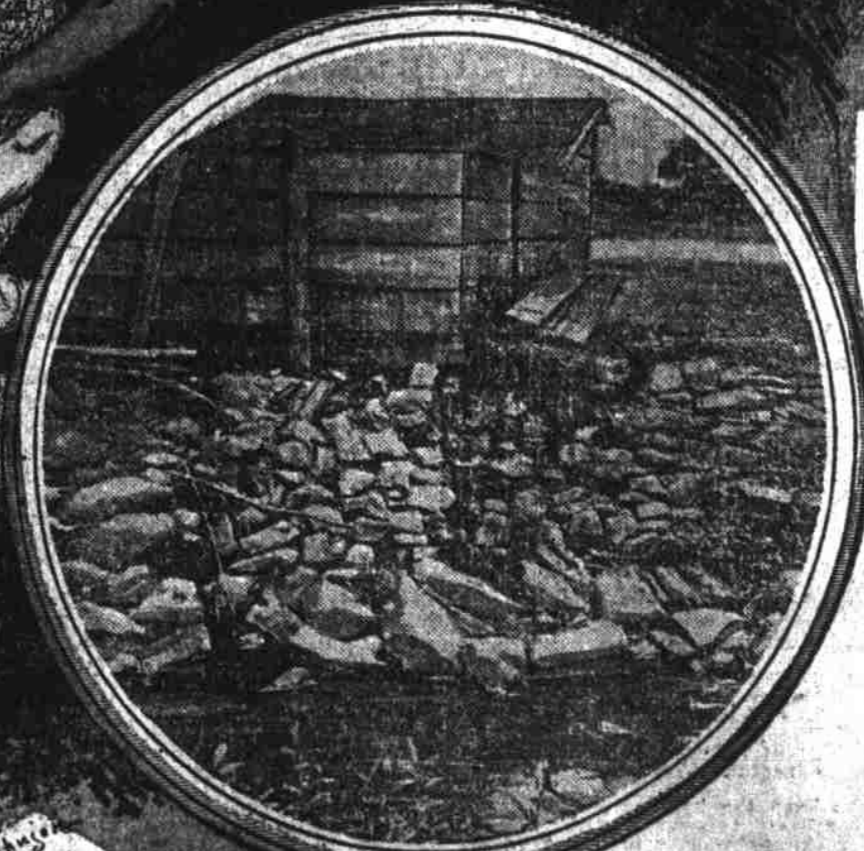
City Babies Fed on Milk from this Dairy



Contractors Dump Refuse into River



Pollution from Mills and Back Yards



Pig Pen Draining into a Spring

LAW, which ought to be justice and so eternal, is known by every lawyer to be merely a very faulty imitation of justice—to be simply an opportune expedient.

That is because law is man's application of the principles of justice to the essentially temporary conditions existing when he makes any law. Laws that were just centuries ago are known to be most cruelly unjust now; and laws which would have been unjust then are the perfection of justice today.

Yet today the law cares as little for life as it cares much for property. It will take a year to try to hang the man who shoots another with a bullet which, produced in evidence, one can see and feel, while it refuses to be convinced that ten thousand murders can have been committed by means of germs which it cannot see and feel.

That is where, in the United States today,

superior intelligence rests the whole structure in which the world has embodied its application of justice, unite now in demanding recognition of the principle which the laws deny.

Yet so hidebound are the people in confidence in the laws under which they grew up, and so universal would be the condemnation if the punishment were made adequate for the crime, that even these men dare not ask more than that the principle of responsibility be acknowledged.

But they do not hesitate to aver we are a nation of poisoners, as our foreign critics and our own judges already aver us to be a nation of murderers.

In the latter part of the seventeenth century the beautiful Marquise de Brinvilliers, convicted of having poisoned her father and two of her brothers, of having administered poison to her own daughter and a number of other people about her, had her beautiful head

expeditiously cut off in Paris.

And so did the sorceress and wholesale seller of poisons to the nobility of France, La Voison.

But it was an era of poisoners; and Madame de Dreux and the Duchesse de Bouillon, who tried to poison their husbands in order to wed their lovers, together with scores more of the most exalted folk in the kingdom who poisoned as gayly as they flirted and courted, were permitted to go as scot free as do those today who poison others with venoms as deadly and for motives which are even more abhorrent.

Then the aristocracy made the laws, while the democracy suffered from them; now, the democracy makes the laws, and does its best to keep the democracy from ever suffering again—through the agency of death.

But a number of millions of years ago, Nature, which rules both aristocrats and demagogues, made certain unalterable laws, to which both orders of humanity must forever bow. And one of those laws relates to poisoning.

Dr. Samuel Dixon, president of the Academy of Natural Sciences, of Philadelphia, the distinguished bacteriologist who has inaugurated, as health commissioner of Philadelphia, the official attempt by the state to use its utterly inadequate statutes for the suppression of wholesale poisoning of its citizens by their fellow-citizens, has formulated the relation of the law of nature to the responsibilities of modern democracy:

"Water is one of the necessities of animal life," he says. "The manner in which the country's water supplies are treated by the state and the nation is appalling to the modern intelligence.

"Those water supplies are treated as though they were natural sewers. The waste of the animal economy is something which is thrown off because it is a poison to the animal that makes it; and that waste, that poison, is being fed by Americans, as individuals and as communities, to their neighbors.

"Few individuals and few political bodies, in the sense of the individuals acting as communities, ever seriously review the results of their existing systems for the disposal of human waste, and all regard with horror the reports that come from savage lands of the atrocities perpetrated by cannibals. Yet the reviled cannibal does not lose in contrast with us.

"Simply look over the conditions prevailing in our own communities and, in the light of simple justice to our neighbors, observe our practice of deliberately discharging the deadly poison of our waste body products, the emptying of our sewage filled with the germs of disease that mean untold suffering and well-nigh countless deaths, into the drinking water that must be consumed by our neighbors.

"We claim to be our brother's keeper. Yet our brothers, our sisters, our parents and our children are those whom we deliberately poison.

"And the sole reason is that, knowing we are committing these real, premeditated, deliberate murders, we continue to commit them because we wish to practice the economy we believe to be wealth.

"The very people in charge of our municipal and national governments who would be

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