

The Liquor Traffic and State Control.

THE Second Report of the Central Control Board (Liquor Traffic) is in no danger of being consigned to the waste paper basket—the fate of too many Reports of Royal Commissions—unread except by the few, who are specialists on the subjects. For it deals with a problem, which must be faced, vital alike to the integrity of the Empire and to the happiness of our people. Not long ago the gallantry of our troops seemed as if it might be paralysed in a hideous nightmare by the want of ammunition. Can it be that, when the storm clouds have rolled away, we shall forget how the catastrophe was averted, flinging to the winds the dearly-bought lessons of a terrible experience, the handwriting on the wall?

The Report is well written, lucid and concise ; dispassionate in tone, though it handles a question which has often provoked hot controversy ; it is a reflex of the procedure of a Committee which, though compelled by the urgency of the occasion to be drastic, for a wise surgeon probes the wound to heal it, seems free from undue bias in any direction. The Board revised and modified from time to time the Regulations which they make at starting ; and they frequently accompanied the enactment with a brief explanation of the meaning of it. A law which is too far in advance of public opinion is apt to do more harm than good, if it lacks the momentum which it ought to have behind it. While availing themselves freely of the advice of persons best acquainted with the locality and while keeping in close touch with employers as well as with Trade Unions and other organizations of labour, the Board seems to have avoided any unfair pressure from one side or another, and to have shunned even the appearance of being identified with the "Intransigents" of prohibition. It was announced, "The Board does not invite representatives from temperance or religious organizations ; but if any such organization desires to send a deputation to be heard by the Board's delegation, it will be heard separately." "Pas trop de zele, Monsieur !" ¹

The Report, signed by the Chairman, Lord D'Abernon, K.C.M.G.,

¹ The Secretary of the Board is Mr. J. G. C. Sykes, M.A., C.B., of the Education Office.

on behalf of a strong and representative Board, is apparently unanimous. There is no dissentient.

REPORT.

After recapitulating briefly from the first Report why and how the Board was created in 1915, under the "Defence of the Realm (Amendment) Act" to regulate the liquor traffic in districts where from the number of munition factories or from the conflux of sailors and soldiers, etc., a tighter rein and a sharper curb were needed, the Report records in detail how they set themselves to remedy the evil, *constructively* as well as by restriction. The Appendix contains statistics careful and complete, which justify the conclusion that the experiment was thorough and successful.

If, as seems likely, our liquor traffic is to be brought under the control of the State, this Report will be invaluable as to the best way of doing it. An ounce of solid fact, showing what has been done and *how*, is worth pounds of theorizing.¹

True, it is not usual in England, it is not our habit, to substitute State control for private enterprise. When Sir Robert Peel years ago cut the first sod of the Trent Valley Railway, he said, in effect with characteristic sagacity, that, while in many other countries railways were made and administered by the Government, it was accordant with our habits and temperaments that the State should only intervene, when something had to be rectified. But the drink traffic is exceptional. The evil to be got rid of is so exceptionally extensive and intense, that it demands exceptional remedies.

The first thing which the Board of Control had to do, was to map out the areas to be put under their control. They seem to have had a free hand in this and in their subsequent proceedings. Their Report shows how tactfully they acquitted themselves of their arduous responsibility. Their task was twofold—on the one hand, to get rid of any and everything faulty in public-houses, as they are now, and on the other hand, to fill up the vacuum thus created (*natura abhorret vacuum*) by supplying refreshments in the full

¹ "The Drink Traffic and State Purchase." By the Right Hon. Sir T. P. Whittaker, M.P., etc. King & Son.

"The Gretna Tavern and Refreshment House in Carlisle, the first house of the kind under State control in England, was opened July, 1916. Hot dinners with non-intoxicants or a glass of beer, 1s. The place is very popular."
—*Daily Graphic*, July 18, 1916.

sense of the word, in well regulated canteens and refreshment rooms, sometimes attached to the factory. If you are eradicating the weeds, you must sow something better in their stead. A cure to be permanent must be positive, not merely negative. "Overcome evil with good."

Unquestionably our public-houses have lapsed very far from their original purpose. They were never intended to be dram-shops, nor a lounge where people might sit and booze. As the very title indicates, the "licensed victualler" was to sell "vittles" to travellers and others who wanted refreshment. But we Northern races are apt, it must be owned, to pervert what nature provides as a timely help in case of need—a remedial stimulant—into our ordinary diet and something more.

The root of the evil in England has been the "Tied House." So long as the landlord or the tenant has a pecuniary interest in the sale of intoxicants, there is risk, a very serious one, of the drink sale being pushed to swell their profits, and the public-house degenerates into a place for tipling.

Some years ago in a large village, where the Teutonic element in our very mixed nationality still asserts itself more unalloyed than in other counties, large hand-bills were put up in the windows of the public-houses that "tea, coffee, ginger-beer, etc., etc.," might be had there. In a few weeks the placards were removed by order of those who held the reins. Many a weary traveller often complains, that though no publican can refuse to supply a non-alcoholic beverage under pain of forfeiting his licence, the customer is served with unmistakable reluctance. One obvious way of lessening drunkenness is to lessen facilities for getting the drink. When the late Lord Salisbury objected to what he called a "grandmotherly" Bill which aimed at this, he said, in effect, that it would not check extravagance in dress if the number of milliners' shops in a street was limited. But our witty Premier seemed in this parallel to forget the inordinate, almost irresistible craving for drink, which may beset a workman, who has weakened his will by succumbing to the temptation, as he goes home in the evening, with his wages in his pocket and passes the cheery red curtains of the public-house. "I have said No in myself to the one just passed, I may stop and rest for five minutes at this other." Besides, if there are more publicans in any neighbourhood than are necessary, the strain of excessive

competition is apt, as the police know, to induce a publican to resort to very questionable expedients for alluring customers.

On the same principle the Board limited the hours during which intoxicants may be sold, making these hours coincide, as far as possible, with the normal hours for meals. By penalizing the noxious habit of "treating," which hides the "snake in the grass" under a show of good fellowship by penalizing credit sales, for the slate lures the drinker to go on drinking by putting off the day of reckoning, by other not a few subsidiary rules they tried to stamp out the vicious habits, which lead to intemperance. They rightly made their Regulations more stringent against spirits than against malt liquor, and in all cases applicable to clubs as well as to public-houses.

Ardent advocates of Prohibition seem to forget the old adage "Abusus non tollit usum." (Has not Maine, U.S.A., rescinded the Prohibition Law?) It may be true, that we have turned to evil uses what was intended for 'good; it is easy to imagine a sort of Utopia where the demon of drink seems barred out effectually; but experience shows that the real remedy lies deeper than legislation.

The late Canon W. H. Lyttelton, Vicar of Hagley, himself a strong teetotaler, defined a "moderate drinker" as one who habitually takes less alcohol to-day than he did 'yesterday. It is not difficult to see what follows.

If the attempt to coerce people by law to abstain altogether from alcohol is not backed up by a strong and deep conviction, generally, the law is evaded by secret drinking till the law is repealed and thus the authority of Law generally is discredited. The question is hardly within the possibilities of practical consideration.

There is no need to search far afield for what is wanted. We English seem to have a propensity for doing so. Not long ago before our eyes had been unsealed by the war to the demoralizing effect of it on the German character, some of us were inclined to bow the knee—to a grim and gory idol—Prussia's cast-iron system of national education. Nor, if we look to Sweden for a good precedent, ought we to copy her state-control of the drink traffic indiscriminately. No two nations any more than individuals are exact reprints of one another in circumstances or character. We have something nearer home in what are called Lord Grey's "Publics" (The People's Refreshment Houses Association Broadway Chambers, Westminster), which have stood the test of half a century and have grown

from a mere handful here and there of Reformed Public Houses to considerably more than a hundred. There is a separate room for those who require alcohol under proper regulations, with their food, and a separate room for those who require it not. Above all, for this is the keystone of the arch, the manager of the house, instead of being a tenant, has no personal profit on the intoxicants sold, only on the non-alcoholic beverages. Is there not here, at the least in outline, something which may serve us as a foundation-principle for an all-round reform under state-control of our Liquor Traffic.

I. GREGORY SMITH.

