

CONSTRUCTION OF THE NEW BUILDINGS.

Towards the end of the Assembly there was laid before the Fourth Committee a report, marked "confidential" by the Supervisory Commission on the financial situation in regard to the construction of the new building. The essence of this report is embodied in Document A. 89, submitted on the 29th September to the Assembly, which then passed a resolution concluding as follows:—

"The Assembly

"Declares that it is resolved in principle to keep within the estimate adopted last year ;
and

"Instructs the Supervisory Commission, after having obtained the necessary technical and legal advice and without excluding the possibility of reconsidering the contract concluded with the architects, to submit to the Council for approval as soon as possible a programme which will comply, under the best possible conditions, with the above decision."

The financial position in regard to the new buildings is indeed disturbing. Comment at the moment would be out of place, as a solution has been left to a body of men on whose common-sense and zeal for the interests of the League I think we can rely.

FIFTH COMMITTEE.

As usual, this committee received and considered reports on the work done by the sections of the League organization which deal with opium and narcotic drugs, traffic in women and children, and child-welfare, and it also devoted some time to the question of penal administration, which was first included on the agenda of the Assembly last year, and in regard to which there exists no special League organization.

OPIUM AND NARCOTIC DRUGS.

Very marked progress is, I am glad to say, being made by the League in connection with the suppression of the traffic in opium and dangerous drugs. The work done during the past year is very ably summarized in the report presented to the committee by the Japanese delegate (Document A. V/1 1931). In this document will be found an explanatory summary of the provisions of the convention for limiting the manufacture of narcotic drugs and regulating the distribution of such quantities as are required for medicinal and scientific purposes, which was drawn up by the Conference which sat from the 27th May to the 13th July, 1931, at Geneva. The full report of this Conference and the terms of the convention will be found in Document C. 455, M. 193, 1931, while the reports of the advisory committee, which made the preliminary arrangements for the Conference (Documents C. 168, M. 62 and C. 168 (a), M. 62 (a)), also contain much interesting information.

If this convention is generally adopted, as there seems to be good reason to anticipate that it will be, it will constitute a step forward in the campaign against the illicit traffic in narcotic drugs by bringing their manufacture and distribution under strict supervision in a way which has proved impossible hitherto. Even apart from what it is hoped may be achieved in the future through the operation of this convention, however, very marked progress has been made during the year, under the terms of the Geneva Convention of 1925, in the direction of diminishing the quantities of drugs manufactured, and securing, through stricter Government supervision in certain of the manufacturing countries, that drugs were only exported in satisfaction of orders for which import certificates had been issued by the Governments of the countries to which the drugs were to be sent. Interesting information regarding the encouraging progress made in this direction is contained in Document A. V/1, already referred to, and further information with regard to the tremendous diminution in the quantities manufactured in his country was given to the Committee by the Swiss delegate. The report of the Egyptian Government that drug addiction in that country has been reduced by half is particularly noteworthy.

A most hopeful feature has been the tangible evidence given by Turkey (which is not a signatory of the Geneva Opium Convention) of her willingness to take steps to prevent narcotic drugs manufactured in that country from going into the illicit traffic.

The Australian delegate—a lady doctor—took occasion during the debate to point out that the apparently exceptionally high drug consumption in Australia, as shown by the figures given in Document C. 629, M. 250, 1930, were due to the very general use of drugs by the medical and dental professions to produce local anaesthesia, and to the completeness of the statistical information available in Australia regarding drugs, and not to any general drug addiction. No doubt the same considerations apply in respect of New Zealand.

With a view to still more effectively tackling this problem at its source, the Committee included in its report to the Assembly (Document A. 65) a recommendation for the taking of preliminary steps to secure information necessary to ensure the success of a Conference which it is proposed to convene at some future—and probably not very early—date with regard to the limitation of the growing of the poppy and harvesting of the coca leaf, from which these drugs are derived.

The Assembly adopted the report on the 23rd September.

CHILD-WELFARE.

The report of the Child-welfare Committee (Document C. 249, M. 113) on the work performed during its session last April does not contain much of special interest to New Zealand. Some of the principal questions dealt with, such as the draft convention with regard to the return of children and young people to their homes, and the treatment of foreign minors, while of considerable importance in many countries, arise out of problems which, fortunately, are practically unknown in New Zealand.