

The White Ribbon

FOR GOD AND HOME AND HUMANITY

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WET CANTEENS.

We have always realised that "a thing is never settled till it's settled right." Lately we have had to admit that even after that right settlement is made, there are folk who will attempt to get it upset. When the Defence Act became law and abolished the wet canteen, all right-thinking people thought the matter was settled finally and rightly. Temptation was to be banished from the camps where our young men were to have their homes for a week or two each year. But times have changed; the grim reality of war is upon us, and the occasional camp of the Territorial has been overshadowed by the great permanent training camps like Trentham and Rangitoto. Once again the section of the community who value the vested interests of the brewer more than the physical well-being of our boys, are agitating for the wet canteen in the camps.

We are told that the wet canteen exists in the British camps. But there is one fact we should never overlook when comparing England with our own fair land, and that is, that in England the mothers have no vote. Men study large vested interests and hesitate to oppose them, but mothers say no vested interest is worth considering if it debases and degrades our sons. Had English mothers had the vote for 22 years, we feel sure there would be no wet canteens in British camps.

When a W.C.T.U. deputation waited on the Defence Minister at Christchurch, he told them that personally he was not in favour of the wet can-

teen, but that he was only one member of the Cabinet. Yesterday, in replying to a deputation representing the Methodist Conference, the Premier said there need be no words on the subject of the wet canteen. He had been collecting evidence on the subject, and the bulk of the opinions are decidedly against the wet canteens being established. He had even gone so far as to ask the military people if they would prefer a wet canteen to an alteration in the hours, and they had replied that they would not have a wet canteen under any conditions whatever.

This is in accordance with the highest military authority everywhere. Lord Roberts spoke in favour of dry canteens. He also said: "Give me a teetotal army, and I will lead it anywhere."

In Canada wet canteens were abolished, yet when the Canadians reached England a wet canteen was placed in their camp. So indignant were the Canadian mothers that in the short space of three weeks, in the very depth of a Canadian winter, they secured over 62 thousand signatures of mothers to a petition asking for the abolition of these wet canteens. The petition was forwarded to England by the Premier, who strongly supported it. In Australia the Federal Government has decided that the dry canteen be continued. When the agitation was on in Victoria to secure wet canteens in camps, the newspapers gave much space to the controversy, and we quote a paragraph from the "Melbourne Age" on the subject:

"Amongst the many arguments urged in favour of the wet canteen,

only one deserves the least consideration. It is that the consumption of alcohol in camp can be controlled, and that if men are supplied with liquor in moderation in camp they will not indulge in excess elsewhere. Now, it is a fact that the consumption of alcohol in camp can always be regulated; if the camp is well managed; but the corollary deduced from this fact is quite untenable, and it has been falsified almost everywhere by experience. Experience shows that the drinking minority of soldiers customarily initiates a holiday, where the wet canteen is in vogue, by visiting the canteen before leaving the camp. The consequence is, these men, to use a military expression, reach the place where their leave is to be spent "half-cocked," and ripe for mischief. Under the dry canteen system they perforce reach town perfectly sober, and there is at least a chance of their resisting temptation. But in a half-cocked condition they have no chance at all. They forthwith proceed to become "full-cocked," and trouble follows. Since the inauguration of the dry canteen in Victoria—all our most experienced soldiers recommended its enforcement—there has been little cause to complain of the conduct of our soldiers. Many serious scandals have occurred of late in New South Wales, but the dry canteen is responsible for none of them, and it is very probable that they would have been more numerous and serious under any other system.

"The War Committee, however, should not be content merely to discountenance the misguided agitation for a wet canteen. The time has