

SIX O'CLOCK CLOSING.

CITIZENS' MEETING.

On Thursday, June 29th, a citizens' meeting in connection with 6 o'clock closing was held in the Town Hall, which was fairly well filled. The chair was occupied by the Mayor, and afterwards, when he had to leave to attend a City Council meeting, by the Hon. J. G. Aitken. On the platform were leading citizens, including ministers of various denominations and leaders of the Temperance movement.

After preliminary remarks by the Mayor, who said they had met to uphold as business men the interests of economy and efficiency in war time, in order to further the good of the whole community, the first resolution was moved by the Right Rev. Dr. Sprott, Anglican Bishop of Wellington, as follows:—

"That this meeting of Wellington citizens declares that the immediate adoption of 6 o'clock closing for liquor bars is urgently demanded by the supreme necessity of developing and concentrating in the service of the Empire the full energy of the Dominion for the purpose of winning the war."

After defining his position as in complete accord with the resolution recently passed by the General Synod in favour of 6 o'clock closing, the reverend gentleman urged that in order to conserve energy for winning the war New Zealand ought to follow the example of the three great Allies, Britain, France, and Russia, in adopting measures more or less drastic for curtailing the liquor traffic. It was not suggested that the soldiers were less able to withstand temptation than civilians—all honour to them that so few had yielded!—but they ought not to be exposed to it. Only by sacrifice and economy could victory be gained in this great war, and by the glory of the Empire and by the memory of those who had given their lives in France and the North Sea he appealed to all to act now so that they might not in the future have to regret failure to make greater efforts.

Dr. Platts-Mills, in seconding the motion, said she felt honoured by being asked to express the feeling of the women, who as a whole heartily approved the proposal on the ground

of maintaining efficiency. New Zealand had proved herself efficient so far, but none knew how much more might be required in the future. Hitherto the chief sacrifice had been made by the men who had enlisted and by the women. There was another section of society that had made but little sacrifice, men who had not offered, though eligible, or men who, not eligible, had given no equivalent in service or money. Women's eyes were opened by the war, and they recognised that patriotism meant sacrifice. Economy was urgently demanded, yet in 1915 more drink per head had been consumed than in any other year, and that though so many men were absent.

Dr. Newman, speaking in support of the motion, said it was recognised this war was a war of nation against nation, a war of attrition. New Zealand was all behind, for in conservative England much had been done by prohibiting treating, and now the British Government was taking hold of the drink traffic. In the War Regulations Bill, though anti-treating was mentioned, there was nothing as to 6 o'clock closing. The Government were evidently making up their minds about this. But it was proposed that the sale of liquor to women should be regulated. Why not also to men? All ought to share and share alike. Such legislation would not be proposed if women had seats in Parliament. They must keep on persisting and persisting, agitating and agitating. The leaders of the war could not win by themselves; they must be backed up by the people, who should rise and demand that New Zealand should be freed from a part at least of the drink curse.

The motion was carried practically unanimously, and a collection, amounting to over £25, was then taken up for the dependents of those who had fallen in the North Sea fight.

The second resolution was as follows:—

"That this meeting, in demanding legislative provision for 6 o'clock closing of liquor bars, directs the attention of the Government to the mandate of the people given by means of resolutions passed at public meetings, of petitions to Parliament bearing the signatures of about 100,000 persons, and of representative deputations; and it calls upon the Government and upon Parliament to give

immediate effect to the will of the people."

It was moved by Dr. Gibb, who said Government ought to know the will of the people, considering all the public meetings and deputations in favour of 6 o'clock closing, and the petitions so numerous signed. To be sure, other voices had been raised against, but they constituted a despicable minority. In peace time Government and Parliament were more sensitive to the wishes of the people; but if they thought that their prompt action in calling the forces of New Zealand to the help of the Empire, and in meeting all the difficulties incident to this, would be a cloak to cover their other sins, they were mistaken—the day of reckoning would come. He wished to put forward one or two other points for early closing. The example of the nations that had done something to stop drinking was binding on us, unless we could show that we were better off for excessive drinking, or that we were so moderate that there was no necessity to do anything. What were the facts? In 1914 Great Britain's drink bill was £3 10s 10d per head, New Zealand's £3 13s 10d, N.S.W. £4 6s 6d. Britain found it necessary to deal drastically with the traffic. New Zealand needed it still more. We should demand that our Legislature followed the example of these other countries. We did not realise the meaning of the war, for as a nation we were not suffering, nor were we serious enough. We ought, by humiliation and prayer, to turn back to God, but "business as usual" was the cry. Aye, and drinking and gambling as usual, and more than usual! Shame to those who still found time and money for horse racing and picture shows more than usual! Money was plentiful at present, but every penny would be needed for necessities. History told us that after the war the pinch would be felt, and money would be scarce; therefore we ought to spend nothing on needless luxury. As to military efficiency, the authorities had insisted on dry canteens, and this was significant. Drink was evidently bad for the men in camp, under supervision of their officers, but good for them in Wellington. They must be sober in Trentham, but might get drunk in the city. We could not afford to have even a small minority of drunken soldiers, so we demanded this mea-