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CHRISTCHURCH.

"DEFEAT" and "THE FIDDLERS."

The Women's Service Guild of Perth, W.A., addressed a letter to the Prime Minister and Senator Pearce, of Federal Parliament, asking that the ban placed upon the publication of "Defeat" and "The Fiddlers" should be removed. The Secretary of Defence Department in replying, gave the following reasons for refusing the request:—

(1) It is considered to be most **prejudicial to recruiting**. It was written to support a moral reform movement in the Mother Country, and its circulation in the United Kingdom has been allowed on account of the exposure in its pages of certain grave local conditions susceptible of improvement, but its export from England was absolutely prohibited. The people of Australia have no voice in the amelioration of these conditions, and, consequently, the circulation of the book in the Commonwealth could serve no useful purpose, while its potency for harm is incalculable. Many statements contained in this volume are such as would be most likely to have a retarding effect on recruiting, which in Australia depends wholly upon voluntary enlistment. Further, as the volume consists of a most gruesome presentment of the alleged dire results of the liquor traffic in England, the only effect its circulation could have would be to cause the most cruel anxiety in the hearts of relatives of Australian soldiers in England at the present time, and prevent wives and parents from allowing husbands and sons to enlist and go to a country where, according to "Defeat," many soldiers become victims to drink and its frequent concomitant—venereal disease.

(2) The book is likely to cause **disaffection to His Majesty**. One effect the circulation of this book must have in Australia is to reduce the enthusiasm and affection of the people of this country, however intensely patriotic they may be for the Mother

Country, and the great cause of which she is the outstanding champion, for let the loyal Australian who has any love and affection for the heart centre of the Empire peruse the allegedly true accounts of the awful events caused by drink, and said to be of daily occurrence in England, and he can have nothing but contempt for the Government representing His Majesty which allows such a condition to continue.

(3) The book is likely to prejudice **His Majesty's relations with foreign powers**. I regret to state that already the German Propaganda Bureau has seized on the opportunity of employing certain statements in this book in an endeavour to dissuade neutrals from supplying Great Britain with grain. The argument put forward in German controlled papers in America to neutrals was:—

"Why send your grain to Britain, where it is mainly used for the British consumer of beer and whisky, while the price of bread in your own country rises day by day?"

(4) Many statements in the book are **false**:—The charges made against Canadian soldiers with regard to their drinking habits, and the prevalence of venereal disease have been denied time after time on the floor of the Canadian House, not merely in official reports, but also by Canadian officers and Members of Parliament, of the highest standing and integrity, who had been on service with that Dominion's troops.

It has to be remembered that every Australian soldier who has ever been on service in England is by implication included in the nauseating charges made in this publication; many of them are unable to clear themselves of such charges, having died for the cause we hold most dear. However, it might be mentioned here that the Minister has received reports demonstrating the splendid behaviour of the Australian troops in England.

It will accordingly be seen that the publications contravene practically

every provision of Regulation 28 of the War Precautions Regulations, and, apart from the intimation from the Imperial Authorities above mentioned, Prohibition would have been necessary in Australia.

The Minister recognises the fact that the publications were written with an earnest desire to combat the drink evil, but, after all, it must be admitted that the drink question, important though it may be, is only of secondary importance in comparison with the necessity of our straining every effort to win the war.

It has been suggested that the objectionable parts be expunged, but this has not been found practicable, as these from a censorship standpoint comprise the bulk of the matter set out in the publications above named.

Yours faithfully,

(Signed) T. TRUMBLE,
Secretary.

Honorary Secretary,
The Women's Service Guild,
Perth, W.A.

At the request of the Women's Service Guild, the letters were submitted to Mr Arthur Mee, and the following reply received from him:—

Dear Miss Newcomb,—

Very many thanks for your courtesy. I am very glad to have the papers you sent me, and am grateful to the women of Western Australia for their interest. I wish you would please be good enough to write and thank them for me, and to say they may rely absolutely on the statements in my book. It is false to say that these books are false. There is no serious mis-statement in them, and as for the particular statements that Mr Pearce speaks of concerning venereal disease, not one of these statements is my own but is attested by authority quoted from Hansard, and allowed to remain all these months without contradiction in the House of Commons. It is the usual Government camouflage to declare that all these things are untrue. They are true and the Government finds it easier to deny facts than to face them.