

THE APPEAL OF THE BUSINESS MEN.

It was a notable gathering, that assemblage of two or three thousand in the Town Hall of Wellington last Monday evening, the 9th instant. For it was not simply the leading representatives, and the rank and file, of the great Temperance party such as usually greets the speakers at a large Temperance meeting; it was an audience representative of the business men that had met to hear one of the most prominent members of the business world, and one of the leading educationists, in the Dominion, put forward their views on the burning question of the time. After the Mayor, who presided, had opened the proceedings, the first speaker was Mr Hunt, one of the original members of the National Efficiency Board, and he began by outlining the origin, constitution, and work of that Board, with whose recommendations and policy the public already have been made fairly familiar. He pointed out that the money compensation was necessitated, as a matter of fairness, by the existing legislation, which allowed 4½ years' continuance after the carrying of Prohibition—the time compensation was being commuted for a money compensation.

It was a treat to follow Mr Hunt's well-reasoned-out argument on productive power, on which the welfare and progress of a nation depended. Surplus productive power was used partly to raise the average standard of living, i.e., provide better houses, food and clothing, better education and recreation, partly to improve the facilities for future production, i.e., develop natural resources of the land, increase its productivity, provide better means of transport. Producing power was the result of accumulated surplus production in the past, not only material things, but also the trained ability of skilled workers. Surplus production per head of population, together with the average standard of living, were the measure of national efficiency; and those nations would lead that were economically most efficient. Comparing United States and Great Britain with China and India, the former with high standard of living and high surplus production, therefore economically efficient, had rapidly raised their war power to the level of that of the Central Powers; the latter, with immense

population, but lacking economic power, had contributed comparatively little to the war.

He then proceeded to show that drink reduced efficiency. Taking a man's career from 20 years of age to 65, to take one sixpenny drink per day meant a loss of £1450, allowing interest at 5 per cent. The same sixpence per day saved till the age of 25 and then invested at 10 per cent.—a rate easily earned—would produce £6750. Besides the loss of money, there was also the impairing of efficiency through alcohol, consequent reduction of earning power, even supposing that the man never became a drunkard. All employers preferred non-drinkers to drinkers, for nothing undermined character like drink. Even a slight reduction in efficiency made all the difference between success and failure; and this statement the speaker proved by actual figures. It did not take much drink to cause failure in a business concern, whether through one man in a responsible position destroying by his drunken habits the efficiency of the staff under him, or through a small proportion of the staff drinking to excess, while the remainder, and the head, were capable and efficient.

Capital accumulating at 5 per cent. doubled itself in 14 years, though, as a matter of fact, surpluses did not increase so rapidly because the standard of living tended to rise at the same time, and quite rightly, for this was the very object of production. Therefore the standard of efficiency was continually being raised, and any nation that wished to lead must keep on advancing. Canada and the United States had thrown off the drink incubus, completely or to a great extent, and they were progressing by leaps and bounds. It would be impossible for New Zealand to keep up in the race hampered as she was by loss of efficiency through drink.

Mr Hunt dealt next with the revenue question. The revenue from drink was approximately £1,100,000 per annum, interest and sinking fund on sum proposed as compensation was £300,000. People asked, how could the country afford to lose this? It was absurd to argue that the country must go on drinking £5,000,000 per annum in order to provide £1,000,000, even without taking account of the loss of efficiency caused through consuming this liquor. The money, if not spent

on drink, would either be spent on other things or invested, and in either case would be liable to taxation—if invested, would come up for taxation, not once only, but every year. Quoting actual figures, Mr Hunt showed how the increased revenue obtained during the last four years—an increase from 12 millions odd to 20 millions odd—had nearly all been obtained from stamp and death duties, railways, post and telegraph, land tax, and income tax. The bulk of it had been taken from the pockets of the wealthy. Men in charge of big business and financial concerns were supporting the movement to abolish liquor, because they knew this would not mean increased taxation, but larger incomes for everybody, and therefore a large increase in the number of taxable incomes. The proposal made to the Trade by the Efficiency Board's recommendation was a fair one, and the money required for it, even if it were five or six millions, would be a mere nothing to the country, for the saving in the cost of the drink, and in the inefficiency that was caused by drink—crime, lunacy, poverty, and distress, etc.—would pay the whole thing twice over in the first year. The speaker appealed to those Prohibitionists who still felt unable to support the recommendation on account of their objection to compensation, not to do anything that might split the party, and perhaps defeat the one proposal that had a reasonable chance of being carried, whereby the whole Traffic could be immediately done away with. The Liquor Party's new proposal for National Ownership was an attempt to split the votes, and prevent any issue at all being carried. But nothing should be submitted to a referendum unless there was a large popular demand for it. If three issues were submitted for referendum, either there ought to be preferential voting, or there should be a second ballot in the event of no issue being carried.

Mr Hunt concluded his telling and convincing address with stating his belief that the result of the present war would be such an access of energy to the world that the progress made in the 20th century would be even greater than that of the 19th.

The next speaker was Mr Milner, Principal of the Waitaki Boys' High School, who pointed out that the demand for prohibition of the Liquor