

MR JAMES SIMPSON, OF CANADA, ON STATE OWNERSHIP.

It was a telling address that Mr Simpson delivered in the Town Hall on Friday evening, October 25th, on the occasion of the Alliance Conference, held in Wellington. His argument was clear and logical, and briefly stated was this: Every department of the Government, directly or indirectly, is affected by, or is compelled to make regulations against, the Liquor Traffic; therefore the Government cannot with any consistency become the manufacturer or supplier or vendor of liquor. Treating then the principal departments in turn, he showed in what special ways each was affected by the question, drawing illustrations from his own wide and varied experience. Having filled various public positions in connection with education and the industrial world, he had made it his first duty to see that the best all-round development was made possible for the children. Statistics showed that the mentally defective were chiefly the children of drinking parents, and that taking intoxicating liquors reduced the intellectual powers. Careful investigation in Austria, where children were in the habit of drinking wine and beer, etc., had shown that only 42 per cent. of such children qualified for scholarships; of those who were "habitual occasional" drinkers, only 32 per cent. qualified; and of those who drank once a day or twice a day, the percentage dropped to 29 and 25 respectively. There was now in the Dominion of Canada a most efficient medical examination of children to ascertain their fitness for assimilating knowledge. Moreover, in all the schools Scientific Temperance was taught, and this had been a great contributing factor to the success of Prohibition. Children ought to know the nature and character of alcohol, ranking as it does with opium, morphine, and cocaine, three of the deadliest drugs known. They ought to be taught about their bodies and the effect that alcohol has on the various organs, and especially on the brain. The New Zealand Government has done something in this direction; how then could it consistently become the manufacturer of so dangerous a poison?

The Health Department, recognising that preventive measures were

safer and better than curative, had no hesitation in curtailing the liberty of the subject where necessary in the interest of health. In Canada war was waged against the fly and the mosquito as carriers of disease—witness what was done in the Panama Canal zone—against dirty yards and footpaths. In the same way, in Toronto, a monthly health bulletin was issued advising abstinence from intoxicating drinks; while in every part of the world it was being recognised that alcohol had more than anything else to do with the prevalence of venereal disease. How could any Government that was endeavouring to maintain the standard of health among the people, go in for the manufacture of that which was recognised as a deadly menace to the health of its citizens?

Turning next to the Department of Justice, which has for its aim to minimise crime, statistics had been brought forward times without number proving that by far the greater proportion of crime was due, directly or indirectly, to Drink. A large percentage of divorce cases, alike in New Zealand and in America, had their origin in this evil. On the other hand, everywhere restriction of drinking had led to reduction in crime. If, then, the direct business of the Government was to promote the prosperity, the health, and the morality of the people, how could it have anything to do with a business which is admitted to have the very opposite tendency?

Look at the regulations made by the Defence Department; the dry canteens, the anti-shouting law, and the latest effort for the protection of the returning soldiers, the closing of the hotel bars on the days when transports arrive with troops. Surely a Government that had done all this for the purpose of safeguarding its soldiers could not so far stultify its action as to become owner of the industry that rendered these regulations necessary. In America they had gone much further. In U.S.A., it was a crime to give or sell liquor to a soldier, and in Canada newspapers were forbidden to publish liquor advertisements. There were many facts proving that alcohol retarded the recovery of wounded soldiers; indeed, had been sometimes responsible for their death.

The speaker proceeded to give various illustrations of tragedies resulting from the Drink Traffic. A woman spending all her military pay on liquor, till one day the house caught fire during one of her drinking bouts, and her three little children were burnt to death; a Canadian boy, who had come from a dry camp, but falling a victim to the drink habit, died a drunkard's death in a London street with a harlot by his side.

Recently the lecturer had had occasion to travel on one of the great Atlantic liners, and observed the precautions taken, the captain scarcely sleeping during the six days of anxiety, the 60 different watchers on the look-out for submarines, the care taken to prevent a ray of light escaping—yet with all this an open bar on the steamer, and one night a drunken man fell in a doorway so as to keep the door open, thus exposing the whole ship, with its hundreds of passengers and crew, to the risk of getting torpedoed.

One most important Department was Public Works and Railways. In America, it was now usual for employers to enquire as to the drinking habits of those who seek employment, for they recognise that it was a question not merely of morals, but also of economics. Similarly all the great Labour organisations agreed that those who drink should not get the same benefits in the sick and other funds as those who were abstainers.

In face of all this it was impossible that any State should, with advantage to itself, take up the work of manufacturing and selling alcohol. A commodity that shortened life and interfered with insurance risks, and particularly New Zealand, a State that had already gone so far in the direction of Life, Fire, and Accident Insurance.

The financial aspect of Prohibition had received great attention in America, and everywhere investigation showed that it was a splendid success. Taking one striking instance from Toronto. It was decided, at the beginning of the war, to insure every boy who enlisted for 1000 dollars. As there were 75,000, it was expected that at the end of 1917 five million dollars would be required to meet the insurance, and it was proposed to issue debentures; but it was found the increase in revenue had