

# The White Ribbon

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## STATE CONTROL OF THE LIQUOR TRAFFIC.

(By Jessis Mackay—a paper read at Convention).

### STATE CONTROL IN NORWAY AND SWEDEN.

"You cannot make a people sober by Act of Parliament." "Long and hard use has given this saying the worn look of a George III. half-crown. Of late, a counter belief has assumed as worn a character though it is seldom stated in its naked force:—"You can change Cabinet Ministers and policemen into angels by turning License into State Control."

On this and no other ground depends the whole State Control argument—the vision of a beautified Minister flourishing a lean, saintly budget—a seraphic policeman hunting like a lynx the misdemeanors of the Government that pays him, and a pious, patient people taking its daily drink when and where the Government directs. Recurrently, every three years this vision pressed upon us—a vision of dewy virginal freshness, untried, untested.

But stay! Is State Control indeed so young? Mr John Vale, of Melbourne, who has made this subject a world-embracing study, tells us it is very old. William E. Johnson, the historian of the South Carolina and Russian experiments, states that public control is as old as King Hammurabi, who reigned 4,000 years ago. Countless systems of control have been tried during 40 centuries.

"The net result," he says, "is that the consumption of alcoholic liquors

is greater than at any time in the world's history."

As State Controllers will not tell us the history of State Control, let us examine it briefly ourselves, taking it up where it begins to touch institutions and conditions like our own.

The record of the Gothenburg system in Sweden, now dying in execration, is the finished story of Corporate Control.

Prohibition is not the experiment of a day. The strong Nordic spirit of Scandinavia came to it a century before America dreamed of it. The quiet, happy, prosperous condition of Sweden in 1775, under prohibition, was admirably recorded by contemporary writers. But the thrifty country got an unthrifty King, Gustavus III., who to refill an empty treasury, forced a Government brandy monopoly on his people. Drink shops were established, drinking songs composed to order, and congregations lured, almost dragooned, to the royal taverns after Church. Sweden, once the most sober, was soon the most drunken nation in Europe. In due course the short-lived boom was followed by bankruptcy. The monopoly was dropped, but that did not check the engendered appetite of the Swedes. Domestic distillation was legalised. In 1899 a population of 2,855,000 paid license fees on 173, 124 spirit stills. Physical degeneration set in. In 1854 a Parliamentary report passionately declared the very existence of the people to be at stake.

In 1855, amid a religious revival, a temperance crusade secured Local Option and abolished private distil-

ling. The number of licenses was fixed by the municipal rate-payers. Rural districts went solidly for No-License. Sweden was transformed. But heavy spirit-drinking continued in the towns. In Gothenburg, a company was formed to buy up all the city licenses, regulate the trade, and fight strong drink by pushing the sale of beer (as in Canada to-day). But Sweden and Canada have found oil to be no quencher of fire.

Thus, in 1866, was the Gothenburg system born. Led by a respectable brewer, Mr Carnegie, the Company started business on philanthropic lines. Like all public control systems, the Gothenburg scheme was intensely difficult to formulate. A British Commission was told some years later by a citizen that only one man ever understood it, and he had gone mad. The Company soon forgot its philanthropic beginnings as it became more and more battered by the diverse agencies of pressure always restive against liquor control. The Gothenburg managers were paid a fixed salary for the sale of spirits, but allowed a profit on beer. The shareholders received 6 per cent profits. Of the surplus profits, 7/10 per cent went to the city, 2/10 per cent to the Government, and 1/10 per cent to locally organised agriculture. The system loudly trumpeted, spread rapidly. Almost every city in Sweden still has its "Bolag," or liquor company.

I may interpolate here that Norway and Finland both adopted modifications of the Gothenburg system. In Norway the "Bolag," or Company was called the Samlag. The Samlag