

STATE CONTROL OF THE LIQUOR TRAFFIC.

(Paper by Miss Jessie Mackay, at Convention (Continued.)

ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN EXPERIMENTS.

Britain made her single bid for State Control in the Carlisle experiment, on which later Parliaments have been singularly reticent, and which they absolutely refuse to extend.

Carlisle was a quiet little town of fifty thousand inhabitants in 1914, with the usual English drinking rate for its size. In November, 1915, Carlisle was flooded with ten to twelve thousand navvies for munition work. Two to four thousand more were quartered at Gretna, Awnan, and some hamlets, all across the Scottish border, and all making Carlisle their week-end drinking place. Crowded past its limits, bare of up-to-date recreations, and left to its own small police force for protection and order, Carlisle soon became a Bedlam. For eight months the authorities strove to enforce the war-time restrictions on liquor, but the number and violence of the drunken host defied all order. At last the Central Control (of liquor) Board decided to buy up all the licenses in the Carlisle-Awnan area, and regulate the trade itself. Only two large hotels in Carlisle remained out of Board control. The scheme was adopted in June, 1916, but purchase and re-fitting took several months to effect.

Nevertheless Board Control transformed Carlisle, managers on a fixed salary, with a large bonus on food sold, carried out many reforms. Grocer's licenses were abolished, temperance Cafes opened, coffee carts started for night workers, and seventy houses were closed; "off" consumption was forbidden in most houses, purchase of spirits forbidden to minors, Sunday sale of spirits prohibited (to get into line with Scottish law) and beer brought down to war-time strength. These and the war restrictions naturally produced effect, though drunkenness and disorder were very obvious still.

The story of Carlisle's first year under Board Control has been told diversely and at length by two Wesleyan ministers. The Rev. Wilson Stuart, Birmingham, described the failures of the prescribed re-

forms and orgies he had witness during two visits. His pamphlet frankly indicted the Control Board for bad faith and pushing sales of liquor without food. The Rev. G. Bramwell Evans, resident in Carlisle, defended the Board's actions during the difficult time of transition. It is useless now to dwell on the details of one troubled war year, and on the circumstances surrounding a change so drastic. It hardly matters now on what date the navvies were drafted away, or when munition girls took their place.

What concerns us is the present state of Carlisle, restored to tranquillity, but transferred, on the dissolution of the Central Board, to the control of the Home Office. Could the operation of State Control in this sleepy little English town, inland and industrial, justify the sky-rending laudations of liquor advocates, anxious to claim at least on State Control success, and so delay the onward march of Prohibition.

Undoubtedly, Carlisle, like all publicly controlled areas, has not failed to make considerable revenue for its size. The authorities dared not publish the enormous profits of the first year. Later balance sheets have proved that some one is still handsomely keeping up sales. As there is no greater show of drunkenness than in other towns of like size and character, the natural inference is that the respectable bars have widened the area of production. License, broadly speaking, stands for man's drinking; State Control, invariably for family drinking. Young people meet alcohol in the restaurants and acquire the taste.

How liquor is distributed in Carlisle's State bars (there are several ordinary hotels there) is only known to the Home Office. Whatever virtues State Control may possess, they are not democratic virtues; it is of necessity a bureaucracy. But Carlisle's inebriation statistics shatter the the fallacy that drinking has been reduced there. It has been shown that out of eighty-four boroughs including London, Carlisle, for its size, has the lowest number of licenses. So far so good. But out of seventy-eight of these boroughs; including such busy centres as Leeds, Wigan, and Burton-on-Trent, Carlisle for its population has the most convictions for drunkenness.

I may here offer for what they are worth some personal impressions of a two day's visit to Carlisle in April, 1922. The town was as orderly and quiet as others of its size I had met. Many people seemed unaware they were under a special dispensation. The Mayor, then absent, was favourable to the change, they said. Other leading men citizens consulted were uniformly favourable, including the Free Church Clergy, who remembered the bad old days. The police were pleased with the new regime. But praise ceased when I got to bedrock with the temperance women of the town. They are still less satisfied, I read, to-day. The church deaconesses, they said, did not like the growing results of the women's bars as touching young persons and young mothers. The temperance women resented the impossibility of getting information regarding the distribution of liquor from huge lorries parading in the town. Still more, they resented the turning of a large private mansion into a State Hotel in a residential area which vainly protested against its proximity. These points also fretted the older Free Church ministers, otherwise friendly to State Control.

I read the end of the Carlisle experiment most clearly in the faces I saw in the women's bars at night, where neatly-dressed young mothers were taking their first lesson in beer drinking and chatting merrily. "Are the fathers minding the children?" I asked the manageress. "Their bars," she snapped, and again in the face of this woman, sensitive to fathers? They're in the men's her position, and already crossing the border-line, I read the end of Carlisle. Though, in passing the men's bars, nothing orgy-like was to be noticed, how different was this Babel of confused tongues from the healthy, "cubby" noise of young men recreating on athletics and tea. The wild, excited eyes of the young woman fitted well with this. I know where England will find them on the day she needs them, and feel that the resolution passed by the oldest Temperance Society of the town in May, 1924, covers the truth:—

"This Society, after seven years' close observation of State Control in Carlisle, is of the opinion that it has proved a failure . . . We are further of opinion that the system of separ-