

STATE CONTROL OF THE LIQUOR TRAFFIC.

By Miss Jessie Mackay.

(Concluded).

In Australia State Control has been confined to a few isolated districts and a handful of Government hotels. Early in this century the Government took over the liquor trade in Port Darwin and the Northern Territory. The type of population in these regions would have given trouble under any system of control. Disgusting scenes of debauchery were prevalent; money earned was flung away on pay-day; scandal followed scandal, till at last the Federal Government intervened in 1919 with a commission of enquiry. It was found that Port Darwin had put up a world record of liquor expenditure a head amid its small scattered population of 3,000. State Control was abolished in 1920.

Renmark, established as an irrigation settlement by the Chaffey brothers of Mildura, began as a No License area. A public management scheme was adopted in 1897, on petition from residents. Government liquor has a strong hold on the district, in as much as surplus profits are spent on public local objects. The hotel does good business, and makes no pretence of eliminating drunkenness. Very heavy drinking indeed is reported in the settlement, and wives and children of workers go short to feed State profits. Complaints from Renmark are no novelty.

Of various State hotels in Australia, those in Western Australia are most in the public eye. The Government seems disinclined to furnish the definite facts of the trade. Complaints commonly arise during the yearly debate on Estimates; insufficient accommodation in place has been admitted, and private enterprise suggested to help out the deficiency. Commissions have elicited grave scandals as to mixture with inferior liquors and poisonous decoctions. Gwalia in Western Australia enjoys a unique reputation for Sunday picnicking and Sunday drinking. The first manager at Gwalia took in good faith the order not to push liquor. He was dismissed. The new manager handed in £2,537 for the first year and £3,000 for the second. Deaths from drink have been reported. All evidence goes to show the Australian States, like the Canadian, are poor publicans, intent, like private dealers, on bar trade, but cold on accommodation.

But why prolong the squalid record? State, Corporate, Municipal, Trust—whatever form of public control is named—leads to the same results: increase in drinking, social degradation, and the corruption of public life and politics instead of the fresh, invigorating case of reform our foolish Moderates try to present; State Control is an old tallow candle, malodorously guttering out.

From this sorry mess of evidence certain conclusions inevitably emerge. State Control at best throws a brief veil over ugly, familiar facts. These facts soon obtrude again, since State Control rests upon two fallacies. The economic fallacy is that a business can be run by managers sworn to discourage it and substitute some other and less lucrative business for it. The psychological fallacy is that selling what is dangerous and deleterious is only immoral when done by private persons; under State sale the thing becomes safe and healthful. A bomb sold by a bishop still goes off, the bomb does not lose its character as a bomb, but the bishop loses his character as a bishop.

But more is at stake than the relations between buyer and seller. There are inter-social, inter-political and international relations bound up in State Control that are not obvious in private liquor-trading. State Control violently disrupts the relations between governors and governed, administrators of the law and sufferers of the law, even to that pitch where law practically disappears. A trust breeds corruption like carrion in a town; a Liquor Ministry breeds corruption like carrion in a Government. Liquor revenue means political "pull" at all times; how much worse when the Government farms its own revenue?

Economics are entirely against State Control. The cost of enforcing Prohibition is great, but it works on a sliding scale; the first outlay is the worst, for it is killing the source of expense. The cost of enforcing State Control is greater, and the source of expense is being fed till ultimate bankruptcy is the logical conclusion. Contrast America's credible estimate—the normal life of ninety per cent. of law-abiding population—with the seething vice and liquor-induced crime of Quebec and British Columbia.

There is no stability of institutions under State Control. In Russia the vodka monopoly took its huge part in the ill-sowing for revolution. Anarchy waits for a country where the people

have no respect for their Government, and Government has no care for the people. Very bitterly has Britain paid for State Control in India, among other errors.

Lastly, there emerges the inevitable "reductio ad absurdum." State Control never controls. Liquor monopoly never monopolises. No Government or association is ever strong enough to stand up against the liquor pull from without. It has to buy its life by legalising private sales, as Sweden has done; or by collusion with illicit sellers, as Carolina did, and Canada is doing. Must we, then, return to private trading as a way of peace? There is no warrant for that. Private control is not so much fairer than public control. During 40 centuries the trade has never reformed itself. Never has it been richer than now, never better organised, and never more bitterly denounced and despised. There is no place for either a public or a private liquor trade in this wonderful century of ours, which is dreaming and doing for the kingdom amid the worst confusion of politics, the rudest clang of armaments.

Who have laboured for that Kingdom of Righteousness more busily, more unitedly, more hopefully than the women of the White Ribbon? Much has fallen before us; much remains to be fought to a finish. Discouragements are many; the forces of evil are heavily entrenched, but they will fail. The grand old hymn peals down the century:

"By force of arms we nothing can;
Full soon were we downriden;
But for us fights the proper Man
Whom God Himself hath bidden."

CANTERBURY PROVINCIAL CONVENTION.

The Canterbury Provincial Convention is being held in New Brighton on September 14th, 15th and 16th.

Will delegates requiring hospitality forward their names to

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New Brighton.

CORRECTION.

We regret that last month a report of the Auckland District Executive was placed among the Branch Reports as a report of an Auckland Union meeting.