

OF WHAT VALUE IS ALCOHOL TO A NATION?

In 1925, according to the Year Book of the United Kingdom Alliance, the people of the United Kingdom spent £315,000,000 on alcoholic drinks. It was a year of trade depression, nevertheless this vast sum was paid for a useless and even harmful self-indulgence; and there was consequently so much less purchasing power left available for things conducive to a fuller life. During the same year of trade depression the brewery profits were as high as ever, and in some cases higher than ever. The bad effect of alcohol upon workers' steadiness of time-keeping is well brought out by the prolonged recorded experience of Messrs Creed and Co., electrical engineers at Croydon, which was quoted by Mr W. Hamilton Whyte, Director of the School of Economics, Bristol University, in a recent speech reported in the "Alliance News" of December, 1926:—

"Some years before the war that firm decided to employ only total abstainers, and their managing director, Mr F. G. Creed, had published interesting figures with reference to the influence of alcohol on lost time, accidents and output. He said that the average lost time was probably about 10 per cent. in the ordinary engineering trades; at their works it was only a half of 1 per cent. At the outbreak of war, under normal conditions, they were obliged to engage a number of men who were not total abstainers; the average then rose to 5 per cent. But during the period the general average in the trade rose to 15 per cent. Since 1920 pre-war conditions had been re-established in the works, and from 1921 to 1924 the percentage of lost time from all causes had been under 1.75 per cent. They paid to insurance companies 4s 6d in premiums, whereas other firms doing similar work paid 8s 6d."

Mr Whyte also quoted an important statement made by Sir Thomas Oliver in a lecture on "Alcohol in Relation to Industrial Hygiene and Efficiency," delivered to the Royal Society of Arts. The conclusion the lecturer had come to after an impartial survey of the whole question, was as follows:—

"Alcohol does not increase the resistance of the body to disease; too often it paves the way to such diseases, for example, as tuberculosis. When taken

to the point of interfering with the operation of co-ordinating nerve tissues in the brain, alcohol tends to impair efficiency, intellectual and physical, so that no man who has important work to do is acting in the best interests of his work or is doing the best for himself by undertaking it upon alcohol."

Mr Whyte appealed for the setting up of a Royal Commission, whose business would be to investigate results, not to discuss remedies, and who would have power to cover the whole field. Information could be collected and co-ordinated. Many sources could be tapped which at present were inaccessible, and data would be provided as a guide for future action. Some people would say, "Things cannot wait." But he was convinced that such an enquiry, instead of postponing action, would itself be a very powerful means of educating the public and awakening public opinion. There was a feeling abroad that on both sides in this controversy the facts were somewhat coloured, and politicians were only too glad to keep clear of a very tangled, difficult problem. Meanwhile the danger was continuing. This was an age of social enquiry, and the causes of poverty and unemployed were being repeatedly explored. Why hesitate to investigate one of the biggest contributing factors? There was ready all the equipment in machinery and personnel. Let the Government take the initiative.

It may be objected that a considerable proportion of the price paid for alcoholic drinks is absorbed by the Government for public purposes, through the heavy taxation it imposes upon the Trade. But a financial gain to the Government is no adequate compensation to the nation for the damage done to the health, efficiency, and industrial prosperity of the people.—From "Brotherhood," February, 1927.

"When Elihu Root was reminded that the Geneva Protocol of 1924 was dead, he replied: 'Yes; but when delegates from many lands meet and agree upon a thing like that, though the measure be never adopted, the world never thinks exactly the same again.'—From "Peace and Goodwill."

DISTRICT EXECUTIVES.

NORTH CANTERBURY.

April 26th, at 10.30 a.m., in W.C.T.U. Rooms, Manchester Street. Mrs T. E. Taylor (President) presided over representatives from Christchurch, Lyttelton, New Brighton, North Brighton, South Brighton, Oxford, Sefton, Rangiora, Kaiapoi, Sydenham, Spreydon, Riccarton, Springston, Lincoln, Styx, Belfast, and New Brighton Y's.

A letter was read from the Secretary of the "Open-Air Schools' League," asking that a delegate be appointed to represent the Union on the League's Committee. Miss Blackwell appointed.

A vote of sympathy was passed with Mrs Sirret, late President of the Sydenham Union, on her recent sad bereavement; also a vote of appreciation on her past interest in the Union's work.

The report of the Dominion Convention was read by Miss Harband, in the unavoidable absence of Miss Lovell-Smith. It showed that steady progress had been made, and a number of new Branches formed. Plans of work were discussed and decided upon. Twelve Y delegates had attended, and the Convention had proved a great impetus and inspiration to all.

The principal business to come before the Executive after the report was getting the petition forms allotted. Miss Henderson explained the object and working of it, and impressed upon all the importance of getting as many signatures as possible, and the best way to work the country and outlying districts. All the Unions represented took a number of forms, and others will be sent.

The President spoke at some length on the great number of unfinancial members, and emphasised the great need of getting in members' fees as early in the year as possible. A number of suggestions were made, which ought, if carried out, increase the membership at next Convention.

We break new seas to-day---
Our eager keels quest unaccustomed waters,
And, from the vast uncharted waste in front,
The mystic circles leap
To greet our prow with mightiest possibilities.

—Source Unknown.