

THE DRINK TRAFFIC

READ AT THE CATHOLIC CONFERENCE 1891.

An Able Paper, by W. H. Cologan, on the Cause of Temperance. Published by the Catholic Truth Society.

The first subject of this paper consists of two main points: first, "The present evils of the Drink Traffic," and secondly, "The practical remedies that can and ought to be applied." With regard to the first point, the subject deals not with the question of *Drink* but with the *Drink Traffic*, that is to say, the system now in vogue and countenanced by the law of the land of buying and selling intoxicating liquors.

The subject takes for granted that certain "evils of the Drink Traffic" do exist. We have now to inquire what those evils are—that is, as I understand the question, what evils arise from the drink traffic, and then what are their causes? First then, what are the present evils of the drink traffic? Here I must dwell upon the evils arising generally from the use of intoxicating drinks, leaving them afterwards to the drink traffic as their main source.

These evils have been summarized as follows in the report on Intemperance laid before the Belgian Chamber of Representatives by M. Frere Orban, the Minister of Instruction in 1888: "Nine-tenths of the paupers; three-fourths of the criminals; one half of the diseases; one-third of the insanity; three-fourths of the depravity of children; and young people; one-third of the shirewicks. These are the drink results for England as given in that report. They proceed from a careful investigation by a responsible and impartial body of educated men, and the summary may be taken as at least fairly accurate. And though I fully admit that a considerable improvement has been made since the time when that report was issued, yet it is undeniable that even now intemperance is a very prolific source of the crime, the poverty, the insanity, in fact, of all the miseries of the country. Every day, almost, doctors, judges, philanthropists, statesmen, are reminding us to this. I will not permit of going into many details, but two of the points referred to merit a closer attention, inasmuch as they greatly affect the welfare of the Catholic Church in this country.

Let us take the Drink Bill, 72, the amount of money spent in intoxicating liquors in the United Kingdom for the past year. It amounts to £139,425,170, exceeding that of the previous year by about £7,250,000. Close on 140 millions spent on intoxicating drink! averaging an expenditure of £3. 13s. per head of the entire population, including those, whether infants or adults, who never touch such drinks, and £18 5s. per family of five persons. The amount is one-twelfth of the income of the population; it exceeds by far the amount expended in any other article of consumption. Compare with this 140 millions, the amount spent in the support of churches and benevolent institutions of all creeds—18 millions!

One-twelfth of the entire income is spent in the purchase and consumption of intoxicating drinks. But wealth is not distributed equally; the expenditure of a certain sum is not felt by all classes alike. The loss of the £18 5s. apportioned as the share of each family in this matter is not perceived in the house of the millionaire, but it may be at least one-fourth of the income of the ordinary artisan, one half that of the agricultural labourer. And it is very noteworthy that of the 140 millions, no less than 114 millions (in round number) have been spent in drink mostly used by the working classes and the poor, viz., British spirits, such as gin, and beer, besides the large amount spent in rum.

Now if we estimate the proportion of the expenditure in drink by Catholics of Great Britain—that proportion being calculated according to their ratio to the population—the sum will amount to about six and a half millions sterling; a rough calculation, but sufficient for our purpose. Last year Canon Murnane in his paper on the Temperance Movement, speaking of a mission of 10,000 people, stated that they were spending £25,000 to £30,000 a year in

drink. Is this an exaggeration? I believe it to be under rather than over the mark.

Of this six and a half millions, deduct what may be conceded for purpose of health, refreshment, or pleasure without excess—whatever that may be—there still remains a very large sum, amounting to at least one half, or about three and a quarter millions, which if properly employed would go towards enriching generally the Catholic body, allowing a good margin for works of piety and charity. Not only this, but the large sums which are annually expended in consequence of the want of education, and such, for instance, as the support of what are termed public supply houses, or the expenditure of the police in the way of their duties, the maintenance of the waste of labour and time, and the rest—the greater part of which would be saved, and could be devoted to other purposes. The whole social status of the Catholic body would be raised, the difficulty in providing for priests, churches, schools, would be removed, means for supplying our wants, repairs, and charity purposes would be available, and, even being a poor community, in many respects better off than other denominations, and a count of our poverty—we would be able to stand on a state of prosperity, and we would stop the great drain of our resources in this matter of drink. It is being stated that had the Church but one saloon a year from every Catholic in the country, it would have an ample supplementary salary for its missions and schools. To procure this, one saloon yearly from every Catholic was the aim of Daniel O'Connell in the Catholic Institute. The attempt is now about to be renewed by the Catholic Association. O'Connell failed; if this Catholic Association succeeds, it will be with difficulty, but the public mind with comparative ease has been gathering in year after year, not a saloon per head, but *one saloon per head* of the Catholic body.

But this, the enormous waste of Catholic resources, is not the only evil fruit of the Drink Traffic. There is another evil more pernicious by its effects on souls. It would be useless for me to address external authority, as to the connection between drink and sin, needful to bring forward the numerous declarations of Judges and of statesmen, who within a very recent period have stated that drunkenness is the source of by far the larger part of the crime of the country. We have the solemn declaration of the Hierarchy, read out from the pulpit month after month, that the widespread habit of intemperance is the prolific source of evils which afflict the country. It degrades and destroys the body and soul of innumerable Christians, and is perpetually flaring before the throne of God, most heinous offences against His Majesty. This is the pronouncement of the whole body of the English Hierarchy, and individual Bishops also have given their testimony. The Cardinal Archbishop has written: "Intemperance in intoxicating drinks is a vice that stands head and shoulders above all the vices by which we are afflicted," and the Bishop of Middlebury, commenting on these words, says: "There is not a priest who for ever so short a period has had the care of souls in any of our great centres of population but would be able within his own experience to bear witness to the truth, the appalling truth, contained in the words of the Cardinal Archbishop." Close on a score of years I have been a priest, and never yet have I met with a Catholic whose faith in the Church has been in the least degree shaken by the continuity theory, or who has stayed from Mass on Sundays, or neglected his Easter duties because the high Church Party claim to have valid orders and seven Sacraments; but is there a priest in the country, a brother of St. Vincent de Paul, a Sister of Charity—a worker of any kind amongst the people, who has not known many cases of Catholics falling from virtue and from religion through intemperance? And it is in the public house and gin palaces that the habit of intemperance is for the most part—at all events amongst the poorer classes—acquired; it is in these places and in the licensed drinking and music saloons that is met the fatal company which ruin so many of our people.

It is generally acknowledged that of the boys and girls that leave our elementary schools, a large percentage—lamentably large—are for several years altogether lost to the Church. Whence comes this falling away? Mr. Whitwell in his

evidence before the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the inquiry into the closing of public houses on Sundays, held in 1878, stated that he had visited a large number of the ginshops in London on a Sunday night between 8 and 11 o'clock, and he found that one-third of those present were boys under 20, another third women and girls, and another third men, many of whom were the worse for drink. He also stated that on a certain night, presumably a Sunday, in February of that year, a number of public houses were watched to see how many persons entered. They averaged altogether 1,052, and of those, 687 were men, 220 were women, and 145 children. By "children" he means boys and girls from 10 years of age or four or five, to eleven or twelve; the young men and young women are included among the adults. We need not inquire whether those children and young people were, or were not, to any degree intoxicated. Doubtless many were there, not from choice,—perhaps because they had to accompany their parents, or to bring home a supply of drink. But their mere presence there is an evil. Is the public house or gin shop a fitting place for a young man or young girl? Surely not, and still less for a child. Can we wonder at so many of our youth going to the bad when we know the school they frequent? I do not for a moment imply that the frequenting of the public house is the only source of the diminution of our numbers, but I do maintain that it is one factor, and so influential a factor that it would be folly for us to shut our eyes to it.

And what are the causes that lead to the evils referred to above?

1. The first cause of the evils is the excessive facility for obtaining intoxicating drink, that excessive facility being in itself a danger and a temptation. This cause is twofold. 1st, the excessive number of licensed houses; 2nd, the opening of these houses at times when the people have most money and are least occupied—hence the temptation to drink. The excessive number of houses of various kinds, licensed for the sale of intoxicating drinks, is, in itself, a natural and very fruitful source of evil. The Government of 1872, in the Bill proposed by Mr. Bruce, then Home Secretary, decided, after an exhaustive inquiry, that one public house per thousand of the population in towns, and one per six in the country, would be ample provision. This Bill, if carried, would have reduced the number of licensed houses in England and Wales from about 10,000 to 35,000 or 40,000. Last year the number of licensed houses in England and Wales was 133,462 or one to 188 of the population. In London and other large cities there are many courts and alleys with a public house at each entrance. This means that the inhabitants cannot go in and out of the street or alley without passing the public house, and being subject to temptation. Many of the courts and streets so beset with temptations are inhabited almost wholly by Catholics. This, the alleged excess in the number of licensed houses, is not mere fancy on the part of temperance advocates; it has been admitted by the statesmen of all parties, and has been the basis of the many attempted, but mostly abortive, reforms of the licensing laws.

2. A second abuse whereby the evils of the Drink Traffic arise, is the system of "retail houses," whereby the retail seller is reduced to the position of a servant of the producer, bound so sell his liquor, removable at his will. It is thus in every way to his interest to push the consumption, as far as possible. Some idea of the extent of this system may be formed from the following figures: in London 10,000 licenses are owned by persons who are other than the publicans; in Manchester, the number is 2,054; in Liverpool, 2,008; in Sheffield, 1,102; in Bristol, 893; in Portsmouth, 806; in Norwich, 605; in Salford, 567; in Nottingham, 511; in Hull, 460; in Leicester, 492.

3. A third abuse is the legislative system hitherto in vogue of granting licenses irrespective of the will of the people, or of the supposed requirements of the neighbourhood, looking to the good of the publican—provided that his conduct be satisfactory and his house suitable—rather than to the good of the public.

(Concluded on page 6.)

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