

SOCIAL NEEDS.

SOCIAL NEEDS DIFFER FROM DILETTANTISMS.

A death by burning—that is a dreadful thing. The fires of Ridley and Latimer are reflected down the ages, and the recital is always fresh. It was reserved for the latter half of the nineteenth century to treat the burning of living human beings with practical indifference. The magic words "Company" and "accident" have done it all. Where is the "accident," when possible and even probable dangers are not provided against? A newly made Road, exposed to subsidence, on the lately opened New Brunswick Railway—a high embankment with no parapet—a burning stove, not even locked—a track not closely looked after—a jumping of the engine from the rails—a revolution of the train of cars, and a general holocaust!—such are the elements of the modern disaster; but the grief and shame is, that they should have become normal—stereotyped—always more or less untruthfully described on inquest or through the press, and left from year to year without remedy by legislative provision, or in any other form. This is not civilization, nor will it be so regarded by the historian of the future.

With reference to the late panic and loss of life in the Music Hall in Liverpool, it is suggested that the problem of safe exit from public Halls in case of fire will be partly solved by making the fenestration—in common parlance, window openings—subservient to the purpose of exit by moveable panel-work below the sills, thus making many openings into the surrounding space for those in the body of the Hall. It is simply surprising the architects have not yet developed something of this kind.

The safety-towers and balconies in the Philadelphia Tenement Buildings are exceedingly well arranged, especially in the staircases opening to the air, and not communicating with the interior. We knew an institution in the Do-minion, with solid and elegant towers intended to be fire-proof, where the doors communicating with the interior were actually of wood and the stairs of iron, instead of slate or stone. The building was burned, the iron stairs crumpled up like paper, and property put into the towers for protection was destroyed. Numerous points of exit are the only mechanical security in the case of panic. The moral security is real enough, but hard of attainment.

In Canada the Government has secured for some years past monthly returns of assets and liabilities from all Chartered Banks sufficient in form to satisfy the shareholders and the public of the actual condition and solvency of each institution so reported on; but, as the figures represent large classes of business and give no details, there is of course the possibility of their being sometimes juggled with, and particularly in the matter of a too favourable estimate being put upon certain classes of credits,—so that, in fact, they are included in a wrong column, debts to the bank, which are really of almost nominal value, being made to do duty as good and valuable assets. And again, there may be, as the phrase is "too many eggs in one basket," and yet no glimpse of the fact be given in the official statements; for the good reason, that those statements deal only with the gross totals in each class. The latter danger might be met by the enactment of a positive law restricting the sum loaned, in all forms, to any one firm—whatever danger there might sometimes be of evasion; but the validity or truthfulness of the classifications could best be secured by the plan of a continuous audit, such as exists in Government and some Municipal Treasuries. It is not enough to have these monthly returns. We want to know that they are true; therefore, we need to have them certified. They cannot be certified as true without an inspection involving labour of the daily or continuous kind. Annual audits are seldom really efficient in large concerns. But an audit that does not pretend to report upon the actual current value of the securities is worth nothing at all. A bank Manager is supposed to be controlled by his Board, with their veto power; and this is generally best done when the President has a salary and a special responsibility. But this does not certify the printed returns, and the labour of doing so should devolve upon the auditor. Such an audit would bring with it no dangerous publicity, of which some critics are dreadfully afraid. It would only insist on truth, and tell what ought to be told. The man intrusted with it should be elected at a separate general meeting of the stockholders, and should not in any sense be nominated by the Board of Directors. We have always to trust somebody. Here it would be the Manager, for judgment; the President, for veto, as representing the Board; and the Auditor, for accuracy in returns and certification of values. A bank so worked would have as good a chance as any.

SOBERING SOCIETY.

It is profitable sometimes to ask ourselves what would happen if certain social arrangements were other than they are now. It is particularly desirable to do so in the case of restrictions and regulations supposed to be indispensable to the welfare of society. There are people who regard the body politic as a sort of tub held together by legislative hoops, and who are convinced that if these hoops were removed the tub must fall to pieces. The fact is that during the present generation many hoops have been knocked off, and the tub still remains. It is possible that some others might be struck away without fear of the consequences. On the other hand there are many well-intentioned people who believe in more hoops.

The drinking habits of society are kept constantly before us, and there are many who would put a fresh hoop on this tub. One cannot express surprise at an English judge enlarging recently on the obvious relation between drink and crime, and asserting, with the air of a man who had made a discovery in ethics, or, let us say, with the exultation of Little Jack Horner when he extracted the plum from the pie, that "were England made sober, nearly all the gaols might be closed." This is nothing more than a truism. Two and two usually make four. Profound as this utterance was, the truth it embodied was suspected before.

Drunkenness is admitted on all hands to be the parent of half the crime and more than half the misery in the land. The question is, How is it to be

got rid of? That is the point; and it would be well if something like a reasonable and practical answer could be given to it.

Something has been accomplished. Society a century ago was utterly given up to drinking and hopelessly accustomed to seek a heaven on earth in the exhilarating influence of the bottle. All its enjoyments meant drink. Even its church festivals had no other significance. Whitsun ale was sold at the church doors. Easter was a time of joyous carousing; and the popular figure of Christmas shows him as a red-nosed toper, with the flowing cup in his hand. For centuries it was a canon that no gentleman shirked his drink. He might fall drunk in the midst of his guests, but that was not counted as a demerit. The sin was that he should quit the social board sober. And as those in high places set this example, it was naturally followed by the masses.

That this was a curse must be felt by all right-minded men; but curiously enough, it has remained for us in these later days to raise the standard of sobriety, and to undertake the task of making society, like Falstaff, "forswear sack, and live cleanly." It was a grand undertaking; for a nation is not to be argued or coerced out of the habits of centuries without a mighty effort. To an extent it has been successful, and there may be entertained reasonable hopes of still further progress. That greater progress has not been made is mainly due to the exceedingly impracticable way in which the work has been set about. It began in a fanatic spirit, it has been carried on amidst the strangest incongruities, and to this day the possible and attainable is sacrificed to extreme views, to which it is hopeless to expect that effect will ever be given with anything like uniformity.

To cure men of drunkenness is a noble, salutary, and Christian mission; to endeavour entirely to restrain them from taking drink, is not only Utopian, but perhaps pernicious. That wine, moderately used, is permissible to Christians and to Jews, we believe that no one but a fanatic will deny. If we appeal to reason, does not this tirade against the abuse of a thing vindicate and legitimate its proper use.

Many excellent men believe that until we obtain a total suppression of the sale of all wines and liquors, we never can get true temperance. That is, they say that total abstinence is alone meritorious, and (we quote their own words) the "moderate drinker, who has never exceeded in all his life, is *worse than the most degraded drunkard*." To this we reply, Who are you that accuse your brother? We utterly deny the truth of the assertion. Total abstinence is not possible in a free nation, and even when established as a religious dogma, has failed to produce the benefits which you assert will flow from it. Look to the Mohammedans and Hindoos; are they models of prosperity and virtue? Yet they drink water alone. Look at John Wesley and John Howard, and hundreds of other names on the glory scroll of history; did not they use wine?

Do not attempt too much; total abstinence is a very fine thing, but you can't have a nation of total abstainers, and those who rely on everybody becoming wise enough voluntarily to take the pledge, are as chimerical in their ideas as those who expect a Government, which derives so large a part of its income from the sale of intoxicating drinks, to set about an attempt to make people sober by Act of Parliament.

In this, as in every other case, it is necessary to remove the cause of the evil, if the effect is to be got rid of; and this must be done in a practical fashion. The era of banners and badges has had its day, they have been tried and found to be no more effective in dealing with the great bulk of the evil than was Mrs. Partington's broom in withstanding the inrush of the Atlantic. Something else has now to be tried, and it must be done in a manner consonant with the needs of the case. But it must be set about rightly, and in a fashion different from that with which our hopes have been mocked for the last quarter of a century. The mistake has been in attempting too much. To preach the doctrine of total abstinence, and to hope to enforce it by legal enactments, is simply to invite ridicule and bid for opposition. We shall never be a nation of water-drinkers, that is certain; and it is the height of folly when enthusiasts denounce the partial abstainer as worse than the drunkard. To aim at forcing the whole population into sham Temperance, is to grasp at the shadow whilst losing the substance. What is needed is to convince the people of the desirability of temperate habits, and to give them the opportunity of practising them. The first as an appeal to growing intelligence is not difficult, the second is the practical work to be taken in hand. Those appalled at the drunkenness of the day should consider that all the conditions of modern life, especially in cities is artificial. If we all followed pastoral pursuits, had plenty of fresh air and exercise, wholesome food and pure water, worked reasonable hours, and had fair recreation, kept Nature's hours, and yet had ample sleep, the need for stimulant would hardly arise. But thousands huddled together in large towns enjoy none of these advantages. The air is vitiated. Occupation is for the most part sedentary. Exercise is limited and the blood flows thin and cold. Food is doubtful in quality, and the water frequently poison. Long hours entail wear and tear, which is not made good by sound, protracted sleep. These and like conditions beget a craving for drink, not for its own sake, but for the momentary sense of life and health which follows it. We do not here go into the question whether it is well or ill that such stimulant should be taken—we only say that it is in the nature of things that it should be, and that it always will be, unless the conditions be altered. Can the Legislature alter them. Well, it might do much. It might, at least, break down the monopoly from which so great a portion of the revenue is derived, and so open up the way to a wholesome competition for the supply of the public requirements. What is the use of a Bishop signing the pledge as an example, whilst the Government licenses a saloon at the corner of every street, takes toll from it as a cherished monopoly, and fails to put in force any satisfactory supervision over what is sold. The whole thing is a farce.

What the nation wants to get rid of, is not drinking, but drunkenness. The man who takes his glass of wine or of good ale may be as good a citizen as the total abstainer. What guarantee has he of the quality of what he may obtain at any licensed house? This should be a part of the business of the Government. This would put an end to half the evil. The other half might be met by the temperance people themselves, if they would give up their processions, and badges, and medals, and unite with a will to improve homes, and workshops, and provide comfortable refreshment houses in which innocuous drinks

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