

Temperance Column.

PAPER FOR DISCUSSION BY OUR BRANCHES.

By MR. E. STAFFORD HOWARD, VICE-CHAIRMAN C.E.T.S.

TO influence public opinion is the only way to secure reform, whether Temperance or other. Organised as our Society is now in every diocese, its influence on public opinion should be very powerful if properly exerted. Organised as it should be in every parish in the Kingdom, it would be irresistible.

The causes of intemperance are many. Each must be met on its own ground, each must be attacked in detail, and here, in a score of ways, both sections of the Society can work in hearty co-operation.

Wherever there is a living branch of the C.E.T.S. the battle is going on. Bit by bit the ground is being contested, bit by bit the enemy is falling back. But the progress is slow, the forces of habit, taste, and money-making are not easily dislodged. The brunt of the work often falls upon a few ardent members, here and there, and in a great measure is unmethodical, spasmodic, ebbing here, flowing there, intermittent and irregular.

To bring the full pressure of our organisation to bear effectually upon public opinion, it is very desirable to direct public attention as far as possible simultaneously throughout the country to certain practical and definite reforms.

Many branches, especially in the country, find a difficulty in keeping up their meetings regularly, in getting speakers, in varying the interest of the meetings.

With a view to meet these two requirements the Council at its annual meeting last May passed the following resolution:—"That the Executive be requested by notice, published in THE TEMPERANCE CHRONICLE, to invite attention at the commencement of each quarter of every year to some one pressing and special question relating to Temperance reform, and that all branches be requested to take up such question at one meeting at least during the current quarter, so that important questions may be simultaneously discussed, and public opinion educated upon them."

The Executive Committee, carrying this out, resolved as follows on June 2.—"That it is desirable that children under the age of sixteen should not be served with intoxicating drink in publichouses, whether for themselves or for others, and that our branches be urged to keep this question to the front, with a view of amending the law in the next Parliament."

Whilst the reformation of the intemperate and the removal of the causes of intemperance are very great and integral parts of our work, everyone will probably admit that, on the sound principle that prevention is better than cure, the great hope of ultimate success in the Temperance movement lies in persuading parents to bring up their children as total

abstainers and members of Bands of Hope, and in using every possible means to encourage them to remain so.

Whatever may be the difference of opinion as to legislative interference on behalf of men, there is practically none as to the wisdom and expediency of safeguarding children. Our statute books furnish many instances of such interference, both old and recent. We protect them from long hours of labour; we interfere to prevent their ill-treatment; we compel their attendance at school; we insist on their being vaccinated. But the evils which result from over-work, ill-treatment, ignorance, and disease, are manifestly not greater than those which flow from the one fatal source of intemperance. Surely, then, if we step in by legislation to protect them from the lesser, we shall only be consistent in doing the same in the case of the greater evil.

In "On and Off Duty" for February, 1889, a reliable monthly magazine circulating amongst the police, it was stated that in London alone in the last year, 590 children under 10 years of age were taken up in London in a state of intoxication, 1,500 under 14, and 2,000 under 21. There can be little doubt that many of these poor children were first led astray by being sent for drink to the public-house and then rewarded by a taste of it for themselves, until they acquired a liking for it and began to help themselves, to it when and how they could. It is a common thing for even the most respectable people to send children on such errands. Only the other day, in a parish where active Temperance work is carried on, a very respectable woman occupying the house where the infants' Sunday-school is held, sent a little boy, who happened to come early, to the public house with twopenny to get beer for her husband, and rewarded him with a drink when he came back. It was reported to the mother, who complained to the Vicar. Upon his remonstrating with the woman for her action she was quite surprised that anyone should think it wrong. She seemed to think it quite a natural thing to do. She thinks differently now, but there are thousands who don't think about it at all, and these we must reach and educate to regard the matter in a different light.

Again, a handbill was widely distributed in a district near London announcing that on the following Sunday in June very child fetching beer from a certain publichouse would be presented with a packet of sweets, obviously to stimulate the practice of sending children to get drink, as likely to encourage drinking amongst old and young. Is there not good cause, then, for a combined attack upon this system? We are making great efforts to strengthen our Bands of Hope, to extend Temperance teaching in our schools; and we shall not be doing our duty to the cause we are fighting for unless we get all the protection we can for the children against temptation, whether coming—alas! that it should have to be said—from their own parents, or from anyone else.

This can be done in two ways. (1) By influencing parents; creating a local feeling against the custom, so

that it may come to be condemned. (2) By influencing Parliament to legislate against children under sixteen years of age being served with drink in publichouses. Both these objects can only be secured by public discussion; therefore let our branches throughout the country take the matter up, discuss it at public meetings, pass resolutions about it, address their Parliamentary candidates upon it, and keep it well to the front. An attempt was made to deal with the question in the present Parliament, but the measure was mutilated and rendered of very little use as a protection to children; they can still be sent to buy drink, so long as they do not drink it themselves in the publichouse.

Soon we shall have a new House of Commons. Amidst the many questions raised by party conflict, let us, as neutrals, press this one. Given a righteous cause, a determined band of workers, persevering and enthusiastic in its support public opinion will soon come round in their favour, and Parliament will first listen and then legislate as desired.

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