

STATE CONTROL OF THE LIQUOR TRAFFIC.

(A paper read by Miss Evans at Auckland Convention.)

The seriousness of the drink problem and what appears to be the slow rate of progress towards the elimination of the great national evils caused through alcohol, have led many earnest men and women to think favourably of the idea of State control as a means of getting rid of the worst evils of the Liquor Traffic. The covetousness of the publican is held by some to account for much of the excessive drinking of to-day, and it is hoped that by putting behind the bar a civil servant, in receipt of a fixed salary, instead of a licensed publican, whose profits depend upon the amount of drink he sells, that the quantity of drink sold would be reduced, because the State drink-seller would not push intoxicants upon his customers. In our own country, where there is a strong No-License sentiment abroad, and where such a strong protest against the continuance of the Liquor Traffic has been made so repeatedly at the ballot box, the drink-sellers have been made to think seriously of ways and means of prolonging the life of their trade, and the suggestion has come from that quarter, that to bring about the reform which public sentiment is demanding, the No-License proposal shall be taken off our Statute Books and ballot papers, and that State Control shall be substituted. In other words, that the Government—the people—shall buy out the publican, lock, stock, and barrel, shall compensate him for the loss of his license, and shall undertake to control the sale of intoxicating drink. This proposal would not only rob the temperance reformers of their right to wipe out a traffic that has been such a menace to society, but it would make every No-License voter in the Dominion a partner in the drink business, and in event of a nationalisation we should have our State schools teaching the boys and girls that alcohol was hurtful to the system, and our State hotels teaching our young men and young women that it was alright, because the State provided it. State Control, Municipal Control, or Trust Management of Liquor Shops has never yet succeeded in doing away

with the worst evils of the Liquor Traffic. In Gothenberg they have Trust management, a system of State control, or disinterested management. By its wonderful construction the Traffic was to be effectively controlled and its evil influence checked. By doing away with the element of personal profit; by having the hotels conducted by salaried managers; by refusing to give credit; by selling pure liquors; by keeping food for sale at the establishment; by encouraging the sale of wines and beer instead of spirits, it was hoped to lessen the evils of drink. One of the advertised objects in favour of the system was to wrestle with the problem of pauperism. But what are the results? Why, you will never get a Bolog manager to mention pauperism to-day, for Gothenberg is spending nearly as much in supporting her paupers as she is in supporting her public schools. Pauperism has increased 50 per cent. Latest figures to hand show that there are 12,591 paupers in that city.

During one year Gothenberg had 1600 more arrests for drunkenness than the most drunken American city of similar population. Mr Joseph Malins, who has repeatedly made investigation into this Trust system, says that Gothenberg has produced more convictions for drunkenness in one year than the whole of the hundreds of drink shops in English towns of equal population. Judging by the number of convictions it has produced it is more than five times as drunken as Aberdeen in Scotland, Cardiff in Wales, or Liverpool in England. In one year 1456 persons got drunk at the Company's hotels, 1828 persons were found drunk with a bottle in their pockets, 1938 others were drunk through drinking beer only, and 1661 citizens were so drunk they could not tell where they had got the drink; and besides all this, there were 663 Sunday drunks. Gothenberg is the most drunken city in the Scandinavian peninsula. What has been done in the way of regulating this Traffic? It cannot be regulated, but give it a chance and it will regulate the State. Ask a Bolog manager how many hotels there are in Gothenberg, and he will say 18, and you will afterwards discover that besides these there are 17 or 18 club licenses and seven shops where it is sold by the bottle for consumption off the premises, and 23 licenses let out to publicans; and be-

sides this, 75 privileged licenses under an old law, and three or four other privileged licenses, 65 beer licenses, 25 ordinary beer licenses. There are other beer shops that sell beer by the bottle for consumption at home, and beer is sold at practically every grocery, fruit, provision, and candy store, and every shopkeeper can sell beer for consumption off the premises. It is sold from the brewers' carts as they go about. The railways belong to the Government, and practically every railway station is a beer saloon. Figures go to show that there are about 1000 liquor shops and 843 beer shops in Gothenberg. The Company's shops alone sell 3 5-9 gallons of spirits per head of the population. In reply to an enquiry made by the British Consul, the manageress in one case said, "We sell 1200 gallons of brandy to working men and women on Saturdays, and the daily income is £55." A Swedish statesman, Herr Oskar Eklund, M.P. for Stockholm, says that the Gothenberg system has never become in practice what it is in principle. The disinterested men who founded the Company's hotels soon taught themselves the art of securing their own financial interests. Soon it was arranged that from the large funds placed in the business a high interest was drawn, and high salaries paid to the directors. When attempts have been made in some of our towns to get Sunday closing introduced the managers have opposed the measure. When any proposal to restrict the sale of liquor has been formulated in Parliament the subject matter has generally been sent to the Provincial authorities, and they have remitted it to the managers of the saloons, and so making it almost impossible to get reform. This evidence goes to prove that Gothenberg is not controlling her Liquor Traffic, but that the Liquor Traffic is controlling her. We have another example of disinterested management of the Drink Traffic in the Public House Trust Association at Northumberland, which includes some half-dozen hotels. Earl Grey, in a letter to the "Times," lays down the essential conditions of success as follows:—

1. The Trust houses were to be managed so that only the best drink would be sold.

2. It will not be to the interest of the manager to push the sale of intoxicants, for he will receive no commission on the sale of intoxicants, but