

CONVENTION SERMON.

Preached in the Anglican Church, Ashburton, on Sunday, March 13th, 1921, by Rev. F. Guise Brittan.

Romans 14:21—"It is good neither to eat flesh nor to drink wine nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth."

It was with some slight hesitation that I decided to accept the invitation to address you this morning upon the all-important subject of abstinence from intoxicating drink, and that not from any want of sympathy with the movement, for no sane person can shut his eyes to the evils caused to the community by alcoholic liquors, but because I have not been hitherto identified with what is known as the Prohibition cause, nor have at any time taken any prominent part in any active Temperance movement. None the less am I convinced of the enormous benefit to the society at large of such a Society as is here represented to-day, and am pleased to have the opportunity of expressing this morning my sincere sympathy with the Temperance Society, and to extend a hearty welcome to New Zealand delegates of the Women's Christian Temperance Union.

The whole world just now is in a state of bewilderment and confusion. "The Church of Christ," says the Archbishop of Canterbury, "is now enrolled and banded for active service to a degree hitherto unknown." Never in history have the statesmen of a country had to look out upon so seething and whirling a storm of human needs and rivalries. If these things, as part of the work which God is giving us to do as a people, are to be handled rightly, it must be with His help and backing of us all of us, that is, who believe that there are sacred duties, and that the only source of any victory over these strifes is a spiritual source; and by a spiritual source I mean the combined endeavour of men and women, who look upward as well as downward, who expectantly say their prayers, and who are going in this year that has lately begun to stand shoulder to shoulder, day by day, with the knowledge of the Master's presence and the assurance of the Master's help until the tangles become clearer and evil gives place to good.

Intemperance in drinking may not be as some say, the only evil in the world,

but it is largely this influencing factor of all the others. It is true that there is hardly anything that may not be and is not abused. Gluttonous people are not called upon to give up food altogether. The most innocent amusements may be carried to excess, but they are not required to be abandoned entirely. No, a sane man's attitude to any question of this kind is determined by the nature of the thing and measure of the evil occasioned or attached. As a general rule, it is a pretty safe procedure for a man who wants to do the right thing, who wonders if he should identify himself with any custom or habit, to ask himself, Is the thing essentially evil, or only associated with evil? Is it in itself provocative of that evil? Does the good associated with it out-balance the evil, or the evil the good? Is it reasonably possible to eliminate or reduce the evil until good preponderates. Let us try the use of alcohol as a beverage on these lines fairly and without prejudice, and see where our conclusions will lead us. We need not waste time in discussing or emphasising the enormous evil and misery caused by excessive drinking. It is about us and around us wherever we look. However many may be found to excuse or justify moderate drinking, no one has yet been bold enough to defend drunkenness. It is as the late Judge Denniston called it, "A cancer upon the body politic." Doctors, judges, ministers, merchants, statesmen, all unite their testimony. Said Joseph Chamberlain, himself a moderate drinker and anti-prohibitionist: "If I could take away the excessive use of strong drink in Great Britain, I should change the whole aspect of this country as though some beneficent fairy had waved a magic wand over the land." At the Supreme Court sittings at New Plymouth, some little time ago, the Chief Justice said that at least one-third of the crime in New Zealand could be traced to the drink habit. He thought that the people were dead to all sense of humanity by not stopping heavy drinking. It has been said that New Zealand is one of the most sober countries in the world, and probably it is so. But suppose that in this comparatively sober country we could to-morrow close every drinking place and stop absolutely all use of alcoholics as a beverage, what would it do? If we ask the doctors, they would say: It would reduce disease and lunacy, enormously benefit

child life, and raise the standard of general health. Let us ask the Judges and Magistrates. They say it would so lessen crime that the gaols would be half emptied, and the Magistrates and police left with comparatively little to do. Ask the Charitable Aid Boards. It would reduce real poverty to a negligible quantity. Masterton, we are told, for many years had a Dorcas Society. After a period of No-License, it disbanded and sent the clothes on hand to Wellington, as there was no one to give them to in Masterton. Ask the merchants, and what is their reply? It would wipe out one-third of the bad debts and boom legitimate trade. Is this evil inseparable from the use of alcohol, or will wise laws and right handling of the trade reduce it to a minimum, and result in the moderate and reasonable use of a harmless luxury. Opponents are never tired of representing prohibitionists as emotional fanatics, who, horrified at evil, hastily jumps at the conclusion that the only remedy is to destroy instead of trying to regulate. "There's not a leading prohibitionist to-day," says one of the best known pioneers of the Temperance cause in this country, over fifty years of age who did not start as a regulationist and moral suasionist, not a man who has figured prominently in the movement in New Zealand, from Sir William Fox onward, who did not learn his prohibition convictions from bitter failure in all remedial measures. To-day there are over 700 laws on the British Statute Book for regulating what is still unregulated. The fact is that the evil is in alcohol itself. Granted that scores of thousands of people can use it all their lives and never go to conscious excess, yet that does not alter the fact that it is a drug capable of creating a diseased and irresistible craving for itself in a large percentage of the human family. No one knows whether this weakness attaches to himself or herself until they try the experiment. As one prohibition lecturer is fond of putting it, on the one hand you have the drug alcohol with the power to create this diseased appetite, on the other successive generations of men and women with a large percentage with the weakness that answers to this power. The drinking habit will continue unless you can do one of two things: either take the power out of the drug or the weakness out of that percentage. If you bring