

*The Drink Question in Ireland.*

We had occasion in a recent number to comment upon the superabundance of public-houses in Ireland and on the preposterous power that those who serve the people with strong drink have obtained over their masters. In his recent remarkable book, *Ireland in the New Century*, that very practical patriot, Horace Plunkett, has thrown on the condition of things in the green isle a side-light which is the more illuminating as it comes from a most impartial source. From every page of this book the Vice-President of the Irish Agricultural Department makes it clear that in his opinion want of moral courage, that moral courage which begets self-help, invention, energy, and success, is the bane of his country. Slyly adopting our jargon, he says, "The conclusion has been forced upon me that the Irish mind is suffering from considerable functional derangement, but not, so far as I can discern, from any organic disease." The derangement is asthenia of the moral fibre. For the general treatment of this ailment we must refer to the original work. How it bears upon the drink problem a quotation or two will show. "Our four and a half millions of people, mainly agricultural, have," we are told, "speaking generally, a very low standard of comfort, which they like to attribute to some five or six millions sterling paid as agricultural rent and three millions of alleged over-taxation. They face the situation bravely—and, incidentally, swell the over-taxation—with the help of the thirteen or fourteen millions' worth of alcoholic stimulants which they annually consume." A little further on we find the following statement:—"The indiscriminate granting of [public-house] licences in Ireland, which has resulted in the provision of liquor shops in a proportion to the population larger than is found in any other country, is in itself due mainly to the moral cowardice of magistrates, who do not care to incur local unpopularity by refusing licences for which there is no pretence of any need beyond that of the applicant and his relatives. Not long ago the magistrates of Ireland met in Dublin in order to inaugurate common action in dealing with this scandal. Appropriate resolutions were passed, and much good has already resulted from the meeting, but had the unvarnished truth been admissible, the first, and indeed the only necessary resolution

should have run, 'Resolved that in future we be collectively as brave as we have been individually timid, and that we take heart of grace and carry away from the meeting sufficient strength to do, in the exercise of our functions as the licensing authority, what we have always known to be our plain duty to our country and our God.'

Sir Horace Plunkett's book is dated 1904, and was placed before the reading public in the second month of that year. Only by considering that he is too much absorbed in the cares of his office to take any note of current events can we account for the blazing indiscretion of this last sentence. The Irish magistrates have about as much power of defending themselves in Ireland as the Cherokee Indians have in America. Like the latter they are dispossessed, outnumbered, and unarmed. But what of the Prime Minister of the Government to which Sir Horace Plunkett belongs? Does he deserve no respect, or are his enemies of his own household? On the other hand, if the unvarnished truth be admissible, is it not the plain duty of that high functionary to his country, etc., to recant his recent base submission to the grog-shop interest, and to take heart of grace and be as brave as he has been timid in this question so vitally important to the well-being of the community?

In view of the pledge given to the publicans by Mr. Arthur Balfour last autumn that the powers of refusing licences shall, in the interest of the licencees, be removed from the hands of the magistrates, does Sir Horace Plunkett believe that the extreme of moral cowardice is peculiar to Ireland?

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*Caution Cards.*

The interesting and valuable discussion originated by Dr. Marnan at the last meeting of the South-Western Division is one of many evidences of the good work that the Divisions are performing.

Mechanical routine in the treatment of the most serious danger of mental disease should receive the most stringent criticism in regard to its necessity and the extent of the need.

The primary result of caution cards, as Dr. Marnan points out, is to fix responsibility on the attendant in actual personal