

Forty Years and Not Yet.

By CHARLES BAILEY, Esq.

TWO important temperance anniversaries pointedly emphasize the fact of the extreme slowness of temperance legislative progress. Forty-five years ago—February, 1869—the special committee appointed by the Convocation of Canterbury presented its report of a prolonged investigation into the subject of national intemperance, and, consequent thereon, Convocation memorialized Queen Victoria to take measures to discourage intoxication, and diminish the great moral and social evils resultant therefrom. Two years later, the spring of 1871, a Committee appointed by the Convocation of York pursued a similar inquiry into the extent, causes, and remedies of the curse of national insobriety. Notwithstanding four decades have intervened, scarcely one of the leading recommendations of the reports issued under the ægis of the two Convocations is to-day the law of the land.

The wheels of true progress move slowly. The histories of all great moral movements demonstrate this. For twenty years Granville Sharp and William Wilberforce pleaded and wrought ere the African slave traffic was abolished. Another period of twenty-five years was requisite before the slave himself was freed. Long and wearily the noble Shaftesbury had laboured when success crowned his efforts for factory worker and mine employé. So the movement for emancipation from the thralldom and miseries of intemperance advances at an exceedingly slow pace. Over forty years ago the investigation by the Canterbury Committee clearly revealed the drink evil in its appalling vastness and horrors. Eloquently in 1877 the late Dean Farrar predicted the speedy overthrow of alcoholism's fell power: "The tide of public opinion is rising and rising until I venture to prophesy it shall have risen so high that before another twenty years are over it will have resistlessly

swept away the strong rock of opposing interests, and have utterly overwhelmed under fathoms of national shame and national indignation that sunken reef of vice on which we are now suffering so many a gallant and noble vessel to crash, and to be irremediably shipwrecked." Yet, despite the Committee's revelation and Dean Farrar's prediction, the curse of alcoholism is still with us, with its widespread seductive allurements and appalling horrors.

Prison governors and chaplains, chief constables, asylum superintendents, judges, recorders, coroners, workhouse masters, and like officials responded to the Canterbury Committee's invitation for information. Overwhelming was the proof both of the practically universal prevalence of the curse, and of the dire character of the consequences which everywhere ensued. In the commercial, manufacturing, and agricultural centres, notwithstanding the multiplied efforts of religion and philanthropy, and various counteractive agencies, alcoholism existed "to a frightful extent," and the evils therefrom such as "to defy computation." Thereby prisons, asylums, workhouses, and penitentiaries were filled, and more than by any other cause or complication of causes, endeavours for the people's elevation and welfare frustrated. "No question," declared the Committee, "more *immediately demands* the zeal of our clergy, the attention of our statesmen, the action of our legislators, and the thoughtful aid of our philanthropists." True to-day!

Similar information constrained the York Committee to declare it impossible adequately to represent the baneful effect of alcoholism upon public and private morality. Giving intemperate habits the foremost place in the prolific causes of crime, pauperism, and lunacy, the Committee expressed "an earnest hope that some plan may be devised for abating this gigantic evil"; and "Christian people may be stirred up to co-operate for the removal of that which is the chief hindrance to all social progress, educational development, and material prosperity, and which is also the principal stumbling-block to

the advancement of Christ's kingdom in this great nation." Also true to-day!

For the curtailment and eradication of the curse, many valuable suggestions were made by both Committees. Some were of non-legislative character, and, put into operation, have worked well. Amongst the proposals for Parliamentary action, five were specially important: great reduction of licensed houses throughout the country, reduction in the hours of sale, closing of public-houses on election days, Sunday closing, and some measure of definite local popular control over licensing matters. Recommending "a large diminution in the number of licensed houses," the York Committee cited the statement of a clergyman whose parishioners were principally ironworkers that, though the population had nearly doubled in three and a half years, yet the public-houses being reduced from twenty-one to fourteen, drunkenness and crime had considerably decreased, and the moral atmosphere of the locality greatly improved. "As the ancient and avowed object of licensing the sale of intoxicating liquors is to supply a supposed public want without detriment to the public welfare," said the Canterbury Report, "the issue or renewal of licences should be placed in the hands of the persons most deeply interested and affected—namely, the inhabitants themselves, who are entitled to protection from the injurious consequences of the present system."

Not one of these five recommendations is to-day the law of the land, though an earnest attempt was made to enact most of them in the comprehensive Licensing Bill five years ago. Forty-five years have nearly elapsed since the Convocation of Canterbury memorialized Queen Victoria! Forty-three years since the York Committee commenced its investigation! The only portion of these suggestions enacted is that of Sunday closing for Wales. Public-houses still are open hours longer than proposed then; and still tempt to drunkenness and corruption by their open doors on election days. The total number of licensed houses has been reduced, but the reduction has been by no means of that considerable character urged by the Convoca-

tion Committees. Against this decrease, too, must be placed the marked increase in the number of clubs which sell intoxicants, and the enlargement with additional attractiveness which in numerous instances licensed houses have in recent years undergone. Frequently Sunday closing has received favourable consideration in Parliament, but has not been enacted for England. Accordingly, therefore, open saloons still entice on the Lord's Day from Sunday-school and from worship. No control is yet exercised by the people over the licences in their midst. Unenacted these recommendations, though in 1876 thirteen thousand of the clergy publicly endorsed the recommendations, and Nonconformist leaders and assemblies have frequently done the same.

Certainly disheartening is the retrospective glance along the years of temperance effort, bringing as it does realization of the relatively small legislative progress achieved. Urgent is the need for increased temperance endeavour. The more stupendous the task, the greater must be the resolution to conquer. It is essential that information on the temperance question be scattered broadcast, the people be clearly taught the enormities of the alcohol evil, the conscience of the Christian portion of the nation be deeply stirred, and the religious and temperance forces of the land be concentrated in one solid phalanx to demand that Parliament shall do something speedily and of real value to combat this appalling curse. Though four decades have not brought the leading reforms recommended, the day will assuredly come when these and greater reforms will be enacted, securing alcoholism's complete, and not merely partial, overthrow. Plain and imperative is the call to plead, to educate, agitate, work and pray, that by Heaven's abundant blessing the inauguration of this glorious era of full emancipation from drink thralldom may no longer be unduly delayed.

“O, let all the soul within you
For the truth's sake go abroad.
Strike! let every nerve and sinew
Tell on ages, tell for God.”