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## W.C.T.U. NOTES

### ALCOHOLISM IS A PREVENTABLE DISEASE

Last year "The American Issue," a very commendable kind of American temperance publication, carried a two-installment article by Dr. Hugo Hecht, with the title as above.

Dr. Hecht is, as one would judge straightway, a total abstainer. He is of Czech birth, a graduate of the University of Prague, has written widely in half a dozen languages, and has been since 1942 a naturalized citizen of the United States. He is at present in charge of cancer research at Mt. Sinal Hospital, Cleveland.

Dr. Hecht opens his article with some thinking out loud as to just when this business of calling alcoholism a disease got under way. At any rate the changed attitude generally toward the excessive drinker has come about, and now, says Dr. Hecht, it is "Disease that cannot be controlled by the patient, so what is wrong with getting drunk on every occasion and later every day?" All there is left for us to do is have pity on the drinker and regard him as one more victim of a widespread disease! From that point, Dr. Hecht goes on to examine the meaning of the word "alcoholism." For himself he says, "I call a person an alcoholic who cannot live without regular consumption of alcohol," and very significantly he adds, "It is the same definition as applied to drug addicts." Next, he asks "Why should alcohol not be regarded as a narcotic?"

His answer goes to the very heart of the matter. "Too many vested interests are too influential to admit that alcohol is doing much damage to permit effective measures to cut down the consumption and the profits." Then, Dr. Hecht asks, "If alcoholism is a disease why not treat it as another disease." His answer, in part, is that if alcoholism is a disease it is not like other diseases, since most diseases are caused by germs known or unknown, and "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." And, whenever the cause is known "every effort is made to eliminate this cause and so prevent and suppress the outbreak of the disease." He is particularly emphatic on this point that efforts are not made to prevent alcoholism.

So, there remains but one conclusion about alcoholism if it is a disease, and that is "it is a voluntary, self-inflicted disease whose cause is the consumption of alcohol." If this be the case, why is not the drug curbed as are other forms of narcotics which cause disease. He finds one factor here that is paramount—the money that can

## Named Head of Nat'l Film Board



Dr. Albert W. Trueman (above), president of the University of New Brunswick, has been named commissioner of the National Film Board. He succeeds W. Arthur Irwin. Dr. Trueman has been a member of the film board since 1950 and is a former member of the CBC board of governors.

be made by the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages. Dr. Hecht's words are worth quoting on this point, for again they go to the very heart of the matter: "Imagine the economical importance of alcohol production and business. At the present time nearly nine billion dollars are spent for whisky, beer and wine by the American people. For this purpose a lot of advertising is necessary in newspapers, magazines, broadcasts and by other methods with a cost of one hundred and fifty million dollars per year. Many thousands are employed in the field of production and selling. All these, and the consumers who do not wish to have alcoholism treated like other diseases by prevention, because prevention of alcoholism means total abstinence. There is no better way to prevent people from becoming alcoholics than by abstinence. Abstinence from alcohol means less business. However, it means also less family tragedies, less accidents, less police and court action, less hospital admittance, less unhappy children, less juvenile delinquency, longer and healthier lives, less expense for hospitals, workhouses and prisons, better family life and child care." Dr. Hecht lashes out against the advocates of social drinking, saying "they don't care what happens to the many who cannot control their alcohol consumption." He is sure that much alcoholism has its origin in this form of drinking. The so-called disease is increasing at an alarming rate, 300,000 new cases each year at least, which means NINE MILLION in a generation. Even if a sure cure could be found for alcoholism by medicines, it would be too expensive to carry out, he affirms. He asks, "If this could be put through how many 'cured' alcoholics would fall back, coming overwhelmingly power of advertising, of too many drinking spots all over the country?" The learned physician follows up this statement with a further and more detailed consideration of the economic and social evils due to alcoholism, and again comes back to the previous question, "Why not prevention?"

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