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THE MENACE OF SMOKING

The high purpose of the Crusade for Christ is the reform of the Nation, a new Australia born of the Spirit. That purpose definitely relates both to the individual and the community. Further, it must see the individual from childhood to adulthood as the temple of the living God—body, mind and soul. Whatever, therefore, harmfully affects any of these must be matters for reform. We dare not, if sincere, think otherwise. To that category belongs the alarmingly increasing menace of smoking. It is, undeniably, particularly for the child, the youth, and young adult of both sexes, one of the most harmful and insidious social evils which threatens the community, not only physically, but mentally and spiritually. If we are sincere in waging our Crusade for Christ, the Divine source of all purity, smoking should unquestionably be attacked and vanquished. Will any potential crusader challenge that assertion—smoker or non-smoker? Can he do so, and remain sincere? Many of our young people are concerned about it.

But the challenge goes further—to the men and women, both smokers and non-smokers, of the Methodist Church, who are past the years of young manhood and womanhood. If parents, Christ's challenge is even more pressing, for they are trustees under God of their children and their destiny, both temporal and eternal. There is not one sincere Christian who can challenge that solemn obligation to the Creator. We may ridicule it, as many do where smoking is the issue—they will not where drink is the topic—we may dismiss it with a certain contempt and perhaps a sneer, but the truth stands firm. Every devoted parent knows that this smoking business is a most serious matter, and a deadly menace—in spite of the boast of thou-

sands of its devotees that it has not in any way harmed them! That surely is a purely selfish point of view. But it is worse; it flagrantly begs the question; wilfully denies the facts, and sees the world only as the individual—and that individual the contender. Even bad logic cannot effectively camouflage the truth; assuredly it cannot destroy it. Truth must endure.

And what is the truth from the economist's, or at least the statistician's, point of view? Here are the latest figures from the Commonwealth Statistician. For the year ended June, 1948, the over-all wholesale cost of (1) pipe tobacco, of which 19½ million lbs., or 8,700 tons, were consumed, was more than £23,000,000; (2) of tobacco leaf for cigars, of which 180,000 lbs., or 80 tons, were consumed, was £230,000; and (3) of tobacco for cigarettes, of which over twelve million lbs., or 5,500 tons, were consumed, was £16,000,000.

That is, for 14,300 tons, or 31 million lbs. of tobacco that went up in smoke, Australia paid wholesale thirty-nine million pounds in one year! That is over £100,000 a day! And to what purpose? The consumers, therefore, wantonly and selfishly wasted fifty million pounds on the purchase of tobacco, and for one purpose only: that of self-gratification—sheer, unblushing selfishness.

How do these figures work out for the individual—the seven and a half millions of people of the Commonwealth? The answer is that every single person in Australia averages a consumption of approximately 1½ ounces of tobacco a week at an average cost of two to three shillings a week.

Assuming, however, that thirty per cent. of the total population smoke, the figures work out at not less than four ounces a week at a cost of not less than, say, seven shillings! And how many smokers' bills are less than ten shillings a week? And what is there to show for it—mere dust and smoke and ashes!

A comparison with the expenditure on education is arresting—and to the thoughtful man most disturbing. For New South Wales, with its population of three millions, the cost of education (exclusive of buildings) in 1947 was £6,200,000.

On smoking, New South Wales spent £20,000,000, or more than three times as much—and that twenty million was dead loss to the consumer; no, not dead loss, for it returned dividends in death, disease and deterioration, both in body and mind and, therefore, in spirit.

Again, is it not positively appalling to know that while the Government spends only one penny per day on the education of our children up to the age of 11 or 12, and only one half-penny a day on them in the Secondary Schools, the average smoker spends on his own selfish pleasure one to two shillings a day on smokes.

Where there is no vision the people perish. Here is a wilful, wanton waste—and the returns all negative! The craving (few can deny it) for "soothing" effect of a narcotic; the breaking down of the will (few will sincerely deny that, either) which so often results in the inability to help a weaker brother; and not least, sheer unreasoning economic waste.

Can any true Christian deny that in the over-all view the habit is physically, mentally and morally harmful; that in thousands of instances it weakens the will; that it tends rather to deteriorate than uplift? It is not hard to anticipate the nature of many replies to these questions, but as ambassadors for Christ intent on helping Him to reform the Nation, what replies must we make to Him?

This article was written by Mr. G. Ross-Thomas, C.M.G., B.A., Vice-President of the Christian Anti-Smoking League, and former Director of Education for N.S.W.