

## CURRENT TOPICS.

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**The Alcohol Problem.**—This note is not to discuss the question of the proportion of alcohol constituting a beverage as "intoxicating" nor the sociologic phases, but to point out that the practice of civilized countries of imposing heavy taxes on ethyl hydroxide is one of the most serious interferences with industrial development. Standing next to water as a general solvent, and having solvent powers on a large number of important substances not soluble in water, alcohol now finds extended use in the arts. Although governments have endeavored to release industrial alcohol from the tax burden, yet the only method so far generally adopted—that of incorporating with it ingredients that render it unfit for internal use—is by no means satisfactory. Apart from the uses of alcohol as a solvent, its adaptability as a fuel both directly and in the internal combustion engine opens up a great opportunity. It is of lower energy, weight for weight, than gasoline, but the fire-risk is so much lower and the odor unobjectionable.

The United States Government should institute a comprehensive research with a view of discovering cheap methods of producing alcohol and of devising means by which it can be sold freely for use in everything but beverages. The problems are complicated but they are not unsolvable. One question always presents itself to the law-maker, namely, the loss of revenue that will follow the removal of the tax. The restrictions that are imposed on the manufacture and sale of alcohol are due to the wide-spread opinion that taxes should be raised largely on luxuries, and alcohol has always been regarded as of this type, but apart from the changed conditions that will follow nationwide prohibition, it surely is possible that taxes can be levied so as to be incident on the luxury and not on useful applications. The subject is too extensive to be discussed fully here, but it is well worth careful consideration by those interested in the advancement of the industries.

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**Ash Removal by Suction.** (*Scientific American*, vol. cxx, No. 25, p. 661, June 21, 1919.)—What is virtually a large-sized vacuum cleaner has been delivered to a concern in New York City that specializes in cleaning ash bins of public buildings and large residences, and while the apparatus is experimental because it is now being tested out, the designers feel sure that it will prove to be not only practical and efficient, but will meet with the approval of the general public by minimizing the discomforts and dirt now met with in ash removal by the usual means of dumping the filled galvanized iron containers into open cart bodies.