

THE "MAINE LAW."

This law commends itself by its *thoroughness*. It is not a half and half measure, a milk and water affair. It deals a blow at the very heart of the mischief, lays the axe to the root of this Upas tree beneath whose pestilential shadow every noble and generous impulse is stifled, every plant of paradise blighted, every blossom of promise nipped, every principle of humanity and religion dies. Other expedients have been tried but they have been found wanting. We have our license law, but in its most improved form what does it amount to? It does more evil than good; in many respects it would be better to do away with it altogether. Without it as the public mind came to be enlightened, and the public conscience to be aroused, drink might be outlawed the drinker be branded with infamy and the maker and vendors be regarded as an Ishmael or a Cain. With it, humanly speaking, it is impossible for such results to ensue. The license casts the broad shield of law around the dispensers of this poison, elevates them to the status of government officials, furnishes a convenient pillow on which their consciences may repose and blunts the edge of any appliances that may be brought to bear upon them. They will not judge that to be morally wrong which is pronounced to be legally right, "What business have you to find fault with me for doing this which by your representatives you grant me permission to do? How call me to account for the consequences when you supply me with the cause? Do you not to all intents and purposes lend your sanction to the ends by thus granting the means?" It would be difficult to refute this line of argument. The license law gives an air of respectability to the whole business. Let the Philanthropist go to the tavern and begin to remonstrate with the respected gentleman who, at the head of a regiment of bottles, stands behind the bar. Let the wretched wife come, whose heart through his means has been broken, whose home rendered desolate, whose children clad in rags and steeped in wretchedness, let her plead with him with the importunate earnestness of one whose foot skirts the border of the grave, whose eye is on the judgment seat, not to deal out what Robert Hall fitly called "double distilled damnation" to her husband.

The man will meet all the remonstrances and appeals by pointing significantly to the sign above the door and by waving the license in your face. He has regularly paid for it. He has entered into a contract with the public authorities and is bound to fulfil it. And even supposing the principle upon which our licensing system is based to be consistent and correct is it in point of fact successful? Has it restrained or even regulated the traffic? Let Montreal answer. No. The license laws are as the withs of Samson. It is most difficult to get individuals with moral principles and courage enough to brave the odium connected with giving information in the event of their being violated. And when the information is given it is most difficult to make good the charge and to secure a conviction. It is about as easy to convict a dog of stealing sheep by the testimony of the puppies that ate the carcasses.

And even supposing you get individuals courageous enough to inform and a jury faithful enough to convict, the penalty is comparatively so trivial that the culprit goes forth from the court like the strong man of old and shakes himself the same as before. Will he be kept in when the commission of the crime yields him perhaps ten times more than the amount of the punishment? And so all the other remedial schemes that have been proposed; they have this fundamental failing—they do not meet the emergency. But the law or Maine does, so far as human legislation can; whilst these may lop off some rotten branches; it strikes at the root.

II. This law commends itself by its *consistency*. The system at present existing in our Province, is glaringly inconsistent. It pronounces a thing to be wrong and yet patronises it. You will perceive that the granting of a license in this business, proceeds not on the same grounds as in others. It is not