Wet or Dry ?

By STEPHEN LEACOCK

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THERE can be little doubt that all of North America—or all of it that lies between the Mexicans and the Esquimaux —is going dry. In the United States a few more legislative votes need but be passed and there will be effected an Amendment to the Constitution making the whole republic bone dry. From this there is no return. The door of the beer cellar is locked and the key thrown away. In Canada eight provinces are at the actual moment dry, and the remaining one, Quebec, dries up, unless help is brought to it, early in the spring. The legislation in Canada is, it is true, largely war legislation and requires a further vote to make it final. But there is no sign or organized opposition, outside of the interested trades, no protests from the public, no delegations to Ottawa, no memorials from our learned societies.

There is every prospect that we are about to go dry and stay dry. The moment is therefore fitting for one who thinks that we are making a sad error to voice a few words of regret.

To my mind the strange thing about the prohibition movement is the queer psychology at the back of it. Few people really want it. But nobody cares to say so. Politicians wait in vain for the sign that is not given. Judges on the bench hand out reluctant sentences, wondering what they will do when the stock of wine in their own cellars is exhausted. Lawyers, doctors, professors and merchants sit tamely by awaiting the extinction of their private comfort. The working man watches the vanishing of his glass of beer and wishes that he was a man of influence with power to protest. The man of influence wishes that he were but a plain working man and might utter a protest without fear of injury to his interests. Nor is there, so far as I am aware, a single one of the clergy to stand up and preach a sermon on the wedding feast at Cana of Galilee.

Drunkenness is, of course, a very terrible thing. It has blotted out many a bright young life. It has slowly broken many a vigorous brain down to drivelling senility. It is a fruitful