

THE COMMERCIAL

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The Commercial certainly enjoys a very much
larger circulation among the business community
of the vast region lying between Lake Superior
and the Pacific Coast, than any other paper in Can-
ada, daily or weekly. The Commercial also
reaches the leading wholesale, commission, manu-
facturing and financial houses of Eastern Canada.

WINNIPEG, OCTOBER 8, 1898.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES.

It is proposed to erect a free public library building in Winnipeg. In this age of the world, with popular literature as abundant and as cheap almost as water, the advisability of maintaining expensive public libraries seems open to question. A consulting library of the more expensive class of standard works, such as scientific and technical books, etc., would be a useful thing in any city. Such a library could be maintained at a very moderate cost. A room in the civic building could be set aside for the purpose, and the library could be easily looked after by some one whose time could be partially otherwise employed. It is very doubtful if it is a part of the duty of the city to maintain an expensive public library for the benefit of the consumers of light and very often trashy popular literature. The supplying of works of fiction to a section of the community, seems to be the principal function of the public library. This class of literature is cheap and abundant—practically within the reach of all. Before investing in an expensive public library, it might be well to enquire into the value of the library as at present maintained, to the community as a whole. Possibly it might be discovered that the money could be used in some other way to the better advantage of the community as a whole.

PROHIBITION.

The Prohibition plebiscite has come and gone, and the question is about where it was before the vote was recorded. The result is certainly unsatisfactory to the friends of prohibition, while at the same time it can hardly be satisfying to the anti. The popular will has not been pronounced with emphasis either way. On the parliamentary principle of majorities by constituencies, the prohibitionists have scored a good victory, as they have clear majorities in a large number of constituencies. On the other hand, the total prohibition vote is too small to show clearly what the will of the people is on this question, while there were also large majorities for the opponents of prohibition in some quarters. On the whole, it would appear that prohibition is not practical as a Dominion measure at the present time. It would be useless to attempt to enforce such a radical change in our customs, unless the change were earnestly desired by a large majority of the people. The moral effect of a prohibitory law which does not prohibit would perhaps be more dangerous to society than even a loose license system. In the Maritime provinces, where the prohibition element appears to be quite strong, a combination might be formed to experiment with prohibition within the boundaries of these three provinces. Canada as a whole is evidently not ready for the experiment.

The question of revenue seems to have been one of the leading features presented in opposition to prohibition, during the campaign. Much greater stress was laid upon the revenue question than its importance would warrant. The few million dollars raised from liquor taxes is a comparatively trifling matter. The whole thing in a nut shell is this: It is the people, and not the liquor, who pay the taxes. The people have to make up the revenue in one way or another, whether as a tax on liquor or in some other way. The really important question is, whether or not prohibition is the remedy for intemperance. Many good people believe it is not. On this point there is certainly room for great difference of opinion.

What the effect of the plebiscite vote will be on the temperance sentiment of the country, time alone will develop. Will it lead to the amalgamation of the temperance element on some more moderate policy, or will it tend to further divide them? Temperance people have been considerably divided in the past, between the extreme views of a section who looked to political action, and those who preferred to work on moral and educative lines. The result of the vote will no doubt give a set back to those who favored

working on political lines and with prohibitory measures, but it may not prove a great injury to true temperance sentiment.

THE WHEAT SUPPLY

Every now and again some crank or faddist tries to alarm the world by predicting some pending calamity. Several dates now past, have been set for the end of the world, and thousands of weak minded people have in the past accepted these prognostications of diseased minds. One alleged scientist startles the world with the statement that the dry land is being slowly but surely engulfed by the rising waters of the ocean. Another finds that the temperature is growing colder, so that eventually, some thousands of years hence, we will all be frozen to death. Another computes the time when our fuel supply will be exhausted, which would certainly be an awkward predicament for Canadians at least. If we worried over these things we would be in uncomfortably warm water all the time. Sensible people, however, will attend to their business and give little thought to such predictions, leaving the worrying to the alleged scientists and faddists who propounded the apparently startling problems.

The latest scare crow is the prediction of Sir W. Crookes, president of the British association, who announces that the world's limit of wheat production will be reached by 1921, and a few years later the world will enter the first stage of starvation by reason of the shortage of foodstuffs. With all due deference to the exalted position of Sir W. C., we can hardly take his prediction into serious calculation at the present time. Sir William may have figured the thing down very fine in a highly scientific manner, but in the light of a little horse sense, and the experience the past century or so, his conclusions seem simply nonsensical.

Predictions have been made in the past of impending calamities through shortage of foodstuffs. About 100 years ago T.L. Malthus declared that the time was close at hand when the demand of increasing population would exceed food supply. The good man was so worried over this matter that he proposed that the increase of population should be immediately regulated by legislation. Predictions have been freely made regarding the time when the United States would cease to export foodstuffs, but in spite of these alarming forecasts, the surplus food supply of the country keeps on increasing. From the last crop the United States will have about as large a surplus of grain for export as it ever had before in any one year, and the area sown to winter wheat this fall shows a large increase. In