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The Week,

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TOPICS OF THE WEEK.

A CLOSE scrutiny into the Redistribution Bill of the Ontario Government fails to detect a real grievance in the shape of a Gerrymander. It may be possible to point out an instance or two in which greater numerical equality is not attained. As always happens under redistribution, the Government has taken to itself any balance of advantages which might have been thrown into either scale. This was inevitable, and does not form a subject of serious complaint. The introduction of minority representation, Toronto being the seat of the experiment, after the confessed failure of minority representation in England, will be difficult to defend. Toronto is to form a single constituency with three members, of whom no one will be allowed to vote for more than two, and a third of the votes will be suppressed. This is the worst form of minority representation which it was possible to select. Minority representation as applied in Glasgow and Birmingham does not prevent the Liberals electing all three members; in Toronto one party cannot, under the plan proposed, possibly elect more than two members. One effect will be political stagnation, neither party feeling that it has anything to gain or lose by a contest; but the minority member, as always happens, will be chained to his seat; if he resigned on taking office in the Government he would be defeated, and in case of death the minority would lose the seat. When the bill of 1867 was before Parliament, Mr. Gladstone rightly held that "the principle of Parliamentary representation is that we should recognize each constituency as being in itself an integer, and what they want in this House is to have the prevailing sense of the community." The minority is not without representation; what it does not get in one constituency it gets in another. If the principle of minority representation were applied, in connection with numerical representation, the balance would be so even that a dead-lock would be likely to ensue. What is much better is the French system, under which no candidate can be elected unless he receives an absolute majority of all the votes cast, and if there be no majority under the first ballot, a second takes place. This gives a chance for an independent candidate who may be beaten on the first ballot.

But in the three-cornered constituency, with the right of voting restricted to two candidates, the result is determined in advance, election is reduced to a formality, and political life is smothered out.

OUR simple expression of an opinion that the Licensed Victuallers are justified in the demand which they have made for legal protection against improper influences in Scott Act Elections, similar to that provided in the case of Parliamentary Elections, can hardly have been twisted by any candid reader into an accusation of malpractices brought by us against either party. Nothing is more notorious than the effect of enthusiasm, even honest enthusiasm, in distorting the moral vision and leading men to act upon the principle that the end justifies the means. It is difficult to say what means would not become justifiable in the eyes of a man who had been persuaded by Scott Act lecturers that if the Act were passed prisons and hospitals would be no more. We are aware that this journal has almost alone been guilty of refusing to succumb to the violence of the agitation, and we are perfectly prepared to hear that our course is determined by our desire of pleasing "our patrons in the liquor traffic." There is probably not a journal in the country less beholden to the liquor traffic for its circulation than THE WEEK. We wish to promote temperance; and we believe that, the immemorial habits of mankind almost throughout the world being what they are, the only temperance practically attainable is the moderate use of wholesome, or comparatively wholesome, beverages, such as light wine and beer, which are known to form a regular part of the diet of nations among which drunkenness is extremely rare. It is the proved tendency of the Scott Act, and of other legislation of that class, to put a stop to the use of such beverages as light wine and beer, and practically to drive the people to drinking ardent spirits of the most deleterious kind, at the same time substituting for the regulated hotel or tavern the unlicensed drinking-shop, and teaching citizens to despise the law. To the argument that if Prohibition does not prohibit there can be no claim to compensation, the answer is that Prohibition does prohibit the respectable trade while it fosters the contraband. We are glad to learn that upon this question of compensation Prohibitionists hold themselves open to conviction; it might be imagined that they did not when they propose to treat the Licensed Victualler like a dynamiter or bed-bug, and when they identify his case with that of the slave-dealer, the highwayman, and the brothel-keeper, as they do in pamphlets which they are now distributing by thousands. Drunkenness is bad, but it is not worse than iniquity. Nor do we see how a journal, which professes independence, can better redeem its pledge than by refusing to follow a multitude, however large, when there seems reason to fear that iniquity will be done.

EXCEPTIONAL legislation, interfering with private liberty, can be justified only by extraordinary need. So much, we presume, will be admitted on all hands. It has never been proved, or even deliberately stated, though it is constantly assumed on Scott Act platforms, that the Canadians are a drunken people. Inquiry on this subject, by means of a Royal Commission, has been challenged on behalf of the Licensed Victuallers, and we do not see why the challenge should not be accepted. An Englishman, on coming to Canada, so far from being struck by the prevalence of drunkenness, is agreeably impressed by its absence. There are in our cities drinking places which ought to be, and if the ordinary law were administered with vigour probably might be, suppressed; out of these a drunkard too often is seen to reel. But there is nothing like the scenes which present themselves in the low quarters of British cities, or even in the village ale-houses, and which have led steadfast friends of liberty to doubt whether in that country extraordinary measures might not be required. Such statistics as are available seem to show that Canada instead of being drunken is one of the soberest countries in the world. This, at least, is the result of a comparison of the amount of alcoholic drink consumed here with the amount consumed in the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Holland, Belgium, Denmark, and the United States. It would appear that moral and sanitary opinion, instead of being powerless, and needing to be supplemented by despotic laws and an inquisitorial