

The Commercial

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PROHIBITION IN THE TERRITORIES.

The regulation of the liquor traffic seems to be as much a bugbear to statesmen and politicians on this side of the Atlantic, as ever was that of state churches to those of Great Britain, and indeed there is about the same latitude for bigotry and intolerance within the scope of the one as the other. The liquor regulation question however, cannot be treated in a negative fashion, by placing it outside of the limit of legislation, as is accomplished by a parliamentary measure abolishing a state church. The traffic exists, and must be regulated by law, even when the regulations extend to prohibiting its sale for anything but medicinal purposes.

We too often hear the assertion made that liquor prohibitory laws have proved to be of very little value, if not a mere farce, wherever they have been tried. This is mere unsupported assertion however, as in many parts of this continent the enforcement of a liquor prohibitory law has had a very good effect, and there are still many other places, where it could be successfully put in operation.

But the claim may be safely made that where liquor prohibition has proved a success and public benefit, it has been enforced in accordance with the wishes of the local communities, and therefore carried with it the respect of the law abiding citizens. In plain English this system of leaving the question of liquor license or prohibition to local option has been a very convenient doorway out of the difficulty for statesmen, and it cannot be called a cowardly way of retreat on their part, as in taking such a course, they simply delegate back to the people a portion of the powers conferred by the people upon themselves, and prevent the possibility of legislation being brought into contempt in another.

In our Northwestern Territories we have a system of prohibition in force at present, in the enforcing of which the people of these Territories have never been consulted, and as a natural consequence the law is more brought into contempt and more of a farce there, than in any other portion of the American Continent. The law prohibits the manufacture, sale and even use of intoxicants, and yet it is out-

raged by a system of permit granting, by which liquor has become anything but a scarce commodity in the Territories, and the conviction of those trafficking in it difficult, and of those using it almost impossible. Such a law forced upon a people must naturally bring upon it more or less public contempt, even from those who might be inclined to a reasonable prohibition law. In short it is a settled fact in the minds of political economists generally that liquor prohibition is a question long ago relegated to local option, and the manner of its enforcement in our Territories, is the only instance in which this conviction has not been practically carried out. Why this exception should exist is a mystery, unless to the "wondrously wise" at Ottawa. The last attempt at manufacturing a license bill in that city, which would apply to the whole Dominion, and the miserable failure which that act has since proved to be, should convince even an Ottawa politician of the folly of carrying liquor regulation outside of local option.

But in attempting to introduce any system of local liquor regulation into the Territories great caution must be exercised. This would not have been so necessary had there never been a prohibitory law in force. But that has been in force so many years, and of late has caused so much discontent that a move in the direction of general licensing would now be simply madness. Prohibition in the Territories was at first meant principally to keep liquor out of the reach of Indians, and although the country is now pretty well sprinkled over with good white settlers, we do not believe that liquor would be beyond the reach of the Indian under a general licence system. No, the system of local option is the only safe course to follow, and in granting this the Government at Ottawa should delegate the power only when there is some well organized system of Local Government. The larger incorporated towns of the country would be safe hands in which to entrust such local option. The votes of the *bona fide* residents of such towns might be entrusted to decide the question of license or prohibition, and civic authorities be allowed to manage the details. There can be no reasonable argument against such a course unless it is based upon a mistrust of our fellow citizens in the cities of the Territories, and a belief that they would not use their privilege as conscientiously as

those in the provinces. Such a belief we consider only a matter for ridicule.

The Ottawa Government have utterly failed in enforcing prohibition in the Territories, much less in making prohibitory laws respected there. The "choke the devil in the dark" policy of permit granting through the Lieut.-Governor has proved even a greater failure and a stupid blunder. The compromise of a general ale and beer license system will never work smoothly with a mixed population like that in the Territories. The law which allows the Englishman his ale and the Dutchman his beer, but denies the Scotchman and Irishman their whiskey would be a fruitful cause of discontent. The only way out of the difficulty is a move in the direction of local option in the larger towns, where there exists civic Government capable of handling the question with firmness if necessary.

OVERSTOCKING.

It is a simple matter to carry a cool level head in times of depression, but it takes a man gifted with some of the traits of the philosopher to keep his head so in prosperity. The mercantile man is as a rule best able to do so, and yet no man has more temptations to recklessness than he. Yet there are a few points on which he is very liable to err, and one above all others namely overstocking. There is no fear of the small merchant committing such a blunder during depressed times. The stern impressionless face of the banker who traded on his surplus deposits, when times were easy, gives him no reason to believe that funds beyond what his bare wants demand, can be had there, if indeed he does not find that the bank he deposited in, and from which funds were obtrusively pressed upon him, when he did not want them, has closed its coffers to him entirely; neither does he find the wholesale merchant or manufacturer ready to press him into heavy purchases, and he may even find such men curtailing his supplies and wisely so, in order to keep his line of credit within judicious limits. All these influences are then at work to keep him against overstocking, and many who have had eight or ten years in business, and who started on limited capital can fully comprehend how persuasive these influences are.

But with the return of prosperity every influence which has been at work in curtailing credit becomes reversed, and is a