

whole people? This is the first and fundamental question. In regard to it we find the widest possible divergence of view.

Assuming the question of constitutional and moral right to be settled in the affirmative, the second question, that of practicability, emerges. This is a question of expediency, pure and simple. Can it be shown that it is possible to enforce a prohibitory law, so as to secure its potential blessings? Can this be done in Canada, in the last decade of the nineteenth century? In regard to the unfavourable inferences drawn by many witnesses from the failure of the Scott Act and other attempts at local prohibition, candour compels the admission that they are without special, certainly without conclusive force. It seems strange that the test of experiment should have been needed to show that local prohibition must necessarily be very ineffective, so long as the prohibited and coveted article is accessible on every side. In this case both the manufacture and the general distribution are permitted. It is an attempt to dam the rivulets while fountains and rivers are full and overflowing. The prohibition of manufacture, importation and every form of distribution—save in medicinal quantities through the drug stores—throughout the whole Dominion, would be a very different matter.

It is evident that the question of practicability at this point resolves itself into one of the strength of public sentiment. Given a public opinion sufficiently overwhelming in favor of prohibition and the traffic, if not utterly destroyed, can be reduced to very small and comparatively innocuous dimensions. It will be deprived of respectability, driven into holes and corners. The gilded saloon and the tempting hotel bar will no longer entice the weak and the unwary. But how is the fact whether such a sentiment exists—a fact upon which the whole question of expediency turns—to be ascertained? Hardly by a Royal Commission, which at the best cannot summon one in ten thousand of the population to answer its questions, and can furnish no assurance that those whom it may chance to summon correctly represent the opinions of the masses. And this is prominently a question in which the opinions of the many, not the few, are the determining factors. The Commission may indeed serve to show the existence of so influential a section opposed to prohibitory legislation on the ground either of right or of expediency, as to put the success of such a measure in serious doubt. But it seems pretty clear that nothing short of either a general election, if such were possible, with prohibition as the main issue, or a Dominion plebiscite can settle the antecedent question upon which the possibility of effective prohibition depends.

Mrs. Hannah Day, of Brunswick, Me., died recently in her one hundred and first year.

NOTES ON DANTE.—II.

VITA NUOVA.

The chief of the minor works of Dante are the *Vita Nuova*, the *Convito* and the treatises *De Vulgari Eloquentia* and *De Monarchia*. These works, although of less interest and importance than the *Commedia*, are yet of much significance, and help greatly towards the understanding of his master-work.

The *Vita Nuova* (New Life) was undoubtedly the earliest work of its author. It consists of thirty-two poems, sonnets, canzoni and ballate, as they are severally entitled, introduced by a kind of historical narrative, and followed (in the earlier parts at least) by explanatory notes. The poems range from Dante's eighteenth to his twenty-fifth year. The prose portions were not completed until about 1302.

Some have tried to make out that the "New Life" was simply the early history of the poet, but the general consent of commentators has fixed upon that meaning which is certainly the true one. The new life of Dante was that which was stirred within him by the beauty, purity and gentleness of Beatrice, and which was in later days transfigured and transformed into a higher life by the mystical Beatrice, the Grace of God. Here is one of the difficulties of the book, to separate the real and the ideal, or rather not so much to separate, as to recognize that there is a passing of one into the other in the *Vita*, although in the *Commedia* we leave the physical behind us.

In the exposition of this subject, some have gone so far as to declare that there was no actual Beatrice at all, but that she was first spiritualized, or selected as the type of a spiritual idea. But this is in the highest degree improbable, not only because we have precise names and dates and localities, but because Boccaccio could hardly have been mistaken about a matter of this kind. The only ground for the notion might be found in Dante's use of numbers which can hardly be the real ones in every case. It was the passion of Dante's life to erect a monument worthy of Beatrice and his love; and we might perhaps say that the *Vita Nuova* was consecrated to the real Beatrice and the *Commedia* to the ideal.

Certain facts are tolerably certain. Beatrice was the daughter of Folco Polinari, scarcely a year younger than Dante, who saw her for the first time in 1274 when he was barely nine years of age and she was a little over eight. The second interview with her took place in 1284, ten years later, at which time Beatrice seems to have become the wife of Simon de Bardi. In 1290 Beatrice died at the age of 24. There are obvious difficulties in the way of a satisfactory account of the nature of Dante's love for Beatrice. They were both mere children at their first meeting. As girls and young unmarried women were kept in comparative seclusion they may have had hardly any intercourse during the interval between the two meetings described by Dante. On the latter occasion, as already remarked, she was almost certainly married, so that any love-making in the ordinary sense was out of the question. There can be no reasonable doubt that Dante's feeling for this peerless woman was one of pure devotion free from ordinary passion. Beatrice was to him the ideal of all beauty and excellence, one which must penetrate and pur-

ify all who contemplated and admired it, a model by which all noble and gentle ladies might test and fashion their own character and life.

An excellent account of Dante's first meeting with Beatrice is given by Boccaccio; but, as it is drawn principally from the *Vita Nuova*, it will be better to give the latter, Dante's own account. (Note the use of the number nine.) After a few words introducing the book, he goes on:—"Nine times now since my birth had the heaven of light turned almost to the same point in its orbit, when there first appeared to my eyes the glorious lady of my soul who was called Beatrice by many who knew not wherefore she was so called [*Beata*, the blessed] * * * It was about the beginning of her ninth year that she appeared to me, and at the end of the ninth year that I beheld her. She appeared to me clothed in a most noble color, a subdued and becoming crimson, girt and adorned in a manner suitable to her very youthful age. At that moment, I say truly, the spirit of life which dwells in the most secret chamber of the heart began to tremble with such violence that it showed painfully in the least pulsations, and tremulously spoke these words: '*Ecce Deus fortior me, qui veniens dominabitur mihi*' [Behold a God stronger than I am who shall come to rule over me]. * * * From that time forward, I say that Love held sovereign empire over my soul, which had so suddenly inclined to him; and through the power which my imagination gave him, he began to exercise over me such control and authority that I could not choose but do his pleasure in all things. Oftentimes he enjoined upon me that I should seek to behold this youngest of the angels, wherefore, in my boyhood, I frequently went in search of her; and saw her to be of such noble and praiseworthy deportment, that one might truly say of her those words of the poet Homer, 'She seemeth not the daughter of mortal man, but of God.'"

This was the first meeting; the second is represented by Dante as taking place nine years later. The account is given in the next (the third) chapter or section of the *V. N.* We may note again the prominence of the number nine. "When so many days," he writes, "had passed by, that exactly nine years were completed since the vision of that most noble (*gentilissima*) lady just described, on the last of these days it happened that this admirable lady appeared to me clothed in purest white, between two noble ladies older than herself; and passing along the street she turned her eyes towards that part where I was standing, shy and timid, and by her ineffable courtesy, which is now rewarded in the higher world, saluted me in a manner so gracious that I then seemed to see all the boundaries of human blessedness. The hour in which her most sweet salutation reached me was exactly the ninth of that day, and, as that was the first time that her words had reached my ears, I was taken with such secret sweetness, that, like one intoxicated, I got away from the company I was in, and having recourse to the solitude of my chamber, I set myself down to meditate on this most courteous lady. And as I meditated upon her, a sweet sleep came over me, in which there appeared to me a marvellous vision." It was a vision of love, a lord of fearful aspect yet joyful, who appeared bearing a lady wrapped in a blood-red garment and holding in his hand Dante's heart on