

responsible a position. But that the moral obligation of a pledge can be cancelled by such a process of reasoning is, to say the least, a dangerous ethical doctrine. Premier Fielding's plan is now said to be to obtain an overwhelming popular vote, as he probably can, in favour of abolition, and then ask for constitutional power to carry out the wishes of the people. If the first step is successful, it is not likely that the second will be necessary.

Sir Oliver Mowat's reply to the questions put to him by the delegation from the Prohibition Convention was perhaps as direct and unambiguous as could reasonably have been expected. It is not easy to see how anyone in his position could have given a more definite answer, unless he was prepared to declare either that he would not, under any circumstances, introduce or support a prohibitory law, or that he would at once introduce and pass such a law and take all risks in regard to its constitutionality. To have done the former would have been not only suicidal from a political point of view, but would have argued insincerity on the part of the Government in causing the plebiscite to be taken, for it can hardly be questioned that the taking of the plebiscite was an implied pledge to act, so far as the Government and Legislature might have the power to do so, in accordance with the decision of the people thus expressed. To have done the latter—pledging himself and his colleagues to immediate prohibitory legislation, regardless of the question of jurisdiction, would have been an act of folly, unworthy of a sane administration, unless its members were confident that they were within their constitutional rights in so doing. It would, moreover, have been to commit themselves, with their eyes open, to a course which would almost inevitably have delayed effective action for years, while the constitutional question was being decided, leaving the Province meanwhile exposed to all the evils of free trade in liquors. On the whole, then, we can but wonder that the Opposition should charge Sir Oliver with want of straightforwardness in his written pledge, instead of attacking him on the really vulnerable side, that of the virtual certainty which he probably feels that effective prohibitory legislation does not lie within the powers of the Provincial Assembly. Having this conviction, he could with almost absolute safety give the pledge required, feeling sure that under its conditions he would never be called upon to undertake the very radical legislation in question. We do not, of course, mean to insinuate that he is to blame for the want of a power which the constitution probably does not give him, or that so long as there is uncertainty in regard to the matter, he would have been justified in expressing an opinion unfavorable to the Provincial prerogative.

The meeting of the Ontario Good Roads Association, which took place in this city a few days since, reminds us of a most important reform which is making headway in some of the States of the American Union. We are glad to see it so hopefully introduced into Canada. Though quiet and unostentatious in its methods, the movement is scarcely less closely related, not only to the well-being of the rural populations, but to the progress of national trade and commerce, than many which attract much more attention. The sea is fed by rivers, the rivers by creeks, the creeks by rills and rivulets. Let the rivulets cease to flow and the rivers would soon disappear and even the great ocean decrease in volume. No one can fail to realize the value of great trunk and branch railroads, ocean steamship lines, trans-continental and sub-marine telegraphs, in bringing the markets of the world nearer to our doors. But few stop to remember that all these great arteries of commerce would be useless were they not constantly fed from tens of thousands of local centres of supply, each of which in its turn is dependent upon the tributaries, in the shape of country roads, which radiate from it in all directions. Whatever lessens the toil and expense of conveying farm products to the nearest railway stations, tends directly not only to swell the tide of a country's commerce, internal and external, but to increase the income and improve the position of the farmers themselves. Were it possible by some magic process to transform instantaneously every highway and by-way in the Dominion into a hard, smooth, first-class road for travel and traffic, what a wonderful impulse would be given, not only to agriculture but to every kind of trade and industry. The country would advance in wealth and prosperity by leaps and bounds. Life in the rural districts would be divested of much of its discomfort and hardship. Ease and freedom of social and business intercourse would add immensely to its attractiveness for young and old. The value of his products would be increased to the farmer by so much as the expense of getting them to market was diminished. Farms and other properties, now comparatively worthless, would become valuable, for, as everyone knows, a given distance from a railway station or seaport, or a certain difficulty in reaching these for want of passable roads, renders valueless what would under other conditions be good properties. All, then, must heartily unite in wishing prosperity to all "Good Roads Associations."

The address of M. Casimir-Perier in the French Chamber of Deputies, a few days since, affords a curious instance of the way in which an idea of national honor, genuine or spurious, often leads nations far beyond the bounds which they had set for themselves in enterprises among uncivilized countries. Referring to the disastrous af-

fair near Timbuctoo, in which a French flying column was massacred—of course a surprise by savages is a massacre, while a successful ambushade by civilized troops is a victory—by a band of natives, he explained in effect that the movement which had led to this tragic result was unauthorized; that the Government had, in fact, given instructions some time ago that no military expedition should be undertaken in Africa save with their knowledge and consent. He even said that when the Government had learned of the occupation of Timbuctoo, it had at once telegraphed to the Governor of the French Soudan that the too enterprising general who had taken that step should be ordered back to France as soon as circumstances would permit. Now, however, he went on to say, there could be no question of evacuating Timbuctoo. On the contrary, orders had been sent to strengthen the forces in that place. All this clearly means that the fact that a small body of French troops had met with disaster while engaged in an unauthorized raid had changed the whole policy of the Government. Had the native tribes been pusillanimous or politic enough to have allowed themselves to be beaten with impunity, they would have had their town and territory restored to them, but the fact that they were spirited and cunning enough to inflict a serious loss upon their invaders compels those invaders to persist in the occupation of their country. We do not say that Great Britain or any other country would not have drawn the same conclusion from the same premises, so peculiar and sensitive a thing is national prestige.

The fact that the French troops on the frontier of Sierra Leone recently made a second attack on a body of British troops, taken in connection with the capture of Timbuctoo, suggests that the French commanders in Africa must either be too rashly enterprising to be trusted so far from home, or that they must have in some way obtained strangely erroneous impressions in regard to the kind of enterprise which will commend them to the Government and their fellow countrymen. In either case it is surely time that their impetuosity should be restrained, and their Government will probably be well advised to make an example of some of them, as it proposed to do in the case of Col. Bonnier, had not a swifter fate overtaken him and changed the currents of French feeling and purpose. May it not be that this seeming lack of deliberateness, or self-restraint, or whatever it may be, on the part of French officers in responsible positions abroad, is or illustrates one of the causes why that nation succeeds so poorly in its colonial enterprises, as compared with the English and even with the Germans?

As we write, two events of great political importance are on the eve of taking