

AT THE NICKEL MONDAY.



How to Cure Our Financial Cankers

and Tone of the Emaciated Body Politic.

(By SPECTATOR.)

It is necessary to take a good confident look at the public; but here, just among the look blacker than thunder. There is no use denying the fact that we are in a financial straits. A young country can't manage without looking well at her first steps out. The first supplies physical strength, while the second is a moral advantage that's hard to reckon. The latter I'm willing to do what I can. Former you'll have to consult a plan. The first want (and this point is your best view on) is to get the best of the situation. The gentlemen think it would cure the cankers. The way of finance, if we just want the bankers' view, is to propose the proposal would square in my views. The lives were not all that we'd like them to be.

ULTIMATE END OF GOVERNMENT.

As we have always been under the impression that the ultimate of governing, under a constitutional form of government, was to get the will of the people. In however, it appears, we have been mistaken: that is, to accept the dictum of those who control a certain section of the country. These gentlemen, by their constant action, jointly and severally, have made it the object of government to be in power, and to bend the will of the government to their own purposes. To ordinary minds, it would appear to be a reversal of the order of responsible government.

and were the people a concrete entity, instead of a diffused and dissipated embodiment of power, the latter would soon resent it. But to superior minds (like those to whom I refer) which look at matters and things in a light totally different from that of the people generally, such is not the case. They think the people, as such, are too ignorant to know what they want. This is not in accordance with the fitness of things, nor does it, I am sure, coincide with the views of the present Prime Minister. His business according to the Constitution, and to see that the will of the people has its true and immediate effect in the government of the country. To do otherwise is to place the servants above the masters; the agents above the principals; the effect above and in place of the origin and the cause. There's a public opinion on the track of the political leader (no matter what position he occupies) that will wake him up to a sense of his duty some day, and show him then that while he has imagined the people (the voters) were "fast asleep in the sides of their ships," they were keenly, acutely and momentarily watching him and his political associates, and all that they did; and that they have not been so much mistaken after all.

A PATRIOTIC AND POPULAR LEADER.

Although only a few years have elapsed since the death of Sir William Vallance Whiteway, one of Newfoundland's most patriotic and popular leaders of the past generation, yet his name is now seldom mentioned in the discussion of public affairs. But this is no cause of surprise. The

same may be said of Disraeli, Bright, Gladstone and other great statesmen of their day in the Mother Country. We all suffer because of the absence of such men from the arena of politics. Sir William Whiteway was a safe man at the head of the government. He had character, which some of his successors had not; he put it into his speeches in the House of Assembly and elsewhere. It lurks in his letters—two or three of which are before me at this moment; it exploded in his conversation. You saw it in his face and figure; in his manner of holding himself, in all that he said or did. As to retrenchment of public expenditure, he was always advocating it, not without reason, as subsequent events have shown. The Parliamentary vote he attached the greatest importance to, giving the private citizen a direct interest in the government of the country, and so elevating his own position. In short, Sir William was always occupied with important matters. He practised no reserve with respect to the truth in which he believed; and he never concealed his conviction that the causes he exposed were bound to prevail. He was a doughty fighter, and we cannot but admire his splendid courage and capacity. His thoughts and dreams and courage were all exalted by a faith in the colony that was capable of accomplishing much good. He made himself conversant with the chief questions that agitated the minds of his fellow-citizens, and dealt with them in a way that made him a master in all contemporary matters. He used to say:—"Let us remember that individual virtue can promote social happiness, and that social happiness and peace form the basis of political independence." But Sir William is gone, and it so happens that, since his departure, no ship of state has ever been freighted with more veritable Jonahs than this same unfortunate institution of ours.

THE AVERAGE SHEPHERD OF THE POLITICAL FLOCK.

The average "shepherd of the political flock," these days, is a different type of man altogether. He takes up the crook, not that the sheep may be fed, but that he may never want a warm woollen suit and a joint of mutton. He blows up the flames of political discord for no other reason than that he may thereby handily boil his own pot. I believe there are scores of these mutton-loving shepherds in the colony to-day, and, of these, how many have even the dimmest perception of their immense power, and the duties consequent thereon? Here and there, happily, one. Nine out of every ten labor to impress upon the people the great principles of Tweedledum, and the others preach with equal earnestness the gospel according to Tweedledum. Verily, there is a point where toleration, sinks into sheer baseness and poltroonery!

ARE WE GETTING BETTER OR WORSE?

One of our "City Fathers" remarked to me the other day:—"In view of the criminal statistics for the past year, what is the answer to the questions which rise to one's lips as he reads the Telegram's daily installment of police news? Are we improving or otherwise? Have we more crimes or less crime in proportion to our population? As the result of all our education, church union and extension movement, missionary, Salvation Army and the like, have we been able to make any appreciable diminution in the number of crimes com-



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mitted? He asked these questions, much as a passenger on board a vessel which has sprung a leak comes to the officer who takes soundings from time to time to ascertain whether the pumps are gaining on the water or the water on the pumps. The answer of the judicial statistics is, that slowly and steadily the pumps are gaining on the water, but that there has been nothing like the diminution of crime which superficial observers have been led to infer from a comparison of the prison calendar. A French critic recently commenting, with obvious admiration, on the progress towards the extinction of crime which had been made in England, as evidenced by the prison statistics there, said that in the last few years, or since the close of the World War, there had been such a decrease in crime in the English cities that they were encumbered with empty prisons, and some of those which were occupied were not more than half full. Hence, the natural optimism of many credulous people who, with the evidence of certain facts before them, could not resist the conclusion that we were really making strides towards the millennium. Alas! for the vanity of all mortal things, especially if these things are based upon statistical returns! Let me point out that while the diminution of the prison population is an undeniable fact, it is due, to a much greater extent, to the greater leniency in inflicting punishment than to any widespread improvement on the part of the criminal classes.

BRUTALISING EFFECT OF EXCESSIVE SENTENCES.

As a matter of fact, while the total of the prison population is somewhat diminishing, the number of crimes re-

ported to the police has actually increased. Judges, from whatever cause, seem to have at last wakened to the fact that there is something brutalizing in the excessive sentences which some of their number deal out indiscriminately. Nor is that the only cause of the change. Prisoners formerly sent to the Supreme Court for trial and sentenced to twelve months and upwards, are now often dealt with in the Central District or Police Court, and sentenced to three or six months; and if we look only at sentences of imprisonment, we disregard the cases formerly punished by imprisonment for a month or a week where the sentence is now only a fine or sureties. The effect of the changes in procedure which the Summary Jurisdiction Act introduced was to make punishment more certain and quicker, but less severe; and it is a very old doctrine that quickness and certainty in punishment is more efficacious for the repression of crime than severity of sentence. On the whole, the best criterion of the amount of criminality is the total, not of crimes tried or indicted, but of indictable crimes.

CRIMINALITY AMONG THE YOUNG.

Special attention should, perhaps, be given to the fact that more than one-fourth of the persons convicted of larceny are children under sixteen; and that more than one-third of the convicted burglars are youths between sixteen and twenty-one. It would appear that from sixteen to twenty-one the proportion is much higher than at any other age, and that the proportion declines steadily as life advances. The proportion of women convicted of drunkenness and disorderly conduct is considerably higher than of men convicted of crime. Even for offences of cruelty to children tried summarily, the proportion of women is much less than that of men. The comparatively larger number of women who are criminals in the later periods of life may be due to the fact that women are less influenced by punishment than men. Possibly, however, we should look for the explanation in the fact that some women who, when younger, earn a livelihood in a questionable way, are in later life driven to crime. Several such cases have recently come under my notice.

REMARK MADE IN THE POLICE COURT.

The remark recently made in the Police Court by a certain prominent member of the bar that the law against the use of liquors stimulates to greater violation of the law, and produces an appetite for liquor drinking where it did not exist before, would be easily verifiable if true; but

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upon appeal to the facts of statistical reports of criminal and health records, there is no evidence to sustain it. To say that all prohibition laws are worse than useless, that they have not lessened the sale or consumption of liquors; that free spirits and free sale would increase the horror of the drunkard and decrease the horror of liquor; and by making the one a crime and nuisance, the merits of the other would come into prominence, or, in other words, increase the severity of the punishment of the drunkard, and make the sale of liquor practically free, sounds very tropical to say the least. It would be useless to make any detailed study of statements that will not bear the most casual scrutiny. Reformers and their opponents who battle with each other in a "Donnybrook fair style," striking in all directions, with the wildest dogmatic assertions, reckless of history.

DIFFICULTIES ON BOTH SIDES.

On the one hand, to repeal all restrictive and prohibitory laws and open the door for the free use of rum is to act in opposition to all the facts of observation and experience. On the other hand, to insist that prohibitory laws are the only measures to correct the drink evil, or that high license and local option, are equally powerful as remedies, is to assume a knowledge of alcohol and inebriety that has not been attained. The highest wisdom of to-day demands the facts and reasons for the use of alcohol, and why it should be literally and theoretically the cause of so much loss and peril to the race. All hope for the future solution of these questions must come from accurately observed facts and their teachings, and, like the problems of the stars above us, be determined along lines of scientific inquiry.

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