

The Presbyterian Review.

Vol. X.—No. 42.

TORONTO, APRIL 26, 1894.

\$1.50 per Annum

Who Knows?

Who knows ? God knows : and what He knows
Is well and best,
The darkness hideth not from Him, but glows
Clear as the morning or the evening rose
Of east or west.

Wherefore man's strength is to sit still :
Not wasting care
To antedate to-morrow's good or ill ;
Yet watching meekly, watching with goodwill
Watching to prayer.

Some rising or some setting ray
From east or west
If not to-day, why then another day
Will light each dove upon the homeward way
Safe to her nest.

The Gothenburg System.

BY ALEXANDER MILLER.

BRIEFLY stated, the Gothenburg system is that by which the State retains in its own hands the right of dispensing intoxicating liquors, and restrains any private person from doing so. It is claimed by the advocates of the system that in this way some of the most serious evils attending the traffic as at present conducted will be removed. Good drink will be supplied; inferior and adulterated liquor will be a thing of the past. Intoxicated persons and confirmed drunkards will not be supplied with drink. Liquor sellers having no personal interest to serve, and being merely civil servants, will not use any alluring arts to entice people to drink; and so drunkenness will be materially diminished. These are the grounds on which the friends of the system advocate its adoption. And we may at once admit that would be some improvement on that at present in vogue in our colony. But we do not believe that it is the best or most practical system. We believe, indeed, that it would be a bad thing to have it introduced in our land, for the following reasons:—

(1.) Drunkenness is not abolished by the system; the disease is not cured; it is only at best somewhat alleviated. In Norway and Sweden, where that system has been in operation for about twenty-five years, and where, therefore, there has elapsed plenty of time to show what are the results in this direction, recent statistics show that drunkenness has decreased in Norway by 35 per cent. and in Sweden by 35 per cent., or, taking the average of the two countries, we find that under the operation of this system, after twenty-five years, drunkenness has decreased by about 45 per cent. This means that for every 100 drunkards produced under the old system, 55 are produced under the Gothenburg system. In this colony, according to a low estimate, we have 10,000 drunkards out of a population of a million. Were this system, then, according to the experience of Norway and Sweden, after twenty five years we might expect to have, out of a population of a million and a-half, 8,250 drunkards. Now, we do not think that this is satisfactory, and we do not think that

the system is worth fighting for, from which we can only hope for results such as these.

(2.) We find a serious objection in the fact that by this system the State takes the liquor traffic entirely into its own hands. Some theorists of socialist tendencies see in this a good feature, because they think that the State should distribute all supplies to its people, and they welcome this as an instalment of State socialism. But the wisest of socialist systems, theoretical and practical, make no provision at all for the supply of strong drink to the people, regarding it as a thing for which the people have no need; and so even the most ardent socialist need not feel constrained to go in for the Gothenburg system. Our objection to this feature of the system is twofold. It makes the system highly impracticable because it greatly increases the difficulty of the compensation question when it proposes, not to abolish the liquor traffic entirely, but merely to transfer it from private enterprise to state control. It would thus be necessary to hand over to the publicans a large amount of the people's money before the State could take the traffic into its own hands: and advocates of the system generally recognize this. But further, no one who is opposed to the drink traffic could countenance this system, because under it the State, dispensing liquor to the people, becomes directly responsible for the evils of the traffic. Under this system, as we have seen, strong drink would still produce drunkards, and the people as a whole would become directly responsible for the production of these drunkards. The State would be transformed into a gigantic liquor selling concern, and would incur the woe pronounced upon him that giveth his brother drink. We certainly decline to soil our hands with this evil traffic, and will strenuously object to be saddled with this curse.

(3.) But finally, we object to this system because we believe the establishment of it in our country would effectually block the path of Temperance Reform. It is not an easy stepping-stone to something higher and better; it is likely to be a final resting-place for legislation on the subject. The system, as we have said, has been in operation in Norway and Sweden for over twenty-five years. There is no movement towards further restriction of the traffic in either of these countries; nor is there likely to be. Under this system the State gets a deeper vested interest in the traffic. Its revenues from this tainted source are enormously increased, and it will therefore be all the less likely willingly to let them go. Any movement towards further restriction and extinction of the traffic will therefore become much more difficult.

We believe the liquor traffic is an evil thing, and that its consequences throughout our country are of the most disastrous character. We desire to see it entirely abolished and we cannot, therefore, accept or give any countenance to the Gothenburg system of dealing with the traffic,