

LOCAL OPTION.

Local option laws are so varied in character and method of application as to be difficult of consideration in a general way. They vary from the little township local option in Ontario, the vote brought on only when the people petition for it, to the Massachusetts law, requiring a vote to be taken every year, whether or no. The Ontario fashion has so far proven a harmless kind of an idiosyncrasy, not attended with any particular results of any kind but still allowing of the little pea to rattle around in the tin pail without doing the general community any perceptible harm. The Massachusetts law is certainly a harrassing and vexatious enactment, a relic of the old Puritan spirit, and like the old Blue Laws, designed not so much for the Glory of God as the mortification of His People. In a general way, however, the fate of local option laws seems to be that of larger prohibitive measures—viz., adopted in haste and repented at leisure. In fact, Prohibitionists themselves are divided as to the wisdom of these local option laws. Mr. Axel Gustafson, it will be remembered, denounced them in unmeasured terms, and I have heard others, staunch in the faith, do the same. Other sections of the Prohibition party, again, look upon them as a step in the right direction, but these, I fear, are those who have not had much practical experience of a local option law. I suspect that the opposition of that branch represented by Mr. Gustafson is not so much to the law as to the fact that these little laws demonstrate altogether too clearly what would be the result of a larger measure of Prohibition. However, putting all this aside, the study of local option is neither a very interesting nor a very instructive study. Since the session held in Toronto I have taken the trouble to study somewhat the working of the local option law in Ontario. I doubt whether the law has had any effect in reducing the sale of liquor in those localities which have adopted it. In some localities I know it has not. In one township I am assured that every place that sold before the Act is selling now. The travellers for liquor houses go into these townships just as they did before, and I have seen some of their bills of sales, which is about as good evidence on the subject as one could wish. Business houses do not send travellers where a profitable trade is not to be done. On the other hand, it must be admitted that time sufficient has hardly elapsed to give the law a full trial. In the first years up to 1892 very many of the by-laws were quashed by the Courts, as the official statements which I have with me show.

I would draw attention here to the fact that in these elections, as in all others relating to this question, a large percentage of the vote is not polled. Take the first name on the list, Lanark township; only 191 votes were polled out of 449 on the list.

This year some few municipalities have passed the by-law, but altogether their number is few, the area covered insignificant; they are almost entirely strictly rural municipalities within easy reach of towns or large villages not under the operation of the law, and whether the law is observed or not is of very little importance. I apprehend that the number, even as it is, will decrease rather than increase.

On the other side of the line the working of local option can be studied on a more extended scale. Massachusetts is, of course, the most rigid local option State, and there Cambridge is pointed to as an example of the beneficial workings of the law in that it has voted against licenses for many years. But Cambridge is practically a part of Boston, just as much as is the section of Toronto west of Yonge and north of Queen. In that section there is a population of 35,000 or 40,000 inhabitants who have no licensed hotel, and that without the operation of any law. Somewhat similar is the case of Cote St. Antoine in Montreal. Other towns in Massachusetts vary considerably, adopting license