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**THE PLEBISCITE**

That a plebiscite will be granted by the Dominion Government during the next session of Parliament is now more than probable; that prohibition will be the grand issue before the people is certain. In view of the fact that we claim to voice the interests of the Licensed Victuallers, it may not be out of place for us to call attention—from the very start—to this important question. It is one that may be approached and studied from various stand points. It may be considered from a sentimental, a moral, or a commercial side. We anticipate that the advocates of prohibition will cling, in their zeal, to the sentimental and moral aspects: on our side we intend, in as far as we ever refer to this important matter, to deal with it simply as a business or commercial question. With the earnest advocates of temperance we have no quarrel; we recognize as fully as they do all to dangers and misfortunes that flow from the abuse of intoxicants; we freely grant that it is their privilege and right to use every fair means in checking the evil influences and the deplorable effects of over-indulgence in drink. As long as they seek to awaken the sentiments, sway the moral consciousness, and guide the erring steps of their unfortunate fellow-beings, we consider their work to be praiseworthy and legitimate. But the moment this *legitimate advocacy* of a great cause is carried into the domain of *legitimate commerce*, and to the threatened permanent injury of the latter, it ceases to be sentimental or moral propaganda and becomes a menace to the general prosperity and well-being of the whole country.

Should this plebiscite take place—as we expect it will—we do not believe that the cause of prohibition, as its promoters and advocates now represent it, can possibly triumph. And even supposing the majority of the

votes casts were to be in favor of a general prohibitory law: we doubt very much if that would be an exact expression of the popular will. Much would depend upon the lists adopted for the occasion: the form of the vote: the manner in which the issue would be presented to the electorate: the class of voters franchised; and a dozen other contingencies. There are thousands who might refrain from voting, whose ballots would, if cast, place a very different complexion upon the result.

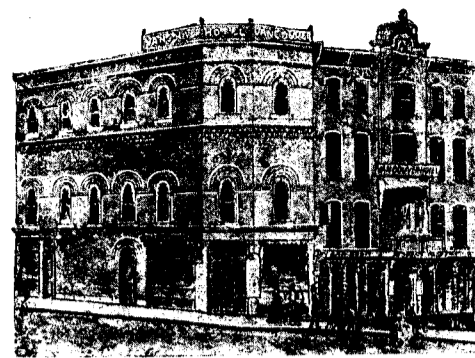
But, supposing the vote to be a fair expression of the popular will, and strongly in favor of general prohibition: then would arise the question of framing a law in accord with that vote. Here again would a great difficulty present itself. Certainly if the advocates of prohibition were permitted to draw up the enactment they would so word it that their most cherished aims might be attained. But the formulating of the law lies with the Parliament of Canada; and we all know how difficult, not to say impossible, it is to secure the passage of a Bill through the House, without submitting to the mutilations, changes, amendments and additions or subtractions that it must undergo in the Committee process. If the law based upon the plebiscite were not in harmony with all the ideas of all the advocates of prohibition, it would be a source of unending turmoil and trouble: if it were—by some miracle—acceptable to each and all of them, it would be positively impracticable.

And again, supposing the prohibition party to have triumphed at the polls, and the Government to bring in a Bill in consequence, and that Bill to finally become law, and a general prohibitory Act to figure upon the statute-page, we would then have to face the all important question of the enforcement of that law. It is one thing to pass a law and another to put that law into force. For the present we will not refer to the immediate blow that such an enactment would deal to the commercial interests of Canada—there is ample time and there may be countless opportunities of setting forth the real and paramount danger that menaces the progress and prosperity of the Dominion at large. Leaving aside the loss of revenue to the Government, the taxation of the people would necessarily have to go up in leaps and bounds. It would be the duty of the Government that prohibited the manufacture, importation and sale of distilled or brewed liquors, to enforce that law, to detect and punish every violation thereof, and to carry to its logical and natural end the legislative expression of the popular will. In order to do so an army of inspectors, informers, spies and secret service employees would be required.

All along the line that divides Canada from the United States a regular Chinese wall of government officialism would have to be constructed: every nook and corner in the Dominion would have to be guarded by the ubiquitous informer. And, in spite of all that, liquor would still be manufactured, brought in, and consumed. The hill-side still would be revived and the days of "moon-

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lighters" would return—even at the close of the enlightened and progressive nineteenth century. The liquors that men would drink, under such a *regime*, would be ten per cent. adulteration, and may be fifty per cent. rank poison. The fiction of a general prohibition would do away with liquor inspection: no law would govern its manufacture—since that manufacture would be in contravention of the general law. The licensed and responsible traders would step down to make way for the unlicensed and irresponsible violators of the great enactment. The private still would replace the inspected manufactory; the smuggler's tactics would shoulder aside the merchant-importer's open trade transactions: and the shebeen, the hidden grogery, and the dive would usurp the domain of the respectable hotel and the duly licensed restaurant.

While thus following out to its inevitable effects this prohibition movement, we do so merely to draw attention to the utter impracticability of the whole crusade. We do not, for one moment, dream that such a plebiscite could ever result in a majority favorable to a general prohibitory law. Yet since there are persons—whose zeal flies away with their natural acumen—who dream of the possibility of such a result, we must assist in quietly awakening them from their nightmare slumber and preventing them from trusting too much to the shifting and dangerous support of such "Castles in the air."

At the D. C. T. W. Convention, in Toronto, Monday, October 26th, a Gentleman named Ramsey, expressed his displeasure that Mr. D. L. Moody, when in Montreal, stayed at the largest whiskey Hotel in Canada. Very unwise of Mr. Moody to do anything of the kind, yet. Our esteemed Governor General, and his Lady, and also most of the Eminent Divines, as well as the Scientific and Learned of every description are wicked enough to put up at the Windsor, when in Montreal.

Evidently they cannot be aware that the Temperance idea is (according to some people) the only proof of virtue in this life. May they read those words of (un) wisdom of Mr. Ramsey and govern themselves accordingly hereafter.

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