

The Licensed Victuallers

THE NEWTOWN POLL.

Dr. McArthur, the Stipendiary Magistrate who heard the petition against the prohibition poll at Newtown (Wellington), has decided that the poll is null and void. Considering that the no-license majority was not a majority of the electors, even those who profess to be believers in the pure principles of democracy cannot object to the Magistrate's decision on the score that injustice is inflicted upon "the people." We are assuming, of course, that the result of the decision will be a return to the status quo ante bellum, and that the bars of Newtown will be open for the sale of virile refreshment after June next. There is, however, a possibility that the result may not mean "continuance," but "no-license." It is the opinion of some lawyers that the failure to take a poll will prevent the issue of new licenses, and the Act certainly states that no licenses shall be granted until a vote of the electors has been taken. The question to be determined, then, is whether a vote taken and declared void is not equal to a vote the other way, or whether if a vote is so declared void, the previous unchallenged poll remains in force. This would be in accordance with the practice usually followed in cases of similar kind, and in accordance with common sense—though that, as we know only too well, is no recommendation in the opinion of the prohibition party. There will be some curious complications, no doubt, but we do not expect to see much fighting. The conditions are not favourable to hostility. Each side believes that the Magistrate's verdict gives it the victory. Neither is likely to take steps to change the position, though the teetotal party has clearly the least to lose. Admitting the liability of the law to ambiguity and the tendency of its interpreters to eccentricity, we venture to affirm that licenses will be issued in Newtown, if not by the freewill of the licensing committee, then by virtue of a mandamus of the Supreme Court.

PROHIBITION "JIM JAMS."

Notwithstanding the crushing facts that have been produced from time to time to show that prohibition does not "prohibit" in those countries where it has had a trial, the teetotal fanatic still comes up smirking with his example from Maine and Kansas, places where the standard of humanity, not to say morality, has sunk to an abnormal depth, the whole being intended to deceive the non-reading, unthinking people of this country and to induce them to vote no-license at the polls, and generally to assist in harassing the people engaged in the lawful calling of licensed victuallers. Some additional facts, from a source so respectable as that of the leading Episcopal bishop in the United States, are to hand which should be placed within reach of the fanatics' dupe, as being calculated to show them what dire results follow interference with the natural customs and habits of mankind. Speaking at a recent American diocesan conference, Bishop Potter presented the following facts:—"In one of the farming districts of the Middle West, where local sentiment has pronounced strongly against any traffic in fermented liquors, it was noticed that drunkenness of a peculiarly violent and insanity-producing kind was largely on the increase among the farm labourers. Ultimately the explanation was found in the fact that the craving for stimulents had led to the tapping from the silos of the vegetable juices of ensilage, which was in a condition of alcoholic ferment, and gave a drink not much less efficacious than fusel oil in maddening stimulation.

"In Vermont, a Prohibition State, Dr. A. P. Grinnel, of Burlington, made a critical investigation of the consumption

of stimulents in that State, chiefly narcotic drugs, and of so-called medicines into which such drugs enter as components of chief efficacy, which is extremely instructive. Only part of the dealers responded to the inquiry; from those that did it was learned that they dispense every month, of morphine, paregoric, or laudanum, what is equivalent to 3,000,000 doses of opium—the standard for a dose being one-eighth grain of morphine, one-half ounce of paregoric, and twenty drops of laudanum. The amount thus reported which by no means covers the total sales, would give a full dose of opium daily for half the population of the State." These are truths that people of moderate views and balanced intellects should ponder over. They see and deplore the evils that result from over-indulgence in liquor, as we all see and deplore them, but they must also see that safety lies in protecting and regulating a legitimate trade, and not in hastening the advent of one that will lower the health, moral and physical, of the whole community.

Trade Topics

In the opinion of the Wanganui "Herald," clubs should be restricted to the same hours as hotels. The two classes of licensed houses must be placed on the same footing as regards the sale of liquor; otherwise, remarks our contemporary, the time is not far distant when public opinion will assert itself and compel the Government to refuse to countenance an unfair competition in the liquor trade.

The total consumption of spirit in Russia for 1900, to which the latest figures refer, was about 28,000,000 vedros (70,000,000 gallons) proof spirit. This yielded the Government just under £46,000,000. The sale of the national drink is now a Government monopoly in Russia, but the new system has, it is stated, not resulted in any decrease of consumption.

The Dunedin District Lodge, I.O.G.T., intend supporting a ticket for the Licensing Committee for the City and Caversham pledged to secure a maximum reduction of licenses and ten o'clock closing. Resolutions were also carried expressing delight at the dismissal of the publicans' petitions against the local option polls at Ashburton, Maitua, Dunedin, Caversham and Waikouaiti and urging Parliament to make bottle licenses subject to the reduction vote.

Provisional returns have been issued of the French vintage in 1902. The total yield is given at 39,943,191 hectolitres of 22 English gallons, a decrease of 18,020,323 hectolitres on 1901, and of 2,797,347 hectolitres on the average of the last ten years. The decrease is attributed to the cold spring, which checked the natural development of the vines, maladies to which the plant is subjected in July and August, and hailstorms and a low temperature in September, during the period of the ripening of the fruit. The low prices to which wine had fallen, from the abundant vintage in 1901, is also stated to have caused growers to economise in the cost of labor in the culture and in the outlay for remedies against disease. The value of the vintage is estimated at 848,461,176f. (£33,935,447). In addition to the French vintage, 3,666,111 hectolitres were produced in Algeria. The leading British wine trade journal, commenting on the trend of business, says:—"The trade in French red wines is appreciably suffering from the competition of Australian wines, which are credited with having diverted about 20 per cent of the British trade in French still wines."

The election this month of the Hawke's Bay Licensing Committee is of great local interest (says the "Telegraph"). Efforts are being made to prevent a contested election by all parties consenting to the present committee being returned unopposed. The present committee consists of the following:—Messrs. Turnbull, S.M. (ex-officio and chairman), C. A. FitzRoy, A. L. D. Fraser, W. Y. Dennett, D. McLeod, and Captain Howard. These gentlemen have been noted during their term of office for their attention to business, and for their impartiality. It is rumored, however, that a Hastings clergyman is a probable candidate in opposition to the present committee.

The question of compensation to owners of hotel property affected by the prohibition vote has formed the subject of a protracted correspondence in the columns of the Dunedin "Star." The teetotal argument is the stale one that there is no property in a license which is simply granted from year to year. To this one correspondent replies:—"Every ordinary person knows perfectly well the licenses have always been granted annually, and quite right too, because it gives the Licensing Bench an opportunity to lecture applicants, if necessary, and perhaps in many cases they have been let down too easy. Surely your correspondent does not imagine investors who have built handsome buildings for the hotel business in this and other large cities in the colony—buildings costing from £10,000 to £40,000—on the off-chance of their license being taken from them in twelve months. We haven't to look altogether on local requirements, but to the travelling public—tourists and commercial travellers; that is, those who have plenty of "foreign" capital to distribute. Evidently your correspondent hasn't his money invested in hotel property; neither has he prospects of being "left," which makes a wonderful difference to those who write—socialistically and otherwise—on the law of confiscation. By the time hotelkeepers who are carrying on a first class business pay their laundry, liquor, the high prices for butchers' meat, poultry, bakers, and other innumerable accounts, there is, in many instances, very little left for them by way of assisting the Income Tax Department."

William Runciman, who was sentenced to twelve months' hard labour at the last sessions of the Supreme Court at Wellington, on several charges of issuing valueless cheques, was brought up at the Wanganui Police Court last week on two similar charges. He was sentenced to three months on each. The accused, who is an educated man, arrived in the colony six months ago, when he deposited £60 in the Auckland Savings Bank. This was all spent in a month. Then the accused travelled about and issued valueless cheques. He stated that he was "sodden with drink" at the time. Every rascal blames the drink. How George Washington managed to keep honest while indulging in his modicum of liquor must ever remain one of the world's mysteries!

The irrepressible John Bourke O'Brien, in an eloquent peroration, appealed to Mr. C. C. Kettle, S.M., at the Wanganui Police Court for protection against what he termed police persecution. He said that he had been the victim of persecution for very many years, and had lost his pension; indeed everything he possessed, except his good character. The police, however, had endeavoured to brand him with disgrace and dishonour, and were filling up the gaols by manufacturing crime. The Magistrate interrupted O'Brien in the middle of his oration, and reminded him that if he had any complaints to make there was a proper way to do so. O'Brien added that he had now joined the temperance cause, and he trusted that the prohibition order which had been issued against him would not deprive him of lecturing on the great temperance cause under the patronage of some of the great temperance societies.—(Wanganui "Herald.")

There is no body of men who are more interested in putting down and destroying the calamitous existence of drunkenness in the country than those who represent the Trade." This is an excerpt from the speech of Mr. Lucas, M.P., in responding to the toast of the Houses of Parliament at the annual dinner of the Portsmouth and Gosport Licensed Victuallers' Association, and he is right. The curse of drunkenness in the public mind is associated with the Trade in general, but it has been repeatedly stated, and with truth, that there is no greater enemy to the licensed victualler than the drunkard, and the Trade will be amongst the first to support any proposals that are calculated to solve "this everlasting problem."

Mr Edward Halliwell, a Bolton brewer, has sent a cheque for £3000 to Mr Alderman Nicholson, the Deputy Mayor, to be distributed as follows:—Bolton Infirmary, £1000; Bolton Workshops for the Blind, National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Adult Deaf and Dumb Society, and Queen-street Mission Ragged School, £500 each.

At the Te Awamutu Police Court, on Thursday, before Mr Northcroft, S.M., James Jacob was charged with selling, on November 27 last, to Stanley Mack certain liquor, viz., whisky, and also with selling on the same date whisky to Thurston Walters at Otorohanga, the defendant being an unlicensed person. Mrs Isaacs was also charged with selling whisky to Stanley Mack, at Otorohanga, on November 27 last, without being licensed to sell the same. The evidence in these cases was taken last Court day, when Mr Reed submitted that the evidence of informers required corroboration, and the Court reserved its decision. The Magistrate now gave judgment, and reviewed the law on the question raised by Mr Reed, which went to show that the evidence might be received and acted upon by the Court, although it was not corroborated; the defendants were, therefore, both convicted. Jacob was fined £10 and costs £5 5s 7d on the first charge, and £15 and costs £5 5s 7d on the second. Mrs Isaacs was fined £5 and costs £1 is.

The Home Secretary has caused to be published official forms for the advising of the police (and, we suppose, the Trade also) of convictions of habitual drunkards. It contains nine parallel columns with the following headings:—Date of conviction; date of order directing notice to police authority; name of person convicted; age; address of person convicted; place of business or where employed; offence of which convicted; sentence; licensed premises or clubs usually frequented (if known). The notice is to be signed by the clerk to the justices of the Petty Sessions Division. It will be seen that for all practical purposes the notice will be singularly deficient. It will be very easy for the habitual to move into another locality where he is not known, and in his own neighbourhood he can, where not personally known, give another name. To make the notice operative in the slightest degree a personal description is necessary.—("L.V. Gazette.")

"The Lancet" has been sending a Commissioner to the Charente, who reports:—"The replantation of the vineyards met with conspicuous success, after a most laborious series of experiments lasting nearly twenty years, and now there is abundance on all sides and in all districts. The present prospects of the already being confronted with the prospects of over-production. The chances are, in view of this extraordinary reversal of things within a few years, that genuine Cognac brandy will be cheaper in the near future, and will thus be able to compete with other spirits, and to take the position which it formerly held. The vintages since the replantation was completed are proving to yield brandies of the excellence of that produced in the pre-phyloxera period, possessing that softness and "finesse" which characterised the well-known produce of the years 1865 to 1875 inclusive."

At the Wellington Police Court, on Wednesday of last week, two young men named Johnson and Cooper pleaded guilty to a charge of robbery at the Western Hotel. The hotel was broken into on Monday and £2 stolen, the thieves failing in their intention of robbing the safe. One of the prisoners, Cooper, has made a statement with which the other agrees. This is to the effect that the two prisoners had been acquainted for three weeks. Johnson told Cooper that Pagni, the landlord of the hotel, kept his money in his safe in his bedroom, that it was easy to get at, and there was a good "get away." Johnson induced Cooper to help him, and they left their lodgings at three a.m., entering the backyard of the hotel by way of Boulcott-street and the school grounds. They entered the hotel by the back door, which was latched, but not locked, and went upstairs, Cooper remaining at the door of Pagni's room while Johnson went in, picked up the £2, took the key from Pagni's trousers pocket and tried to open the safe. The click woke Mrs Pagni, and they had no time to get their boots, which they had left outside. By way of Boulcott-street, the Terrace and the tramway line they reached Kelburne reserve. Seeing a constable they lay for ten minutes in a gully, but were able to return to their lodgings and get in unobserved by six a.m. Both prisoners were committed to the Supreme Court for sentence.