

THE LICENSED VICTUALLERS

THE BARMAID QUESTION.

There is no use blinking the fact that one of the main arguments relied upon by the Teetotal Party in their campaign against the barmaid is based on the alleged fact that the calling provides a short cut to immorality. The argument, like many others against the licensing trade, is used by people who are entirely ignorant of the matter, and constitutes a foul unpardonable slander on a class of young women who are just as much entitled to respect as the wives and daughters of the cowards that assail them. The people of this colony are not all tipplers, any more than they are all water drinkers; there is, happily for the welfare of the State and the future of humanity, a solid and substantial majority of the male population who practice the golden maxim, and we unhesitatingly affirm that the testimony of this majority, the members of which know that whereof they speak, would almost unanimously be cast in repudiation of the slander above noted.

Nevertheless, some of the mud thrown has stuck, and we find certain licensing committees making it a condition of the renewal of licenses that barmaids shall not be employed. This action is not only unjust and silly and generally contemptible for its own sake, but it is actually in contravention of the law. The Act does not prohibit the employment of women in bars, and when the committees arrogate to themselves the powers of the Legislature it is time that Parliament stepped in and made a change. The committees must not magnify their office. They are not appointed to act as censors of the morals of the community, but merely to administer a specific statute, and if they overstep their duty they must be restrained. But we fear that the only possible way of reforming consists in abolishing them. Wherever the majority of the committee is composed of prohibitionists it follows that such committee is destitute of the primary judicial element, namely, impartiality, and as, under the existing order, with a wide female franchise and a diminishing sense of justice, teetotal committeemen threaten to become, comparatively speaking, a permanent institution, wisdom suggests that the order should be changed.

If the committee system is to be retained there should be attached a qualification for membership. No one should be eligible who belongs to any teetotal organisation, on the one hand, or who has, on the other, any direct interest in the Trade. Men of the intemperate character of some of the leaders of the no-license movement are just as much out of place on the licensing bench as an habitual drunkard would be.

WOMEN WITH COMMON SENSE.

The women of this Colony are not all content to accept as truth all that comes from the mouth of the prohibition parson and stump orator. It will be remembered that when the Premier visited Kawhia the other day, a deputation representing the women residents in that part of the King Country, waited upon him in connection with the sly-grog horror. They pointed out that the illicit traffic could only be effectually eradicated by the introduction of a properly controlled trade, and expressed a desire that the State should undertake the business. About the details of the subject we need not worry, but the fact

is clear that these good women, like all honest persons of both sexes, recognise the evils of the shebeen system, and also the impossibility of putting it down by the police. But the W.C.T.U., those saints without logic, were shocked, and at once wrote an affectionately reproving epistle to their Laodicean sisters at Kawhia, begging them to have nothing to do with the dreadful drink in any shape or form, but to keep sound in the prohibition goose. To this letter a reply has been sent, much more courteous in tone than the W.C. Temperance persons had any right to expect, but sufficiently crushing nevertheless. The writer is Mrs D'Arcy Hamilton, wife of the native schoolmaster, the lady who had the courage to propose the health of Mr Lang, M.H.R. at the Premier's banquet. She says:—"As spokeswoman of the deputation that interviewed the Premier concerning the sale of sly-grog at Kawhia, I have been asked by them to reply to your letter on the subject. If you do not already know, Kawhia and the King Country generally are, and have been for 15 or 16 years, virtually prohibited districts, and surely that time is sufficient to prove the success or failure of the existing law. As time goes on and this place—because we refer more to Kawhia—becomes more thickly populated, the existing state of affairs certainly appeals to us residents as anything but a success, and instead of prohibition obtaining as the increased demand for liquor goes on, the increase of supply becomes greater. The idea of controlling the natural desires of a depraved humanity by Act of Parliament seems to us an impossibility, at any rate in a satisfactory manner. Extreme prohibitionists are inclined to be rabid, and we think a medium course is better. Extreme measures are seldom advisable in any department. If prohibition could be general throughout the whole of New Zealand it might be possible for the law to be enforced in the King Country, and we should be with you with all our hearts; but where licenses are granted freely in adjoining districts it is worse than useless. The British mind resents such nice distinctions."

But Mrs Hamilton is only a woman after all and a little optimistic, and allows her fancy to run away with her. The publichouse once obtained, she thinks it would instantly banish the sly-grog fiend, just as St. Patrick put all the reptiles in Ireland to rout, and that thereafter the institution could be run on ideal lines.

"We considered," she proceeds, "that a State-controlled house, where the person managing it would be a salaried servant of the Government, like a postmaster, a teacher, or a policeman is, and would have absolutely no interest in whether he sold a thimbleful or a hog'shead, and would have nothing to gain, but much to lose by encouraging the unfortunates who require drink to take more than was good for them—a house where men would not be supplied with comfortable rooms kept open till late hours to keep them from their homes, but an open bar, where all on the street might see them; where no liquor could be obtained except by stamps procured, say, from the local post office; where the person managing could supply temperance refreshments at reasonable prices, and thus increase his salary, making the temptation to use strong drink less. We consider that Kawhia is a most suitable place to try such an experiment, and under a steady, reliable person we consider it would be a success."

To which we beg to say, and we know something about the subject, that the King Country is not populated by angels, and that if the residents, natives or European, have to apply to the local postmaster for permission to get a drink, they will prefer the method now in vogue. What is wanted in the King Country, and what will be there some of these days, is hotels amenable to the ordinary provisions of the law. There is no other way to stop the illegal traffic. As to the whining about our want of faith with the natives, to whom we promised that no grog should be permitted to enter their sacred territory, Mrs Hamilton has some enlightened remarks to make. She says:—"With regard to breaking faith with a semi-civilised race, we may say that at present the semi-civilised persons are very prominent among the law-breakers, and make too good a living by this illicit

trade to favour a hotel of any sort or under any control. It was said at a meeting the other day that if a petition against prohibition and one for were taken round the natives for signature the bulk of them would sign both. The majority of them have little or no mind on the subject, and, with the exception of a few old Maoris who are grieved to see the younger ones abusing drink, the average Maori has no choice, whether his liquor is licit or illicit, so long as he gets it." Moreover, it would be just as sensible to oppose a change of treatment in the case of a person first suspected of typhoid, but afterwards found to be suffering from a broken leg, as it is to maintain in the face of facts, that the police, and the informer, and the gaol can prevent the Maori from killing himself by the consumption of bad liquor. We do not share the hope expressed in the concluding paragraph of Mrs Hamilton's letter that the W.C. Temperance folk may "relinquish their extreme measures to use their influence to rectify a most abasing evil," but we have every confidence in the ultimate victory of good sense in the minds of the people at large.

Trade Topics

Mr Charles Heidsieck compares the present season in the champagne district as very similar to that of 1892, and hopes for a coming vintage equal in quality.

What is known as the British National Drink Bill, compiled by a well-known teetotaler, has been published for the year 1902, the total amount expended being put at £179,500,000. This is, of course (remarks a contemporary) a vast sum of money—not actual, but estimated only—and the basis on which it has been calculated has been raised this year, the change making a difference of no less than some two or three millions lower than in 1901. Nearly one-quarter of the total bill—that is, rather more than 40 millions sterling—is paid to the Government as taxation, and thus the real expenditure on alcoholic liquor does not at any rate exceed 66s per head. Is this really so very excessive? The "bill" for any article of general consumption among a large population must amount to a huge sum. Thus, if each one of us consumed a penny egg and a pennyworth of milk daily, the cost would reach a total of no less than £130,000,000 a year. Again, our expenditure on fares for railway passengers and goods amounts to about 50s a head, or over £100,000,000 a year, though, of course, a very large percentage of the population hardly travel by rail at all.

A Parliamentary return issued recently shows that in the year 1902, 16,437,414 gallons of wine were imported in casks, and 2,045,342 gallons in bottles. From Spain we got 4,117,394 gallons of wine. Portugal sent us 3,942,679 gallons. Only 68,262 gallons of Madera found their way to the British market. From France we imported 3,611,565 gallons. Germany supplied 560,248 gallons. It will be a surprise to many to learn that from Holland came 558,446 gallons of wine. Of Italian wines, which are apparently growing in popularity, 329,365 gallons were sent to us. It is pleasing to see that Australia stands fourth on the list of imports, the quantity of wine coming from the colony being 988,391 gallons. —(English Exchange.)

A correspondent, who signs himself "Unionist," writes to the "Gisborne Times":—"Sir,—Does the closing of licensed houses at ten o'clock apply to gentlemen's clubs as well as hotels? Or is it only the working man that is to be deprived of his drink after ten? I can do without my beer under ordinary circumstances, but if one gets to a meeting and gets dry figures to worry his brain all the evening, it is hard lines if he cannot get a shandy-gaff to quench his thirst, while his wealthy friend can get all he wants whenever he likes to ask for it."

Sergeant Siddels, in his police report to the Licensing Committee at Gisborne, referred to Sunday trading in the following terms:—"The fact cannot be disguised that there is too much Sunday drinking in town and country hotels. I cannot understand why certain licensees should lay themselves out to defy the law. It certainly is not fair to the trade as a whole, for those who keep the law and run their houses in a respectable manner have to suffer for the misdoings of their more unscrupulous fellow-licensees. In Gisborne there is not a shadow of an excuse for illegal trading, as I am certain that every licensee within the borough can keep to the law and do a

most profitable business. If one and all made up their minds to sell to none on a Sunday there would be no trouble, and no person could be offended. Surely licensees do not think they can go on breaking the law with impunity. It is a difficult matter to catch a Sunday trader red-handed, and for that reason some licensees persist in running the risk, but those who do, I am inclined to think, are unaware of the provisions contained in section 76 of the Licensing Act, 1881. That section provides that the Licensing Committee can, at any quarterly meeting, put an end to a license if the house is conducted in an improper manner." Here again we have the attempt to make an assertion take the place of evidence, a course we have more than once known to be most unfair and improper.

"It is reported in Sydney," telegraphs "The Age" representative there, "that the leading brewery companies of New South Wales have 'cornered' Tasmanian hops until 1906." Mr Parker, manager of the Carlton Brewery, seen with regard to the matter yesterday, said he had not heard of it, though there had been rumours to that effect for some time past. These rumours had arisen through the efforts of the growers of Showbridge hops in Tasmania to make contracts for three or four years ahead. The Carlton Brewery, he says, at the beginning of the season purchased the crop of two of the best gardens in the island, and refused to buy ahead. Though New South Wales breweries may have "cornered" the hops of Tasmania for three or four years, it will, he adds, make no difference to the Victorian breweries, because New Zealand and Californian hops can be bought at the same price. Then, Victorian hops have improved so much in quality of late years that the local breweries buy them readily. Carlton Brewery having this year taken more Victorian than Tasmanian hops. The growers in Victoria and Tasmania are, he says, making such good profits that there should soon be a large increase in the area under hops in this State.

The Dunedin "Star" says:—"It will be remembered that at the meeting of the Licensing Committee on Monday the elective members emphatically expressed their intention to make the issue of each license conditional on the willingness of the applicant to restrict the sale of liquor to a single bar. We learn, as the result of special inquiries, that all the applicants to whom this requisition practically applies—that is to say, all who have lately had more than one bar in their hotels—have decided to accept the decision without demur. Indeed, in some cases the hotelkeepers are not waiting (as they might) until July 1, but have already taken steps to make the necessary alterations. It is just as well that the matter should be settled in this willing, or at least acquiescent, fashion. What other course could the applicants adopt? It will perhaps be asked, Probably none of a permanently effective kind; still, there were rumours that some sort of resistance might be attempted, in view of the Stipendiary Magistrate's half-implied doubt as to the legality of the position taken up by his colleagues on the Licensing Bench. But section 63 of the Licensing Act appears to give the Committee almost unlimited powers of discretion; and, besides, in the present state of public opinion, publicans would be ill-advised to adopt a pugnacious attitude towards the judicial representatives of the people.

The numerous alterations that have been made in the British Hotel, Queen street, conduce greatly to the convenience and comfort of customers. Mr Buxton has made the house the popular place of call during the intervals at His Majesty's Theatre, and deserves the large and increasing patronage bestowed on him.

A million gallons of whisky at the Ardgowan Distillery, Greenock, took fire. The burning spirit ran into the streets and sewers, destroying a flour mill and extending the fire to the lower quarters of the town. Escaping gas from a sewer exploded in a private house, seven persons being killed and six injured. The damage is estimated at £100,000.

The resources of the new Royal Hotel, Auckland, under the capable direction of Host Percy Isaac, were in evidence on Saturday night, on the occasion of the annual dinner of the Journalists' Institute. The spread was a most excellent one in all respects, and the attendance was all that could be desired. The Royal may well claim to be one of the finest and best conducted houses in the colony.

At the annual meeting of the South Australian Vine Growers' Association recently, the president's report stated that the year's vintage was a full one, the approximate being 2,500,000 gallons. The exports for 1902 represented 846,681 gallons, an increase of 281,953 gallons. Of this increase 206,165 gallons went to the United Kingdom, while the balance went nearly all in inter-State trade.