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## Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

**A SENSIBLE JUDGMENT.** THE judgment of Mr. Justice Denniston with respect to the licensing committee at Sydenham and to which we referred briefly in our last issue, whether it is borne out on appeal or not, appears very consistent with just law and common sense. His Honour's judgment was, in effect, (1) that a renewal of licences could not be refused merely on the grounds that a majority of the rate-payers were opposed to it, and (2) that the committee were bound to consider whether licensed houses were required by the reasonable wants of residents desiring to purchase liquor. Indeed, to turn a licensing committee into a committee enforcing prohibition seems something like a contradiction in terms, for what, in fact, is the use of a licensing committee if no licences are to be granted? By an act of complete rejection the committee destroys its own *raison d'être*, and should cease to exist. As the Judge pointed out, the Acts had been passed for police purposes, for the right and orderly regulation of the trade, and not for doing away with it altogether. He described the right claimed as a serious interference with liberty—"the right of what may be a bare majority to impose upon a minority the consequences of certain views of the majority." We have no desire to say a word in favour of the abuse of the liquor trade. On the contrary, from its very nature we believe it necessary to place it under very strict and careful control. But it is also needful that abuses should not creep into the control, which, in turn, is a matter far from impossible. It is, in fact, almost as necessary to limit the power of the controlling body as it is to restrict the liberty of the trade. Favouritism, prejudice, even wilful injustice, amounting to oppression, for example, may be employed. In fact, it might not be hard to quote an instance in which some such motive seems to be at work without going very far to look for it. We know ourselves of two houses, of which one has been frequently complained of, and bears in its neighbourhood a reputation for anything rather than exceptionally good management. Of the other no complaint has ever been made, and every one acquainted with it acknowledges that it has been always admirably conducted. Yet the licence of the first has been granted and that of the second refused. There seems, moreover, to be some defect in that reason sometimes assigned for closing a house, to the effect that it is too near another of the kind. If such proximity leads to a harmful rivalry, if the proprietors vie with each other in offering inducements to people to drink, or any other abuse is found to be the consequence, the reason indeed holds good. But in such cases as those in which well managed houses stand close together, why should one be shut merely to give additional trade to the other? Nay, the effect of this may be harmful, for there is more danger of abuses occurring where business is too brisk to admit of minute watchfulness. Or, again, if a house be shut because that appeal *ad misericordiam* so often and so excusably put forward attaches to it, relative to the running to and fro of children with cans and jugs, is it more humane or Christian to force the poor things to travel three or four streets instead of one or two? The question, in short, may very well be entertained as to whether it is not advisable to limit rather than increase the powers of committees, and in every case in which a house is well conducted to make a renewal of licence obligatory. As to prohibition, the matter is a serious one, and its discussion must be undertaken seriously and at length. There is much, no doubt, to be said in favour of it, and there is something to be urged against it. Of its working in the State of Maine, for example, accounts vary, are so various, in fact, as to make it seem that nothing but personal knowledge and experience could solve the doubt. In another of the States, Rhode Island if we recollect aright, it was tried some two or three years ago and abandoned after a brief trial. What, however, must seem evident to every man of cool judgment and sound sense is that, to be successful, if it be capable of success, it must be the fruits of legislation and must embrace a whole country instead of resulting from the humours of a clique, and being confined to some limited locality. Partial prohibi-

tion, as indeed we see, is an undertaking worthy only of fanatics and to be adopted by men whose motives are, in some cases at least, very doubtful. There can be little risk in predicting that it is certain to prove a failure, and that to ruin men who are honestly conducting the publicans' trade is an injustice as absurd as it is grievous. It is, besides, in some degree indirect robbery, because the question of compensation to publicans in the event of a general prohibition is still an open one, and the men whose houses are arbitrarily closed in particular districts are deprived of their chance of benefitting by its solution. Who, indeed, believes that either in Sydenham or in Roslyn or in any other locality in which a prohibition committee pursues its ill-considered plans, there will be one drunkard the less at the end of the year? No one, certainly, who has any experience of the drunkard or his ways. If Judge Denniston's decision, therefore, puts an end to the foolish and bullying attempt alluded to even these ill-advised committees themselves may have reason to be thankful for escaping the ridicule due to failure.

THE London *Tablet* is quite delighted at Mr Parnell's defalcation with respect to Mrs O'Shea. The **REJOICING IN INIQUITY.** Catholicism on stilts which our exalted contemporary so finely represents is evidently quite above the obligations of charity. On the contrary, it rejoices in iniquity. The "whisperings of a woman" that have done for Mr Parnell what the snows of Russia did for Napoleon are to it matter, it would seem, for warm congratulation. The *Tablet* tells us that the whisperings of Mrs O'Shea have produced the same effect on the Plan of Campaign as did the snows of Russia on the invasion of Napoleon. But is there really no difference in the sources whence the punishment in question proceeded? As for the snows of Russia—"Before the face of His cold who shall abide?" Perhaps, in dealing with the mere Irish it was becoming that the devil, the father, for example, of adultery, should be called in to aid. Nevertheless, for people less exalted and claiming ordinary privileges only, there appears to be some degree of blasphemy in the comparison. But does our aristocratic contemporary really understand what he is doing when he makes his high and mighty attack upon the Plan of Campaign, and, in effect, asserts that the devil was called in, in the person of an adulteress, to chastise all those who had any part in supporting it. We may give up to him bishops of Irish nationality, wherever they are to be found—or, at least, of his own accord he will make short work of them. In the eyes of the party the *Tablet* represents, Irish nationality seems to be regarded as offering an effectual bar to the reception of the Apostolical succession. But our excellent contemporary brings a very formidable accusation of flagrant disobedience to the Pope against bishops who are open to no such reproach. Let us take Australasia as an example. Mr John Dillon, on his return from his late tour in these colonies, made altogether in the interests of the Plan of Campaign, and for no other purpose than to obtain assistance and support for the tenants engaged it, was able to declare with truth that, with the exception of one Italian bishop, the whole hierarchy of the colonies had given him their active sympathy. Our contemporary's accusation then, has a wider bearing than he appears to suspect. It is not only Mr Dillon and Mr O'Brien and the newspaper representing Mr McCarthy he arraigns, but several prelates who have nothing of the truculent Irish taint about them and whom even the *Tablet* cannot believe to have offered any impediment in their blood to the grace of consecration. There for particular example, is the Bishop of Auckland—no one calls in question his Lordship's purely English origin and character. On one occasion, indeed, the Auckland correspondent of the *Otago Daily Times* approvingly hailed his Lordship as an Englishman first and then a Catholic. That was a calumny, but it shows us the reputation in which the Bishop's *pur sang* and attachment to his nationality is held—and yet Dr. Luck gave his patronage to Mr Dillon's object. Must the blighting influence of Mrs O'Shea's whispers, therefore, be also invoked against Dr. Luck? At Wellington, again Mr Dillon was most cordially received. Does Archbishop Redwood come under the stigma of rebellion? The same is true with regard to Christchurch. Yet Dr. Grimes, within the last few months, has been treated by the Pope with especial affection—nay, has even been rewarded by His Holiness with a handsome gift. If the snows of Russia falling as a celestial chastisement on