

ST. JOHN, N. B., SATURDAY, DECEMBER 21, 1895

TAX REFORM IS NEEDED.

AN AGITATION FOR CHANGE IN THE ASSESSMENT LAW.

The Men who Are on the Halifax Commission and Their Views on the Subject—A Liquor Dealer who Got the Best of the Law—How a Merchant Saved his Cash.

HALIFAX, Dec. 19.—The Halifax civic tax reform commission, which has been at work in private for some time has now had one open session. The commission is looked upon with mingled feeling by the community. It is the outcome of the agitation for a change in our assessment laws, mainly in the direction of removing the tax on personal property. The commission was appointed by the local government, and is looked to with sanguine hope by the tax reformers as likely to point out a way of relief from those obnoxious personal property taxes; while on the other hand the advocates of the present system, though not very hopeful of anything favorable from the commission to their way of thinking, yet are not altogether in despair regarding it. They think they have one or two good friends, at least, on the commission. On the whole the consensus of public opinion is that the tax reform commission means a bill at the next session of the local legislature which will enact into law those principles which the tax reformers have so long been agitating.

Two wrongs do not make a right, and because the public money is wasted under the present law is no reason that a more equitable system of taxation should not be devised, if the present system is inequitable. In this connection, take the expenditure on civil salaries, for instance. The clerks and heads of departments at the city hall draw in salaries about \$50,000 annually. Just think of it! Fifty thousand dollars in salaries to expend a total of \$350,000 of civic reform fully as inviting as that afforded in the attack on the assessment law. That \$50,000 spent in civil salaries could be cut down to \$25,000, and the work become every whit as well if the aldermen had backbone enough to set about the task in earnest. An expensive royal commission would not be necessary for the purpose either. The departmental work at the city hall requires remodeling and re-organization from one end to the other. Let the various offices be arranged something on the plan of a bank, where each official would be part of a whole working for the common good of institution. Abolish the present system where each man's labor is centralized in himself to too great an extent. Make one big machine of the whole staff rather than a score of small machines, and it will not be a difficult matter to materially cut down the item of \$50,000, civil salaries, and yet have the work done equally as well or better. The work the tax reform commission has in hand however is not to cut down expenses, but to find out how tax-paying by our citizens may be made more equitable. They are not there to learn how the money is spent after it is collected, but how to get it most fairly. Here are the names of the men engaged on this intricate work: G. Mitchell, chairman, R. Taylor, A. Burns, M. Cullen, Wm. Nisbet, J. Y. Payzant, J. R. Cragg, W. J. Stewart, E. Morrison. Are they fitted for the task imposed upon them? Let us see.

George Mitchell the chairman of the commission is one of the most intelligent merchants of this city, one of the most influential members of the board of trade, and is possessed of an abundant stock of sound, practical common sense. He is engaged in a successful West India business, and is rated as worth \$50,000. Mr. Mitchell is a man of decided opinions on all subjects that come before a citizen who keeps himself abreast of the times. His views on tax reform are well known. Mr. Mitchell believes the tax on stocks of merchandise to be an abomination which must be swept away if Halifax is to flourish, and if the wholesale merchants, especially are to have even-handed justice.

William Nisbet has exactly opposite views on the question of tax reform. He is not in the slightest degree afraid of taxes on personal property but he cannot endure the thought of the possibility of another cent being laid upon real estate. When Mr. Nisbet once makes up his mind or forms an opinion he becomes like adamant. It would need an earthquake so to speak, to change his views. He is a building contractor who has largely withdrawn from the competition of today, though he is just about finishing two fine houses on Victoria road for himself.

Adam Burns is one of the merchant princes of Halifax, and has a fortune of \$150,000. While Messrs. Mitchell and Nisbet are liberals, in Mr. Burns, Premier Fielding appointed a conservative. He is deeply interested in the welfare of the city of Halifax, is a well informed man, and one of our best citizens. As senior member of the dry goods firm of Burns and Murray it is not strange if Mr. Burns should desire the abolition of the tax on stocks of merchandise, though he has not yet been prominently heard from on the question.

Like Ex-Ald. Morrow it is likely "he wants to unload" what he considers an unjust burden, a burden which handicaps him in competition with wholesale merchants of other cities.

There is not a more intelligent man among the artisans of Halifax than M. Cullen, the representative on the commission of labor so called. He is a compositor in the office of the Acadian Recorder, and a better "labor representative" than Mr. Cullen could not have been selected.

J. Y. Payzant is a lawyer and a wealthy one. He makes his money, and has made much of it in the management of estates, and the handling of money. Mr. Payzant is estimated to be worth at least \$100,000. As a representative of real estate Mr. Payzant's career on the commission will be watched with interest. There are few in Halifax who have a greater stake in the real estate of Halifax than Mr. Payzant. He is a well informed, benevolent man, a good citizen in every respect and by the way is the second conservative on the commission.

Robert Taylor is the head of the Robert Taylor shoe manufacturing business. Every one in Halifax knows that he is a tax reformer from the very heart. He would soon settle the question if it were left solely in his hands.

The retail shopkeeper is represented in J. R. Cragg. Mr. Cragg is a man of liberal views and one who is open to reason. He has not publicly expressed his opinion on the tax reform question, which is equivalent to saying he has not stated whether he wants the personal property tax abolished or not.

Edward Morrison is a merchant whose mind is open to correction on most questions, tax reform as well as others.

For the ninth member of the commission Premier Fielding is not responsible. A majority of the city council appointed him. Alderman Stewart is one of the fathers of the tax reform association who has kept up the agitation for reform that is now in a fair way of accomplishment. He is thoroughly informed on this question of taxation, and knows by long odds more about the subject than any other member of the city council, and as much as any man outside the council hall. The alderman is a man of brains, and one of the best workers this city possesses in any of its departments of usefulness.

A commission like the above is surely fitted for its work, and the question with which the names were introduced can with safety be answered in the affirmative.

Gets There Just the Same.

HALIFAX, Dec. 19.—Gilbert Walker, who was brought up by the police for illegal liquor selling was a surprised man in Stipendiary Fielding's court the other day. He had pleaded guilty to the charge and was convicted. Then his license was brought into court and it was found to be his third offence. That forfeited the license and made it impossible for Walker to get another for three years. He seemed to have forgotten the fact. When the discovery was made Walker changed his pleading of "guilty" to "not guilty" and appealed to the supreme court. That enables him to continue business till the appeal comes up, which may be a long time in the future. But the license year expires in three or four months.

A HEAVY MORTGAGE.

How a prominent farmer quickly lifted it.

A mortgage has been described as an incentive to industry, a heavy mortgage, as a sure sign of ruin. The last is particularly true, for if a mortgage is allowed to run it will eat up the farm. In this connection Mr. Henry Fowler, of Huron writes: "From my boyhood scrofula had marked me for a victim and it seemed as if it had a life mortgage on my blood. I suffered fearfully with sores, and knowing my condition I have remained a single man. Doctor after doctor prescribed for me, and finally a Toronto specialist told me bluntly that my complaint was a deep-seated, incurable, blood disease. Sarsaparilla I knew was a good blood medicine, and I sent for a bottle of the best. Mr. Todd, the druggist, sent me Scott's Sarsaparilla, and I have stuck to it. It has lifted my mortgage, for to-day I am free from those horrible sores, my eyesight is not blurred, my tongue is not furry, and I have no irritation. I look upon Scott's Sarsaparilla as a marvellous medicine when it will cure a life long disease in so short a time."

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Not Easily Scared.

Housekeeper—Didn't you see that sign out there. "Beware of the dog?"

Tramp—No, mum.

Housekeeper—There is a sign there, and it is especially intended to warn just such fellows as you, so that you will keep away.

Tramp—I didn't see no sign, mum; I only saw the dog.

BURIED THIRTY YEARS.

QUEER STORY OF DIGGING FOR A WRECKED STEAMER.

It sank in a River but Was Found far from the Bank—Recovery of a Rich Cargo of Old Time Whiskey and Gin—Lost a Generation Ago.

One foggy morning, just about dawn, in August, 1865, the side-wheel steamboat Twilight was making her way cautiously up the Missouri River. The watch had gone below and the deck hands had tumbled up with bucket and mop to swab down the deck. In the wheel house the pilot stood dripping with the heavy mist, calling to the wheelman, "Keep her jacking on the lone cottonwood on the star-board shore and swing her stern around."

The Twilight was chug-chugging along slowly against the current. Camden, sleepy old village, had been passed, and Kansas City would be reached early in the afternoon. Right ahead was a bend in the river. Suddenly there was a jar. The hog chains snapped with a report like a cannon, and the boat heavily "hogged," or bulged up in the middle, and the ends began to sink. In a moment or two the water began pouring into the hatches and the boat careened to the North. Meantime a scene of excitement was enacted in the cabins. Passengers rushed to the deck, scantily clad, and were put into boats and sent ashore. The crew followed.

The Twilight had settled so that she was submerged, except the pilot house and "texas," and in this condition she remained until winter, when the ice swept away her upper works. She had struck a submerged sycamore tree of huge dimensions, having got out of the channel in the fog. The passengers were cared for by the farmers in the vicinity and taken to Kansas City, twenty miles distant, by a boat that came up the river that night. Thus ended a venture that, had it been successful, would have made the owners of the Twilight richer by many thousands of dollars, for these were days when a trip from St. Louis to the head waters of the Missouri brought \$50,000 profit.

The cargo of the Twilight was very rich. It was composed of 300 barrels of whiskey, hundreds of cases of wines, liquors, and canned goods, and a great many barrels of oils of various sorts, including linseed, castor, and petroleum. There were in her also ten to twelve tons of white lead, twenty tons of pig iron, 150 stoves, and a huge stamp mill and engines for the mine, to say nothing of sheet copper, eighty-five stands of Government arms and uniforms, and all sorts of valuable things.

For several years she lay on the log in the river, visible when the water was low, and again covered. She was a thing of fascination to country boys, who dreamed of all sorts of exploits to get the treasure out of her. There was an air of mystery about her that thrilled the farm lads like the tales of Capt. Kidd or the stories of the adventures of wreckers. Four years after she sank an unsuccessful attempt was made to get the cargo. Several years after that farmers in the vicinity got two barrels of whiskey out of her, and when they went for more she could not be found. The treacherous river had shifted, and she was buried in a sand bank. Then the river cut in along the south bank close under the bluff, and the great rise of 1881 made a sand bar on the top of her, buried her deep and left her far inland under thirty-nine feet of sand, 100 yards from the bank of the river at high water, and half a mile from shore when the river was down.

From that time on hundreds of people made unsuccessful attempts to locate the wreck and recover the valuable cargo. Capt. Farwell, an old-time river captain, spent the best days of his life hunting the banks of the river over in search of the Twilight. It was expected that if the wreck should be found enormous profits would be made from the whiskey, providing it was in good condition. It was Monongahela rye, old-fashioned copper distilled, made in the days when pure whiskey was the rule. Besides, it was rumored that there was valuable treasure in the safe which was in the purser's room, and the white lead, which would not be ruined by the water, would be worth \$100 a ton; and it was expected that other things readily salable would be found.

Last February the Kansas City Wrecking Company was formed of capitalists and business men. They obtained permission from the Government to seek the treasure. In such cases, after years have elapsed without the owners seeking to regain their property, "finder are keepers." The working members of the company were Capt. Arthur Leopold, a licensed river captain and pilot; Capt. George R. Collins of the Third Regiment, Missouri National Guards, and John D. King, a machinist. March 1 they located the boat. The way they did so is interesting. They first got the general location of the bar from old settlers on the river bank. Then with long steel finding rods they probed the sand. The rods were forced down inch by inch until they reached the probable depth the

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boat might have sunk. After much patient probing one day the rod struck something hard, and telephoned up to the sharp ears by means of vibration that it had struck metal. Then began probing around and about until the experienced men the rod told that it had found the "doctor," or great engine and pump used to feed the boilers. It was an easy matter then to lay off on the sand the general outlines of the boat and find the hatches. To make sure, however, the rods were sent down sixteen feet to the north and south of the "doctor," and found the wooden bulwarks of the boat. She was 32 feet wide, 185 feet long and 6 feet deep in the hold. The hatches were located and found to be open, and there lay the Twilight beneath them, buried under thirty-nine feet of sand, but as plainly visible to their minds' eyes as it had been on top of the ground.

Machinery was shipped to the spot from Kansas City. It was necessary to get the cargo out, to build and sink a caisson precisely as if she had been in 39 feet of water, instead of sand, although had she been in the water the work would have been easier. The caisson was built of heavy timber, weighed at the top and with two locks. It was 8 feet square at the bottom and 54 at the top. Eight feet from the bottom was a floor with a trap door, and another trap door in the top. Running to the bottom were two pipes, the air compressor and the exhaust. As the caisson was sunk air was compressed into it. Attached to the huge exhaust valve was a huge rubber hose. Sand and mud were shovelled over the mouth of the hose within the caisson, a lever opened the exhaust valve, and the sand and mud were sucked in and blown out at the top, the valve was closed and the process went on. A trench was then dug all around the wall of the caisson, which dropped down inch by inch and foot by foot. This went on for months till one day the shovel struck metal—they were evidently on the "doctor." They expected to find the machine so rust eaten that they would not be able to get it out without trouble, but, to their astonishment, the metal was as sound the day the boat went down. They dug away the sand and mud as much as possible, and then found that it would be necessary to break up the huge machine, which consisted of a big engine and six pumps. After it had been broken and the pieces hoisted to the deck was reached. It slanted to the north at an angle of 45 degrees. It was cut away and the discrepancy between the surface of the deck and the bottom of the caisson built in with bulkheads. It took three bulkheads to make the juncture tight. The pine deck timbers and the oak stringers were found to be as sound as the day the boat was sunk. The hold was full of blue clay or mud, closely impacted around everything.

The men were wild with delight down in the hold of the buried boat, with 39 feet of wet sand above them. They filled their lungs with air pumped from above, and rolled and danced, and shook hands with one another. For many months they had been digging and toiling for this very thing, and by the side of a wall of sand the treasure lay revealed. With feverish haste, with pick and shovel, they tore up the boxes, getting them loose. They had been piled solidly in tiers, and they stuck tight. The first case taken out was broken, and from it trickled a white liquor that had a piney odor. Eight bottles had been broken by the picks in the men's hands. The case was stamped "Old London Club Gin, 1860." With four bottles the men climbed out of the caisson and rushed up to the tent of Capt. Leopold, and putting their heads through the flap shouted, "We've found it, cap't; we've found it at last!" The captain, aroused from his sleep, got into his clothes, and together they went back and spent the night examining their find.

The labels of the bottles had been eaten off by the water. The bottles were square-faced, of dark green glass, and held an honest quart. They are sealed with black wax, which has not been disturbed by time or water. The saw dust in which the bottles were packed was wet and mud-colored. One of the bottles was opened and the liquor strained. It contained some sediment and particles of cork, which had partly disintegrated through time and the juniper fumes. Some of the bottles were brought to Kansas city and taken to the leading club house, where a number of good judges of liquor had been invited to sample the gin. It was old fashioned and had a slight taste as of pine or turpentine. A few moments after it was swallowed it began to make its influence felt, and a glow stole through the drinkers, which spread from their toes to the tips of their ears, and they told volitionally of the good quality of the gin.

There was beds of ooze and hard balls of clay that shot up and out of the exhaust pipe, as if from a cannon. In the mud and sand that came up the exhaust pipe were peanuts, allspice, corn, and coffee. The allspice retained its spicy smell and flavor; the peanuts shells were whole, but full of white dust. The shells were all that remained of the grains of corn. Out of the mud were picked pieces of gum and cotton sacks, whole and strong; pieces of the sides of tea chests, and other evidences of the cargo.

When a space had been cleared away in the hold the men could faintly see the shapes of barrels and cases. On the latter being broken away they were found to be full of canned goods, the tin bright, but the contents spoiled. There were iron-trapped cases of sardines, and looking along under the deck the corners of boxes and rims of barrels could be seen. When the wreckers had got thus far, which was last June, water began to leak in from the sand through the hatches, and they were compelled to quit work. Then they got a steam pump from Kansas City, and kept the water out as they dug. They made a little progress in this way, and then they found that the whiskey and liquors, which were the chief things they were after, were not in the after hatch in which they were digging there, and then went all over the work again of sinking a caisson to the forward hatch.

About 9 o'clock the other night three of wreckers were at work in the forward hold of the boat removing cordwood, with which the passage was filled. All the water-soaked wood had been taken out, and a clear passage was before them in the wet sand. Without warning the sand on one side caved in, and before them was a wall of bright wooden cases and long rows of barrels and kegs.

A man who had drunk old London gin as far back as 1860 was given a drink, and said it was the best thing he had ever tasted. It was the old London "square" that Dickens wrote about and smacked his lips over. There are a great many cases of gin in the hold, and this will be taken out at once, as it belongs to the wreckers absolutely.

The 300 barrels of whiskey in the hold have not all been uncovered, but some of them have, and the barrels are in a perfect state of preservation. One of them was tapped and the whiskey was found to be even better than the gin. A glass of it, which was poured out before a company of men in the Kansas City Club, filed the entire room with its aroma. It was thick and oily, almost of the consistency of New Orleans molasses, and after the glass was emptied it clung to the sides as syrup would. Whiskey connoisseurs who have sampled it say that it exceeds anything in the whiskey line that they had ever dreamed of.

The barrels of whiskey will not be taken out for two weeks or more, as the wrecking company desires that Government officials shall see it and become satisfied that it is tax free. The taxes were paid at the distillery where the stuff was made over thirty years ago.

There is a rumor that aft of where the whiskey was found in the purser's cabin, and in it is a safe containing a large sum of money, which was being carried from

St. Louis to up-river merchants and army posts. The money question, however, is forgotten for the present in the joy of the wreckers at the finding of the whiskey and gin. This city and the surrounding country have gone wild over the find. One of the wreckers ventured the opinion that no crops would be grown in the vicinity till the excitement had died out. Soon after the whiskey was found more than 500 farmers had gathered about the caisson watching the operations. In half the saloons in Kansas city "Twilight" whiskey is being sold, though not a drop of the genuine article has been placed on sale. Those who have sampled the alleged "Twilight" whiskey say it is more like "torchlight" whiskey. Speculation is rife as to what will be the profits of the wreckers. Experienced whiskey dealers say that it will sell readily for at least \$400 a barrel.—St. Louis Globe Democrat.

Why the Mirages Seem Inverted.

Our last week's article on the curious positions assumed by the images in that variety of mirage peculiar to the Mediterranean in the vicinity of Italy, and which is known as the Fata Morgana, caused us to undertake the task of ascertaining exactly "why" mirage images are usually seen inverted. If you will take the time to look the matter up you will find that this phenomenon is not clearly explained, either in the books of meteorology or optics.

Lord Raleigh says that the delusion of water appearing in mirages on hot, sandy plains is due to the fact that the undisturbed strata of air near the earth is highly rarified. A ray of light falling very obliquely upon this strata, and being totally reflected, reaches the eye of the observer just as it would if reflected from water.

The phenomenon is, strictly speaking, one of refraction rather than reflection. Now, just as the glass lens forms a image on the screen, so the crystalline lens of the eye forms an image on the retina or sensitive back part of the eye. This retina image is inverted, as all retina images are, and being projected to another strata of rarified air above, has the effect of making the delusion perfect. Raleigh further says that there has been much unnecessary speculation in connection with the theory of inverted retina images, the mystery being that we do not see all things inverted.

The truth of the matter is—now look for something you never saw in a book—we do not see the retina image at all, we only feel it. If we could see the image on the eye of some one else we would certainly see it inverted.

More mountain numbers have been seriously or fatally injured in the Alps this season than ever before in an equal length of time.

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