

AFRICAN LIQUOR TRADE.

IMPORTANT STEPS TAKEN TO DIMINISH IT

By the Second Brussels Conference—The Effects of the Traffic on the Various Tribes—Commerce Destroyed by the Trade in Spirits—Heavy Duties Imposed.

Nine years ago, the Brussels Conference in which most of the civilized States took part, adopted measures to prevent the sale of spirituous liquors in all parts of the interior of Africa where the traffic had not been introduced, and gradually to reduce the volume of the trade, by means of increasing import duties, in those regions where summarily to prohibit it would practically destroy all commerce. It was provided that a later conference should be held at a time to be agreed upon to take such further measures for the repression of the trade as the experience derived from the Brussels act might suggest. This Conference, attended by plenipotentiaries from eleven European powers and the Congo Free State, met in Brussels on April 20 last, appointed a commission to examine the whole question and draw up a new act, reconvened on May 30 to receive the commission's report, and signed a new convention on June 8. The results of its work have just been made public, since it has become law by the ratification of the powers concerned.

The report contains striking evidence of the terrible effect that the liquor traffic has had upon the natives. Traders have sold spirits for many years on the lower Congo from its mouth to the rapids a hundred miles inland. The Congo State has found it almost impossible to oppose the traffic there without running all commercial relations. This district along ninety miles of river and the narrow sea front, consumes about 320,000 gallons of spirits in a year. Alcohol is the real money of the country. Everything the native acquires which he can use in trade is converted into spirits. When he takes to drink all the members of his family follow his example. Women are often seen giving a sip of spirits to their nursing children. The resulting mortality has been very great. The population is now sparse and villages are rare though the numerous cemeteries, filled with the victims of drink, show that the country, thirty years ago, was densely peopled. The measures taken to reduce the traffic have been ineffectual because the blacks of the lower Congo and the neighboring coasts willingly pay the duty of fifteen francs per hectolitre (about twenty six and a half gallons) and if the supply on the lower Congo is not equal to the demand the natives scour the coast regions north and south for additional supplies. The Congo State authorities were of the opinion that the tariff rate must be largely increased, not only in their own territory but also in the neighboring French and Portuguese colonies, to reduce the consumption on the lower Congo.

In regions where the sale of liquor began more recently the blacks are superior in physique and morale to the besotted natives of the lower river. There is a still more striking contrast between the natives of the upper river where no spirits are permitted to be sold and those living near the Congo's mouth. The people living in the interior are intelligent, robust, well built and take good care of their bodies while the contrary is true of the inhabitants of the lower Congo. The natives who have not acquired the appetite for drink have no idea of the degradation it produces.

The British plenipotentiaries urged a uniform imposition of duty of 100 francs per hectolitre on proof spirits (containing 50 per cent. of alcohol) and a proportionally higher tariff on spirits containing a higher percentage. High tariffs, they said, had been imposed in all the British colonies for some years and they have neither destroyed general commerce nor diminished the revenue. The increase in the tariff rate in the Gold Coast colony has prevented augmentation of the liquor imports, and in 1897 a duty of 80 francs per hectolitre yielded a revenue of 3,265,000 francs. The duty on the Gold Coast has now been raised to 124 francs. In Lagos and the Niger territory the increase in duties has diminished the importations. The Lagos importations fell from 85,000 hectolitres in 1895 to 62,000 in 1898, and on the Niger coast from 95,000 hectolitres in 1895 to 53,000 in 1887.

It has often been asserted that the native requires a certain amount of spirits and that a diminution in liquor importations would lead to a corresponding decline in the imports of legitimate articles of trade. This has not been the experience of the British colonies. In the Gold Coast, Lagos and the Niger colonies, a decline in the spirit imports has been accompanied by an increase in the importation of general articles of trade. In Lagos, for example, spirits formed in 1894 17 per cent., in 1896, 7 per cent., and in 1897 8 per cent.

of the total imports, while in those years the imports of other goods amounted to 18,000,000, 22,000,000 and 19,000,000 francs respectively. The British authorities believed that the general imposition on all parts of the African coast of a tax of 100 francs per hectolitre on spirits would not diminish the government revenues. The proof is conclusive, the plenipotentiaries said, that the commerce in alcohol destroys other commerce that is desirable and that the ultimate result of the trade in spirits, if unchecked would be to destroy all other commerce by destroying the natives while the diminution of the liquor traffic will even force an increase of other trade which will be more profitable for European industry. The present policy of increasing the duties on spirits should be continued both with the view of maintaining the colonial revenues and of preventing the abuse of spirituous liquors.

The debate on the British proposals occupied several days. Many of the plenipotentiaries expressed the view that the imposition of a minimum tax of 100 francs per hectolitre at present would, in many of the colonies, be prejudicial to the general interests of commerce and would largely reduce the revenues. A compromise figure was usually agreed to and the convention as adopted provides that in all the zone, not included under the regime of prohibition by the Brussels act of 1890, the minimum tariff on spirituous liquor shall be seventy francs per hectolitre, except in the German colony of Togo and the French colony of Dahomey where, upon the demand of those powers the minimum tax was fixed at sixty and fifty francs respectively. These minimum rates will be maintained for six years when they will be subject to such revision as seems wise in view of the results attained. Meanwhile any power has the right to increase the tariff rate in the colonies. Any distilled liquors manufactured in the colonies shall be subject to an exercise tax not less than the minimum tariff.

The convention having been ratified by all the powers concerned, has been de-

posted in the archives at Brussels and is not law. It maintains the prohibition of the traffic throughout the entire interior, fixes a comparatively high minimum rate of duty and will undoubtedly promote the diminution of the terrible evils of the African liquor.

A Woman's Promise.

Henry Carey, cousin to Queen Elizabeth, after having enjoyed Her Majesty's favor for several years, lost it in the following manner—

As he was walking one day, full of thought, in the garden of the palace, under the queen's window, she perceived him, and said to him, in a jocular manner—

What does a man think of when he is thinking of nothing?

'A woman's promise,' replied Carey.

'Well done, cousin,' answered Elizabeth.

She retired, but did not forget Carey's answer.

Some time after he solicited the honor of a peerage, and reminded the queen that she had promised it to him.

'True,' said she, 'but that was a woman's promise.'

Patagonia's Future.

Doctor Moreno, the director of the La Plata museum, during a recent visit to London gave a lecture on Patagonia, in which he declared that that country does not deserve its bad reputation. Although its present population is small and scattered, it has, he avers, a healthy soil capable of supporting a large population, and it presents a vast field for human industry. In Doctor Moreno's opinion, Patagonia is a remnant of an ancient Antarctic continent.

Rilling in Liquid Air.

Liquid air is so cold that mercury immersed in it turns solid and can be employed to hammer a nail. Yet, when a glass tube containing liquid hydrogen is im-

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mersed in liquid air, the hydrogen gently boils, and gradually turns into vapor, like water simmering over a slow fire. The temperature of liquid air is 312 degrees Fahrenheit below zero; but that is 'hot' compared with the temperature of liquid hydrogen, which is about 420 degrees below zero. Professor Dewar finds it impossible to prevent an open vessel containing liquid hydrogen from having a whitish deposit of solid air at the bottom, because the moment the air comes in contact with the liquefied hydrogen it is frozen hard and sinks through the hydrogen.

Representatives of Antiquity.

When we read of the men who inhabited the caves of Europe at a time when mammoths dwelt on that continent we seem to have gone back to a period so immeasurably remote that we can hardly picture in the mind's eye the appearance which the representatives of our race then presented. Yet, according to Prof. E. B. Tylor, the natives of Tasmania 'remained within the present century representatives of the immensely ancient Paleolithic period.' Recent studies of the relics of the Tasmanians who became extinct when brought into touch with modern civilized man, show that the workmanship of their rude imple-

ments was below that exhibited by the 'Erit and Cave men' of Paleolithic times.

A Surgical Magnet.

The Manhattan Eye and Ear Hospital in New York possesses a novel surgical instrument intended to extract particles of iron from the eye. It consists of a powerful electro-magnet mounted on a stand running on casters. When an operation is to be performed one end of the magnet is cautiously brought near the patient's eye. If a piece of steel or iron is embedded in the eyeball, the patient experiences a sharp pain as the metallic silver forces its way through the tissues and flies to the magnet. The injury to the eye is said to be less than that caused by using a knife.

Different.

President of the French Court—You declare this on your honor as a gentleman? French Officer—N-no, monsieur le president! As an officer of le grande armee!

'What did that young lawyer do when you tried to discourage his attention by telling him your father was in financial difficulties?'

'He immediately went to papa and offered to put him through voluntary bankruptcy for a fee of \$500.'



HANGING UP THE MISTLETOE.