

Messenger and Visitor

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The Plebiscite.

On the 29th day of the present month the electors of the Dominion will be asked to say by their votes, to be recorded at the polls, whether or not they are in favor of a prohibitory law for Canada, and a good deal may depend for the future of the country upon the answer which they shall give. It is not to be doubted that the men who are getting their livings or making their fortunes out of the liquor business are a good deal concerned as to the result of the plebiscite. If they are not making themselves very prominent in the campaign now going on, it is no doubt because they judge that a still fight will be more effective in their interests. The men who are growing rich on a business which is destroying so much of the country's manhood and wealth do not court an encounter with their opponents on the battlefield of public discussion. It is not their way to call public meetings for the purpose of setting forth the benefits which the liquor business confers upon the country and the interest which the people have in supporting it. They understand very well that the more the nature and the fruits of their business are made known, the more cogent will appear the reasons why that business should not exist, and that to invite fair and open public discussion of the subject were but to invite defeat. The liquor men doubtless think that it is good policy to let sleeping lions lie and are trusting a good deal to the inaction of the temperance people in the matter. They hope that there are a very large number who, for one reason or another, will not take the trouble to vote in the plebiscite, although more or less strongly opposed to the evil business. But it would be a great mistake to suppose that the liquor interest of the country is not making its hand felt strongly in connection with the campaign. It is doing a good deal through the press in connection with papers whose publishers are more or less under its influence and whose columns are for sale in its interest. But even in the press it is seldom that an attempt is made to uphold the liquor business as being in the best interests of the country. The fight is made by securing the publication of the utterances of men in prominent positions, who, though opposed to the liquor traffic and all its works, yet do not believe (or at least have doubts) that the evils connected therewith are most effectively corrected by means of a prohibitory law. These good men, we may be sure, have not wished to do anything to fortify the liquor business, but it is still true that they have furnished to the hands of the liquor party some of their most effective weapons for this campaign. Still more effective, perhaps, in the liquor interest is the bugbear of direct taxation as a necessary result of the loss of revenue to be suffered by the prohibition of the traffic in alcoholic drinks. Such an argument ought not to have much influence with the great body of independent electors in this country. At best it appeals to a mercenary spirit, which places a small personal advantage above the great interest, moral and material, of the whole people. The argument, too, is easily answered. It is easy to show that there will probably be no need of a resort to direct taxation to make up the necessary revenue, and that, even if that were the case, the immense saving of wealth now wasted in the production and consumption of strong drink would many times reimburse tax payers for any slight increase they may be called upon temporarily to contribute to the public treasury as a result of surrendering the revenue from alcoholic drinks. Nevertheless, it is not to be doubted that the taxation argument will have its effect. There are few things at which the average Canadian elector is more apt to take alarm than the prospect of increased taxation, and especially if it is proposed to make it

direct. He has indeed acquired the ability to take pretty large doses of it by using the vehicle of a protective tariff, but if he is asked to take his taxation "straight", it seems to him a very noxious draught, only to be submitted to in the last extremity. There is still another quiet, but still more direct and effective, way of fighting prohibition in the plebiscite, which it may be expected will be freely employed when the time for voting comes. It must not be forgotten that the liquor interest is a monied interest and that it has much at stake in this question to which the electorate of Canada is to give its answer on the twenty-ninth. It is not to be supposed that the liquor interest will be restrained by any scruples of conscience from using its money freely to produce the result desired. If the electorate is as corruptible as it is frequently represented to be, the money which the liquor men are likely to put into the fight is certainly a factor to be reckoned among the forces that the temperance party have to contend with.

All these considerations go to show that the temperance people of every province in Canada, if they expect an affirmative vote in the plebiscite, and one large enough to have decisive influence with the Government and Parliament of the Dominion, will need to be fully alive to the interests of the cause and the duty of the hour. It will not do to conclude that because not much is being heard from the liquor men, therefore there is not much strength on the anti-prohibitionist side, and that a large affirmative vote is certain to be recorded. This is by no means certain unless every elector who desires the abolition of the evil business shall see to it that his condemnation of it is recorded.

A Message to the Self-Indulgent.

The man from whose writings the Bible lesson for the current week is taken, describes himself as "no prophet neither a prophet's son, but a herdsman and a gatherer of sycamore fruit." Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, would have silenced the voice of the courageous preacher, but Amos asserts his right to speak, not by virtue of any natural inheritance or human authority, but because he was commissioned by the Lord, who had taken him from following the flock, and bidden him "Go, prophesy unto my people Israel." Like Paul, he did not claim an apostleship derived from man or through man. But neither the man from Tekoa nor the man from Tarsus, had any doubt of the genuineness of his call to preach. Neither have the people of God in all subsequent generations, doubted their call. A man who had no connection with a prophetic guild or school, might yet be a true prophet of the Lord; a man who was not numbered among the Twelve, might still be a true apostle of Jesus Christ, and quite as truly, in these modern days a man who has no standing among the clergy, may be as really a minister of God, as he would be if he were able to trace his clerical pedigree in unbroken succession back to Peter. Not human ordination, but divine inspiration, is the significant thing. The man who has God's message as a fire in his bones, is God's minister, and all that men have to do about it, is to recognize that fact and receive his message.

One of the lessons which we may learn from the prophecy of Amos is, that a condition of material prosperity is no certain indication that all is going well. The reign of Jeroboam II, in whose time Amos lived and prophesied, marked the highest point in the rise of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Its borders were enlarged, it enjoyed peace, wealth accumulated, and the nation indulged a sense of peace and security which it had never before known. But wealth and peace and the easy, prosperous life which they made possible, led to luxurious living, to various forms of hurtful self-indulgence, to effeminacy and to indifference in regard to the supreme duties which men owe to God, and those duties, only less important, which they owe to society.

Because this condition of things existed, the prophet saw clearly that the judgments of God were impending over the nation, and therefore uttered his message of stern warning in the ears of Israel. It is well for us to enquire whether, in our time and in our own country, there is not a strong tendency to a similar condition of things. Living in a country of great natural resources, whose wealth is constantly increasing, and all the results of modern

invention at our command, we find ourselves in a position to indulge in countless luxuries which were unknown to our fathers. These easy conditions may not be positively bad in themselves, but they offer a temptation to moral and spiritual laxity, against which we need to be on guard. We are in danger of finding so many ministries to comfort and enjoyment, in our home and social life, we are touched on the intellectual and aesthetic sides of our being by so much that ministers to enjoyment, that we are in danger of losing all disposition to rouse ourselves from our couches of luxury, in order to be about our Master's business. Material prosperity is apt to lead to luxurious living, and luxurious living corrupts the heart and destroys the strength of a nation.

But this truth has its application to families and individuals as truly as to nations, for it is indeed through the individual and the family that peoples are built up or destroyed. Let the family life be pure and wholesome, and the nation's pulse will beat true and strong. Let the homely rugged virtues fall from the family life, to give place to profligacy and self-indulgence, and in the same proportion the power and prestige of the nation must fall. There is great danger in these days, when wealth increases and the means of indulging expensive appetites and luxurious tastes abounds, that the sterner virtues which have made the homes of this country nurseries of vigorous, wholesome manhood and womanhood, shall give place to conditions far less favorable to the development of vigorous life and national power. There is perhaps nothing in regard to which at this present time there is more need of our being warned. Worldliness, like a miasma, penetrates all the atmosphere of life. It creeps upon us insidiously through all the avenues of society, and before we are aware we are succumbing to its influence. It steals into our homes and our churches. On every high hill and under every green tree the altars of Mammon are erected. There is now, just as there was in the days of Jeroboam, a strong tendency to forsake the service of the Lord for those that are no gods. How hard for men to hear and obey the call of God to self-denying service! But how easy to live worldly, self-indulgent lives, to stretch themselves on luxurious couches, to drink wine, to listen to voluptuous music, to scoff at religion and duty and to shut their ears to every voice that summons them to do anything in the name of God!

Editorial Notes.

—The North church, Halifax, has lost one of its veteran standard bearers in the person of Deacon Norman McDonald, a man of sterling Christian character, a faithful member and officer of the church, whose death occurred on Wednesday last. We extend our sympathy to the bereaved relatives, of whom there are a large circle. A suitable obituary notice will appear in another issue.

—It is stated in a Winnipeg despatch that all available land in the Western Mennonite reserve, recently thrown open to settlement by the Dominion government, has been applied for, and officials in the land office are engaged notifying fortunate ones of the acceptance of their applications. The land is equal to the best in the province and is situated in a well settled district. Among the parties coming to settle is one consisting of seventy farmers and their families from North Dakota, who have notified the Dominion lands agent that they will move over in a body this fall with considerable stock and effects.

—The many friends of Rev. G. O. Gates and Mrs. Gates will be glad to hear of their safe arrival in this country. They reached Halifax early last Saturday morning. It had been hoped that Mr. Gates would reach home so as to occupy his pulpit again on the first Sunday in September, but arriving so near the end of the week, and suffering from the fatigue of the voyage, he felt it better to rest with friends in Truro over Sunday and resume his labors here under more favorable conditions next Lord's Day. Mr. and Mrs. Gates arrived in St. John on Monday evening and were warmly greeted by their friends. The church has arranged for a public reception to the pastor and his wife on Thursday evening of this week.

—Although the Czar's "peace note" was a great surprise to the world generally, it may not have been so much of a surprise in certain diplomatic circles outside of Russia. When Lord Salisbury went to the Continent for a holiday a few weeks ago, in the midst of the excitement respecting the relations between Great Britain and Russia in China, it is not unlikely that he had an inkling of what was to be proposed, and that, as a matter of fact, the relations between the two governments were much less strained than they were supposed to be. No doubt there is a good deal of information in the Foreign Office, which is not confided to the newspapers of London and the correspondents, whose business it is to furnish European news for American readers. There seems to have been

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