

TABLE 34.—PROSPERITY TABLE DERIVED FROM THE VOLUME OF LIQUOR CONSUMED PER HEAD.

Year.				Year.			
1885	..	..	119	1898	..	..	94
1886	..	..	113	1899	..	..	98
1887	..	..	109	1900	..	..	103
1888	..	..	110	1901	..	..	108
1889	..	..	97	1902	..	..	105
1890	..	..	108	1903	..	..	107
1891	..	..	105	1904	..	..	106
1892	..	..	107	1905	..	..	102
1893	..	..	103	1906	..	..	107
1894	..	..	97	1907	..	..	113
1895	..	..	95	1908	..	..	114
1896	..	..	90	1909	..	..	104
1897	..	..	93	1910	..	..	107

This table seems to show that the volume of liquor consumed per head fell during the time of low prices of products, and rose during the period of high prices; people drink more when they are prosperous; but the increase of prosperity indicated here is not so great as the increase indicated by the other tables. That is clearly intelligible from the fact that the temperance sentiment is now much stronger than it used to be.

General character of the improved standard of living.

6. This rise in consumption shown in the above tables has accompanied a rise in prices, so that it is an undoubted sign of general prosperity if the individual can not only purchase twice as much but also pay higher prices therefor. Witness after witness, trade after trade, gave evidence that not only was better quality demanded by all classes, but that more attractive and more fashionable styles were found necessary to draw customers to stores and shops. Boots and shoes must be more delicately shaped; furniture more artistic; clothing of up-to-date style; houses of new design, and finished with all the latest appliances of baths, hot-water services, gas or electric light, drainage, &c. As one of the witnesses in the boot trade remarked, "The imported stuff that comes here now is of a higher grade, and the whole of the public has been gradually educated to demand a better class of stuff." "Educated" is the key-word to the whole movement.

The education towards higher ideals, even in the material things of life, is hard to trace, for it arises from many causes, and flows subtly in many channels. Some of it comes through our national system of education itself—the teaching of our public schools. In the early days of the Dominion there were thousands of our settlers who in other countries had been reared under imperfect tuition. They included in their ranks some of our most valued and valuable pioneers, men and women admirably fitted for the rough work of breaking in new lands. Their children and their children's children now receive instruction equalling, and sometimes surpassing, what they could obtain at a good private school. Naturally, all over the Dominion, even in the most isolated portions of it, there have sprung up centres of culture and intelligence. High schools, universities, colleges, libraries, picture-galleries, debating societies, lectures, daily newspapers, illustrated weeklies, picture-shows, all have tended to disseminate knowledge, and to give to all classes a strong desire for improvement not only in regard to mental culture, but also in regard to more material things, such as artistic dwellings, good food, attractive clothes, and leisure for recreation. With these are joined the desire for rapid transit on trains, fast steamers, and electric trams, together with quicker communication by letter, telegraph, and telephone. The effect of spending money on telegrams or telephones is to cause more of these to be extended as services, and so more taxes have to be paid.

That the rise in the standard of living is worth paying for, from the public point of view, cannot be doubted. The alteration in the public taste is very marked. The old crude wall-papers and decorations of twenty years ago cannot now be endured. The materials for women's dress and adornment become more elegant and dainty every year. The taste for good pictures is becoming evident; the reproach that a colonial was a person who "sat on a thirty-guinea sofa to admire a thirty-shilling chromo" is a thing of the past. The dislike of hideous advertisements on walls, trams, or picturesque places is marked, and the love of beautiful public parks and gardens everywhere apparent.

The question then arises, "Is there ability with the people to pay for these desirable things? Can the increasing burden be borne?" The answer is probably given by the witness who pointed out to the Commission that the returns in the New Zealand Year-book showed that in 1910 there were 408,770 depositors in the savings-banks—i.e., that in a population of about a million nearly one person in two (including children) has a banking account.