

(December 30, 1908.)

The License Reduction Question.

BY CONTROLLER F. S. SPENCE AND MR. A. W. WRIGHT.

AT a special evening meeting of the Canadian Club "The License Reduction Question" was debated by Controller F. S. Spence and Mr. A. W. Wright. Mr. Spence spoke in favor of reduction and Mr. Wright opposed the same.

MR. SPENCE said: *Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen*,—There isn't time to waste in apology. I am, as you know, very busy these days and seek to travel on schedule time. Only a short time ago I secured an opportunity to prepare for this meeting. I made a few jottings on pieces of paper and then came away without them. In consequence I fear I may be a little slower than I had intended and take a longer time. So I shall waste none in preliminaries.

It is always a pleasure to be with the Canadian Club. I congratulate you upon your splendid meeting to-night. It is a great turnout. I accept the chairman's remarks. We are here to discuss an important question on its merits. Issues which have nothing to do with the case have been dragged in. I am not here to refute the silly slanders which have been dragged in to cover certain underhand movements behind them. I don't believe men accept them in their hearts—they recognize that there is no soundness in such an absurdity.

This movement for license reduction carries with it no ill will towards any section of the community. I trust there will be no hard or bitter expressions from the platform on either side.

The opposition is more to be credited with good temper than we are. They have more reason to be agitated; more reason to be disturbed. I am free to confess that it is more to their credit than ours that this good temper has prevailed.

Of the evils of intemperance I need not speak. Its terrible curse was described recently by an eminent American philosopher who addressed you. He condemned in unmeasured terms the treating system and the bar-room. The whole evil of intemperance lies behind them. In Toronto there were 8,750 arrests for drunkenness last year. Anyone who has an acquaintance with conditions knows that the mere figures

—appalling though they are—give no idea of what is behind, the weary, aching, throbbing, bleeding hearts.

What is the cause of it? Surely it is pertinent to ask ourselves as citizens, desiring the good and the uplift to our city, what are the various causes that lead to this intemperance. The most patent cause is unquestionably the treating system and the bar-room temptation. In the Old Country drinking has become a habit at large. It is carried on in the home. Beer is served with the meals. Canada is fortunately free from this temptation to strong drink. In nine cases out of ten the Canadian takes his first glass when some one asks him to have a drink. It is true that poverty leads to a great deal of drunkenness. Some are hard driven to drink, but only when the appetite has been formed. The man in the grind of poverty all the time gets a glass of liquor with a view to relieving the continual strain. I have a great deal of sympathy for that man. But where does the poverty come from? Many men spend what they cannot afford over the bar, and are materially the poorer for that expenditure. There are 150 bar-rooms in Toronto. Let us assume that 100 men visit each bar-room—some will have 1,000 visitors; some will have 100 in them at the present time. But, assuming that only 100 go in, that means that 15,000 drinks are bought—that every man came out a poorer man than he went in. The great mass of the community can probably stand it, but among that 15,000 there will be a great many who cannot afford it. They stand treat all round, but they find it difficult to provide the daily income for the family at home.

Follow it up. There are to-day 150 bar-rooms and, say, 50 liquor shops. Suppose each one of these takes in no more than \$50 a day. Two hundred places at \$50 each would be \$10,000 which went into the liquor business in Toronto each day. There are say 310 selling days in the year, excluding election days and Sundays. What does that mean at the same ratio? It means that Toronto is \$3,100,000 poorer to-day because of the operation of the bar-room. Think of what such a revenue for ten years would mean! Is it any wonder many good citizens are campaigning to banish the bar?

Then also consider this: the \$3,100,000 a year is wasted as far as the purchasers are concerned. The bar-room is the one kind of business that makes its patron poorer. The dry-goods merchants, the grocer, the baker—these make their customer better off, because they supply him with what he needs. The once is better off; the other always worse off.

How then can we grapple with the recognized evil of intemperance? The liquor traffic is the cause and the bar-room is the agency. We believe the remedy rests first in closing the bar-room and ending the treating system. Will closing some of the bar-rooms diminish the evils? The treating system is responsible for two things: first, much poverty; second, the liquor appetite. Will the diminishing of the number of bar-rooms diminish the treating system? The treating system depends upon the convenience of the bar-room. Two men meet. They do not want to drink. Yet one suggests that they drop in to an adjoining bar-room and fraternize over a glass. They meet three others and to show the generous spirit of good fellowship they treat all round. With the second round their judgment is shaken, and the others insist on a treat all round. Thus each man has had 25 drinks when no one wanted a drink at all. Do you suppose these men would have tramped all the way down to the King Edward to have a drink? Not at all. There is a great deal in the dissemination of the bar-rooms in the city. If they are scattered they put facilities in the way of the greater number. You can't weed out 40 bar-rooms in Toronto without removing some of the evils of the drinking habit. The brewers and wholesalers believe it will diminish drinking, else they would come to the committee rooms of the opposite party with their \$1,000 subscriptions.

A reduction in the number of bar-rooms will not interfere with hotel accommodation. This is one of the serious phases of the situation. "Don't kill Toronto," our opponents urge. I should be sorry to kill Toronto, so I have tried to figure out the extent to which Toronto will be "killed" by this reduction. The results are interesting.

In 1874 there were in Toronto 309 taverns and 184 liquor shops. In 1886 the number of licenses was reduced from 493 to 290, while in 1887 and 1888 they were brought down to 200. Now then, how has Toronto been killed by cutting off these licenses? When there were 493 licenses the population was 68,000; the year the licenses were reduced to 290 the population reached 118,000, and the years when the number was brought down to 200 the population grew to 186,000 and again to 286,000. So it has not hurt the population. But how about the prosperity? Let us see. When there were 493 licenses the city's assessment was \$46,000,000; when there were 290 licenses the assessment was \$83,000,000; when they came down again to 200 the assessment was \$126,000,000,

and to-day it is \$223,000,000! Where's the lack of prosperity? Does that look like killing Toronto?

Another argument advanced by the opponents of license reduction is that it will create a shortage of hotel accommodation. This crusade is not against the hotels. You can remove forty licenses in Toronto without taking away a single meal or bedroom. This city has all the hotel accommodation of other cities of the same population as Toronto and more. I have just been telegraphing Buffalo and I learn that that city has only 70 hotels—and 1,470 saloons. Detroit has 10 first rate hotels, 10 second rate hotels and 16 cheap hotels. Do you then think you need 150 hotels in Toronto? Ask the License Commissioners, Colonel Davidson, Major Murray and Mr. Flavelle—what did they say? Listen for a moment to their report:

"The Commissioners for the City of Toronto deemed it their duty to visit personally a number of the licensed houses in their district for the purpose of ascertaining how far in letter and in spirit the hotels of this city were observing the requirements set forth by the Provincial Secretary. They find a common condition is that many houses are being kept merely as drinking places. In nearly all instances there is compliance with the technical requirements of the law as far as the number of bedrooms is concerned—six, exclusive of those used by the proprietor, his family and his help. While these rooms, however, are provided, they are seldom used unless during some crush period like the exhibition. The sanitary appliances and conveniences are in many instances wholly bad and unfit for either public or private use. In some instances a large or small number of boarders are accommodated. In other cases the proprietors frankly state that they will not keep boarders, and that they have no transient trade. In many houses no attempt is made to serve meals regularly.

"The inspectors make the statement that after seven o'clock on Saturday night and during Sunday over one hundred out of the one hundred and fifty licensed houses cannot be entered until the proprietor or someone representing him opens the locked door, showing by this condition that the general idea of keeping these houses is for the business which can be done in the bar, and that as soon as the bars close the house can be locked."

Now that is the official testimony of the license commissioners—it is not my statement. Is it not clear that we can close many bar-rooms without restricting our hotel accom-

modation? The law makes no provision for saloons—and the authorizing of mere drinking places is a violation of the law.

Toronto has a larger proportion of hotels than any city of its size on the continent. From an official directory in my office I find that Pittsburg has 229 hotels, St. Louis 221, Chicago 317, Cincinnati 74, Cleveland 74, Columbus 29, Toledo 86, Rochester 44 and Syracuse 75. There is no necessity for 150 hotels in Toronto—neither is the bar necessary to the success of hotels. There are temperance hotels in Toronto doing a splendid business.

Another argument used by the opponents of reduction is that Toronto would lose \$48,000 in revenue by the cutting off of 40 licenses. Half of this amount, however, goes to the Province. The city would lose only \$24,000 or less than one-eighth of a mill, or eight per capita. It is the tax-payers who have to put up this amount anyway, and the reduction proposal merely means the dismissal of 40 tax collectors who are paid \$596,000 for collecting \$24,000 for the city. Not a bad business proposition. No killing of Toronto in this.

But, perhaps, most important of all, is the question of compensation. It is charged that we would take away men's property. Yet what would really be taken away is the good will of the license, for closing the bar-room would not impair the value of the hotel property. It impairs only the place run for tavern purposes. Without the bar the hotel is really better off for accommodation. What is really taken away is the good will of the license. The license is granted only for a year, and in England the question of compensation is met among the hotel-keepers by a system of insurance—the license-holders' insurance system furnishes a compensation fund. But in Ontario no vested right has ever been recognized. In 1874 there were 6,100 licenses, but these have been reduced to 2,400. There have, therefore, been 3,000 licenses cut off without compensation. According to the theory of our opponents the men at present in the business are doing all the business that the 6,000 used to do. One would think, if this be the case, that the government might levy a compensation tax on the license-holders alone. It seems to me, however, that it is the people who never had licenses at all who should be compensated for the chance they have missed. The licenses have no claim in equity. The chariot wheels of progress cannot be stayed because some one is to suffer.

The whole question is: Is it going to do good or harm? Will not the reduction of bar-rooms make Toronto a cleaner

and safer place for the boys—and that is a great deal more than the mere monetary consideration. We are not going to kill Toronto. We are going to make Toronto grow and prosper, by the adoption of this instalment of a great scheme.

I thank you heartily.

MR. WRIGHT said: *Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Canadian Club*,—This is my first opportunity to address this club. I have for some time read reports of the addresses delivered here, and have formed the opinion that one is to be envied who is accorded the privilege of speaking to this most intelligent body.

With the address of my friend Mr. Spence, I have very little fault to find except in one or two particulars. On the question of the evils of intemperance we are agreed. But that, after all, is beside the question. The question is not concerning the evils of intemperance, but will the projected measure of license reduction diminish or increase those evils. Mr. Spence closed his address with a reference to the boys. We all know, I think, that the License Act of Ontario forbids the presence of a boy in the bar-room except with an order from his parents. And it is interesting to note in this connection that the request of the hotel men and license-holders for an amendment to the law making it a crime to sell to a boy, even with an order from his parents, has come from the hotelmen themselves. Temperance people, so-called, have never given the hotelmen any assistance in securing an amendment to the law in order to prohibit boys from entering saloons on any pretext. Now no boy can enter a bar without the license-holder being liable to fine or imprisonment, but I have been informed that there are 200 "blind pigs" in the city, where liquor is sold illicitly. Some I know, because their keepers are fined occasionally. But the Government has not the control over the keeper of the "blind pig" that it has over the legitimate licensed trade.

Now let me refer for a moment to Mr. Spence's figures relative to drunkenness in Toronto. The Citizens' Alliance has pointed out that there was an increase in drunkenness in the city after the passing of the last reduction by-law. While Mr. Fleming was Mayor a rule was established whereby the police were authorized to release "drunks" without registering them. This has made a big difference in the figures. The serious fact is that drunkenness has increased in Toronto far and away beyond the increase of the population. This is

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largely because the social system has been destroyed and changed into a drinking system. The bar-room was designed to be a comfortable place of social intercourse, where patrons could sit down at a table and, over their glass of beer, play a game of dominos or checkers. The social side was the feature and the drinking an incident. But unwise agitators are turning the bar-room into a drinking place. Those responsible for the change are foolish temperance men who advocate what they do not fully appreciate.

Take the cases of Buffalo, Rochester and Detroit. In these three cities, aggregating a population of 800,000, there are more bar-rooms and a great deal less drunkenness than in Toronto. Throughout the American continent it has been demonstrated that as the number of bar-rooms decreases the amount of drunkenness has increased. The cities of Boston, Pittsburg, Philadelphia and other large centres where restrictive measures have been passed, prove it. If 144 bars, 25 feet long, cause 8,750 arrests for drunkenness in one year, how many arrests will 110 bars, 50 feet long, produce? I ask Mr. Spence to figure it out and tell the audience at Massey Hall to-night.

And let me right here take exception to the statement that all those opposing the by-law are liquor men. I have not a dollar of interest in the liquor business, directly or indirectly. There are 800 men on the Citizens' committee from all walks of life who have not one brass farthing at stake. They are reasonable men who believe the proposals of the reductionists will prove injurious to Toronto.

I agree that if we can get rid of intemperance no price is too great to pay. I am one of those who believes that drinking in moderation is not a crime. There are some people, you know, who think that when the Lord made the grape, the devil put the bloom on it so that it would ferment. I believe that the Creator was responsible for the whole process. In the words of Charles MacKay:

"God in His goodness made the grape
To bless both great and small.
The little fools—they drink too much;
The great fools—not at all."

I am not a talker on this matter. This is not my business, as it is with Mr. Spence.
A voice—"Take that back."

Mr. Wright, continuing—I speak in no offensive sense. I would not like to imply that any one is in this temperance agitation for money. I believe Mr. Spence to be sincere in his efforts to bring about more or less prohibitive liquor laws. But I believe he is mistaken. Our history shows it. We tried the Dunkin Act in Ontario, and we found it to be a drunkard-breeding act everywhere, and repealed it. Those who desire to lessen the evils of intemperance should go slow in driving respectability out of the liquor trade. We want the respectable licensed house, not the illegal brothel. We want to be able to say, "Keep the law or out you go."

A pamphlet has been issued, mothered by the W.C.T.U., in which it is stated that 2,000 boys were convicted of drunkenness in Toronto last year.

Mr. Spence—"That's wrong."

Mr. Wright—"Of course it's wrong, but it's in the fly sheet all the same. There is one plain Anglo-Saxon word of three letters that can be properly applied to it. But even if it were true, where did the boys get the liquor? They could not get it in the bar-rooms. There has not been one complaint lodged against a hotel-keeper of the city for giving liquor to boys. If the boys got it—as the pamphlet states—they got it in the dives and "blind pigs" which have sprung up as a result of the last reduction by-law in the city. The advocates of this course are responsible. As Nathan said to David, "Thou art the man!" It is a serious thing to put out such a fly-sheet to deceive the electorate. Woe to Toronto when the "blind pig" and brothel shall take the place of the hotel.

There are times of year—exhibition time, for instance—when there is a universal complaint of too little hotel accommodation. At the Oddfellows' convention it was necessary to billet delegates in the exhibition grounds. This is one of the considerations which require the license-holder to keep a certain amount of hotel accommodation. Now, notice the gross injustice. Mr. Spence says if the licenses were cut off we would still have the accommodation. But when Mr. Spence's temperance friends are travelling they do not register in an unlicensed hotel. They want the best and they can't get that accommodation unless with the bar-room. The hotelmen have spent \$1,500,000 in providing better accommodation since the passing of the last license-reduction by-law in the city. They have expended this huge sum not on the bar-room, but on the hotel. Now, after this, you propose to take away the

bar-room. How, in common honesty, can you justify it to yourselves?

There is no provision for compensation. The position of Dr. Goldwin Smith has been assailed. He has been handled without gloves. I have not always agreed with him—it may have been my misfortune—but I have never doubted his intellectual honesty, never believed him to advocate what he did not believe to be right or hesitate to condemn what he believed to be wrong. He is one of the great publicists of the world. He is sneered at by men who would be honored if they were engaged to black his boots.

The question has been asked why, if it be true that license reduction would be followed by an increase in drinking and the aggregate consumption of liquor, brewers and distillers are opposing the by-law. One reason will appeal to everyone. These men have large sums invested in hotels, and, if the licenses are cancelled, they stand to lose their investment.

The increase in arrests for drunkenness are out of all proportion to the growth of population in Toronto. Is it not the result of the concentration of the liquor-selling. The police now keep no record of many of the arrests.

Mr. Spence—Are you sure of that? I am informed to the contrary.

Mr. Wright—I am so informed, but if it is a mistake I will frankly admit that I am wrong. It was when Mr. Fleming was Mayor that the change was made, that, unless they were noisy and disorderly, their names should not be taken. To continue: Following 1897 will someone explain why drunkenness has increased in Toronto out of all proportion to the population, except through concentration and monopoly in license holding and the advent of illicit dives where liquor is sold? Look at the great number of arrests under the Scott Act, when there were more apprehensions for drunkenness in Toronto than in any other city of equal size on the continent. Compare the states of New Jersey and Maine. In the former state there is one to every 94 of the population in the almshouses, whereas in the prohibition state of Maine there are twice as many. If drink causes poverty what becomes of prohibition? It is unwise to adopt legislation to increase drunkenness and therefore increase poverty.

One word more, in reference to the unemployed problem in Toronto. If you close 40 bar-rooms you will inevitably cause an increase in the unemployed population. The members of the Trades Council and the allied trades know what they are

talking about. They say there will be a great increase in the number of unemployed if the by-law passes. It also means the reduction of the wages of men who remain in employment. It will go towards impoverishing their earning power.

It is a serious measure. Think its results out for yourself. Never mind what Rev. Mr. So and So says. He is doubtless a good man with magnificent opportunities for knowing nothing at all about it. Or Mrs. or Miss So and So, who have equally good opportunities. Study the question for yourselves as business men. Determine whether concentration increases or lessens drinking. If you believe prohibition to be the right thing, then, in the name of honesty, bring in a prohibition measure. Be manly and straight forward in dealing with this serious civic problem.

I thank you for hearing me so patiently. Whether we agree or disagree on this issue, as good citizens, we will enter the new year with ambitions to make Toronto bigger and better.
