

Liquor Traffic—Ontario.

year in and year out, abuses that delicate sense of taste in the palate, until at last it absolutely fails to give him any warning when he is taking a sufficient quantity, and not being accustomed to notice the effects on his system, he begins, after a time, to lose the sense of direct stimulation, and fancies he is not stimulated until he becomes narcotized, and the vaso-motor nerves begin to lose their functions. In the case of whisky or brandy, a man may readily pass the safe limit without any particular tax on the stomach, but in the case of lager beer or wine, it is absolutely impossible for the great majority of men to get drunk on either with any degree of comfort. If the question be asked, is alcohol a poison? as is very often alleged, I shall have to answer, with Dr. Anstie, Dr. Dupré and other physiologists, that it is undoubtedly a poison, if you speak of alcohol. But really, how many people drink alcohol? A few instances have come under my observation of men in the laboratory or the workshop who have become addicted to the use of alcohol per se, but even then when only diluted considerably with water. Per se, it is a poison undoubtedly. At the same time, we have to class it with a vast number of other substances which are also poisons, and which are used to an enormous extent in life. For instance, we take mustard, we take pepper, we take salt continually as condiments, and even more than as condiments, because they are a practical necessity of every-day life, especially salt. These in their purity and in large quantities are undoubtedly poisonous. Orfila, the great Swiss toxicologist, one of the greatest authorities on poisons, has given several instances in which death has occurred from excessive doses of salt. It is the same with tea and coffee. We use these beverages continually for their stimulant action, not for their narcotic action, although undoubtedly much of the tea drinking of the present day is narcotic in its effects but it would be absurd to condemn the general use of tea, simply on the ground that it contains a principle which when extracted and used in excess is an undoubted poison. So I would class alcohol in the same category as tea, coffee, cocoa, the extract of which cocaine, is very largely used in medical practice. With regard to the question of heredity, it has often been stated that the drinking customs of one age lead to excess in another and impart a hereditary pre-disposition to drunkenness—that drunkenness is inheritable. At first sight there would appear to be some truth in this assertion. We know on undoubted evidence that most evil practices are hereditary. But are the children of drunken parents, if excluded from the influence of such parents as they grow up, likely to become drunkards? They are as likely to be weak in any other direction as in the direction of alcohol; and the practical fact remains, which I think is a sufficient answer to the assertion that drunkenness is hereditary or that the drinking customs of one age lead to excessive drinking habits in the following age, that the history of nations does not show any such deterioration. Let us, for instance, take the fact as we find it in this Province of Ontario. I am but a very young man; yet I can remember the time when it was almost impossible to have a logging-bee or a barn-raising bee or any other kind of a bee without the accompaniment of a keg of whisky. The time was here when one could go nowhere and do nothing without an accompaniment of whisky; whisky on the farm, whisky in the counting house, whisky at the market. Now, that custom has gradually died out; we are becoming more and more temperate every day; and yet at the same time I doubt that the percentage of alcohol used has very much decreased. While the amount of alcohol per unit of the population is practically the same now, with slight variations, that it was thirty or forty or even twenty years ago, our people have changed in their tastes; they do not drink it in the same way or use the same class of liquors; and this has come about wholly without aid from law, being largely a matter of public sentiment. Again, take the case of Scotland or England. In preceding generations the saying "as sober as a judge" meant something very different from its literal meaning, because I believe that at one time there were very few judges who went to bed sober. In England in the past generation—and when I speak of the past generation I refer to the time of my father, who was born in 1800—and what I learned from him I have myself gathered from history—drunkenness was not looked on as a vice or sin. Public sentiment, however, without any aid of law, has stepped in and completely revolutionized the custom, so that if a gentleman now got drunk at the supper table and joined the ladies in a state of hilarity, I think his acquaintanceship in polite society would be very quickly dropped.