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TALES OF THE TOWN.

"I must have liberty,
that as large a charter as the wind—
blow on whom I please."

It is stated on what seems to be good authority that drunkenness among men is increasing to an alarming extent. The habit is not confined to the lower and middle classes of society; for the story was common property last summer that several ladies living in good society partook too liberally of liquor at a city hotel and had to be literally carried home. Truly this is a pitiable condition of affairs. As high authority as Dr. Ker, who at one time kept a retreat for women inebriates, says that the chances of reclaiming women who are addicted to the liquor habit are exceedingly small. As illustrating the length which women will go to to procure liquor, Dr. Ker tells how the women in his retreat insisted on having curling tongs. Then as curling tongs must be made hot they got some methylated spirit for the lamp. Next, by various devices, hot water, sugar and lemon juice were obtained from one of the maids. So out of curling tongs came frog and a state of intoxication shocking and startling to the proprietor of the retreat.

During the past few weeks the number of men who have been fined for drinking has been unusually large. There is something about this mode of punishing a man for consuming what he is permitted by law to purchase which strikes me as altogether wrong. In nearly every instance it only adds to the burden of the unhappy man's family. Indeed, the whole system of dealing with drunkenness in the courts throughout the country is full of injustice to the man's generally dependent family, who are, in the shape of fines, robbed by the law, or, by his confinement in the lock-up robbed of his wage-earning assistance. The money taken from the innocent family of drunkards, in the shape of fines or detention in prison, making an appalling total throughout Canada every day in the week; and this treatment of drunkenness produces no decrease in the number of drunkards from one year to another. Practically the law punishes the drunkard's family, and when he cannot pay at their expense for his day's or night's fun, puts him where he will be sobered up, well housed, well fed, and finally sets him free, in good physical condition to withstand the "wear and tear" of another carouse.

That beautiful combination of intelligence that Victoria loves to call the Mayor and Board of Aldermen have at last swung heavily round to an idea of the need of

some system of street nomenclature, and have ordered a number of street signs. In the learned debate that took place on the purchase of these most important articles, it was edifying to listen to the weighty arguments that were brought forward. Ald. Bragg, of course, was solicitous for the welfare of the citizens, and with him his partner Ald. Baker. How heavily they discussed the advisability of purchasing wooden signs, alleging the sage reason therefor that there was not sufficient money in hand to pay for the requisite number of the permanent metal article. It did not seem to enter their crystalline brains that it was possible to purchase as many as they could pay for and let the incoming council complete the work. Then the delicious patriotism of Ald. Styles in opposing the purchase of enamelled iron signs because such an action would take the money out of the city. I wonder if everything Ald. Styles uses is made in the city. In listening to this eloquence, one was forcibly reminded of Sidney Smith's advice to the deans of St. Paul's, for it was only too apparent that if our council would but put their respective heads together there would be wood sufficient and to spare to make signs for all the streets in New York city.

Although not a special admirer of that institution called the pioneer, there are nevertheless features about him that are interesting, and at times edifying. Usually the pioneer will meet every improvement with the statement, "they didn't have them things in my days," in a tone much the same as an old fashioned Methodist or Baptist would use now if he saw the church transformed into a concert hall where the choir sang comic songs. Essentially conservative in his ideas, and ancient in his character, the pioneer will steadily resist modern improvements. Now and again, however, we find an exception, and there are some of the latter in our British Columbia Pioneer Society, whose annual re-union took place the other evening, when some fifty of the old timers sat down to a capital dinner at the Victoria. Hon. Theodore Davie is one of those progressive pioneers who grow young with time. He was present and made a delightful after-dinner speech, reviewing old times with the spectacles of prosperity from the eminence of a feeling of comfort after a good dinner. His speech was as much a surprise as a pleasure, as it was without a single reference to politics, and was what it should be, an expression of friendly good-fellowship.

What a morbidly curious animal humanity is. Let an unfortunate cur of a dog be run over in the streets, and several people will get hurt in the rush to have a look at

the howling creature; or if a ghastly suicide is picked out of the harbor, there will be a constant crowd of prying, gaping individuals who will gaze on the awful mass of corruption that was once life. There is, in short, something in human nature that cannot be civilized. Take, for instance, the Stroebel murder trial that is going on at present. The court room is filled daily with a mixed crowd of individuals who drink in with eager appetite every little detail in this fearful drama. They are packed in there in that stuffy, little court room, making the air reek with various fumes, the juice of tobacco, the smell of beer, the unhealthy breath and worst of all the odor of the unwashed body, making a combination fit to sour the minds of the best judge, dim the intelligence of the best jury and dull the faculties of the smartest counsel. One can scarcely wonder at juries disagreeing and lawyers falling foul of the judges in criminal cases, under the circumstances.

It has been frequently complained that Victorians had to pay higher for opera than any other city along the coast. Companies which played at Seattle for \$1 demanded \$1.50 in Victoria, and of course the public had to yield up the latter amount or deprive themselves the pleasure of a night at the opera. Mr. Jamieson is determined that there shall be no further cause for complaint on this score. In his contract with the Calhoun Company, it is stipulated that \$1, 75cts and 50cts shall be the prices of admission. The company is stronger than ever this year, comprising forty people and an orchestra of six, which will be augmented by the regular theatre orchestra.

The *Colonist* has issued a neat Christmas number containing a vast amount of interesting reading matter. Much space is devoted to the Province of British Columbia and Victoria, but decidedly interesting features are a number of sketches by well known writers. Of these, I think, "Random Reminiscences of a Nile Voyageur," by Charles Lewis Shaw, is the best. The writer of this paragraph has been intimately acquainted with Mr. Shaw since his youth up, and was thrown much in his company during the period of which he writes. The pen pictures are true and faithful portraits of the originals, and reflect the highest credit on the writer's literary ability. Mr. Shaw, of recent years, has become well known in the world of letters, and I have no doubt but that his sketch in the *Colonist* Christmas number will add to his fame.

Half-a-dozen or so ladies in this city rise to remark that they have just grounds for complaint in the fact that certain clerks in a down-town dry goods do not treat them with the respect due their sex

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