

A Law-Breaking Traffic

It is sometimes argued that a prohibitory law would be more difficult of enforcement than is a license law. Facts do not bear out this theory. The liquor-favoring party in their effort to discredit prohibition, call attention to any violations of prohibitory law, while practically nobody pays any attention to persistent and widespread disregard of the provisions of license laws.

This is strikingly manifest in the fact that where the number of places licensed to sell liquor is greatest, there the sale by unlicensed places is generally greatest as well. The fewer the legalized places, the fewer will be the places that strive to evade the law. It is not needful now to set out the reasons for this condition. They are well known. We simply call attention to the fact.

Take, for example, the city of Toronto. In 1875 it had a population of about 60,000, and had in operation 493 tavern and shop licenses. To-day, with a population of more than 425,000, it has only 160 such licenses, yet the unlicensed places that sell liquor are fewer to-day than they were at the time first named.

It is about thirty-five years since a prominent brewer in arguing against restrictive legislation, openly stated that in Toronto a thousand places sold liquor without license. In giving evidence before the Royal Commission on the Liquor Traffic, Mr. Thomas Dexter, then License Inspector for Toronto, emphatically stated that there were not then one hundred unlicensed liquor selling establishments in this city. More recently the law against illicit liquor selling has been still more vigorously enforced. Few people would venture to say that there are even a hundred unlicensed dives in Toronto at present.

These figures might be put in an instructive table, showing the population in Toronto for every licensed and unlicensed liquor-selling place, in say the years 1877 and 1912, as follows:—

In 1877.

One licensed place for every 121 persons.

One unlicensed place for every 60 persons.

In 1912.

One licensed place for every 2,656 persons.

One unlicensed place for every 4,250 persons.

To put this fact in another way, we might take the number of licensed and unlicensed places for each 10,000 of the population in 1877 and 1912, and we find it to be:

In 1877.

82 licensed places.
166 unlicensed places.

In 1912.

Less than 4 licensed places.
Less than 2½ unlicensed places.

That is to say, speaking proportionately to the population, the licensed places are reduced to one for every 22 of what they were before, and the unlicensed places are reduced to one for every 66 of what they were before.

The Rev. Dr. MacLeod, of the Royal Commission on the Liquor Traffic, appointed by the Dominion Government, made the following report:—

This investigation has made it sufficiently clear that the enforcement of license laws is attended with as great, and even greater, difficulties than those which attend the enforcement of prohibitory laws. Given authority to sell on certain days, within certain hours, to certain persons, licensees, with few exceptions, sell on all days, at all hours, to all persons, only observing the restrictive features of the law as they are watched and compelled. The Commission could not fail to be impressed by the testimony of many well-informed witnesses, including not a few connected with the traffic, as to the lawless character of the liquor traffic generally. It was made clear that the restrictive provisions of license systems are not generally well enforced, and that in some instances no attempt is made to enforce them.