

# THE BULLFROG.

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## SPIRIT LICENSES.

It is not long since we called attention to the fact that in one portion of Halifax no fewer than sixty licensed spirit shops are crowded into an area of something less than two acres. We might indeed go further, and say that the larger portion of this city is dedicated to dram selling. This fact is thrust before strangers in a most unmistakable manner, inasmuch as the route between Granville street and Currier's wharf is literally lined with spirit bottles. It would seem that in certain portions of the city scarce any business can be carried on without the potent agency of what by courtesy is termed Rum. A man's ostensible calling may be that of a corn factor, but his windows must be garnished with bottles; a slop-clothing establishment may reap a rich harvest from sea-faring men, but each bargain must be ratified with alcohol; a man may work hard in the grocery line, but he must retail his tea and sugar in an atmosphere of spirits. The testimony of a witness recently examined before a Coroner's jury opened as follows:—"I am employed in sewing; Mrs. LAWSON keeps no regular bar, but sells spirits occasionally". Here we have the key to a system which cannot be too strongly deprecated. It matters not what line of business is ostensibly followed by hundreds of our citizens,—in one respect they are alike—keeping no "regular bar" they yet "sell spirits occasionally." As matters now stand, spirit licenses may be obtained almost for the asking,—so long as a man can obtain the necessary legal recommendations a license is granted him without, apparently, any reflection on the part of those in whom the licensing power is vested. A legal permission to "sell spirits occasionally" is regarded as a mere nothing, a harmless bagatelle, having no possible bearing directly, or indirectly upon the interests of society. We cannot subscribe to a doctrine which in this matter assigns to our magistrates a power merely nominal. It is incumbent on a magistrate to think as well as act, unless he regards himself, and wishes others to regard him, as an automaton wielding a pen at the bidding of those around him. Discretion is a quality which magistrates should occasionally use, and there is no magisterial duty, the exercise of which requires a sounder discretion, than that of granting spirit licenses. It is no light thing to legalise a calling, the abuse of which may have the most disastrous effects upon society in general. The mere fact of a man being legally qualified for a certain indulgence does not necessarily justify a magistrate in granting it. There is no law, that we know of, which prohibits a man from painting his face,—but what magistrate would justify a man in making himself so hideous as to scare delicate women, and frighten children into convulsions? A magistrate should consider what is expedient as well as what is lawful, and should study the probable tendency of his official acts no

less than their actual legality. The beauty of justice lies beyond all doubt in its strict impartiality; but a magistrate who admits a legal qualification to be in all cases a legal right, ceases to be impartial, inasmuch as in certain cases he must wrong the many in order to benefit a few. This seems specially the case as regards spirit licenses. Suppose A. B. C. and D., to monopolize the grocery trade of a town, and to be each and all doing a good business. Their profits are large and their honorable rivalry ensures to their respective customers a constant supply of groceries of the best possible kind. The town also supports two taverns, the rivalry between which ensures to the towns-people good liquor at a reasonable price. A certain proportion of those country folk who once in each week come to town for groceries, will spend a shilling or so at one or other of the taverns, but the majority will not do so. Let us now suppose that A. has a legal permission to vend spirits, and what will be the inevitable result? He will give his country customers a glass of spirits at a lower rate than the tavern proprietors can afford, because in so doing he is throwing out a mere sprat to catch a very large whale indeed. Many of those who had formerly traded with B. C. or D., and who had afterwards spent a shilling at one or other of the taverns, will now trade with A. alone, and effect a small saving upon the two-fold weekly investment. The extra grocery custom obtained by A. through the agency of rum, enables him to undersell his rivals in the tea and sugar trade, and in a few years A. makes a fortune and his children keep their carriages. But let us note the effect upon society. Those who had perhaps never spent a sixpence at either of the taverns, are attracted to A's establishment by the cheapness of tea and sugar, and are well pleased to find that, having paid for their weekly allowance of such commodities, they have yet some money in their pockets. But with the surplus cash comes a new temptation. While the groceries are yet being tied up, a rum bottle stands convenient on the counter. Those who had formerly tipped at the taverns are now tipping at the grocer's. They laugh, sing, and make merry. Our countryman is pleased in spite of himself, and he has in his possession a trifling sum of money which is literally so much clear gain. He looks irresolutely at the bottle, and one of the company, or it may be the grocer himself, offers him a glass free of expense. He takes it, drains it, and goes home; and next he invests his surplus copper in the grocer's rum. He seldom stops at this point: his career is usually downward, and he comes to town for groceries, &c., oftener than before, to the detriment of his country calling. But what are B. C. and D., and the two tavern keepers, doing all this time? The three former have, it may be, worked early and late to successfully compete with A., but their exertions have been unavailing; alcohol is king, and they must serve him or else flee from his dominion. They cannot accept the latter alternative, so they too apply for a license and "sell spirits occasionally." But the tavern keepers must live as well as the grocers, and, their line of business being more circumscribed, they must try and undersell the grocers in spirits,