

BILL TO RESTRAIN THE SALE AND MANUFACTURE OF INTOXICATING LIQUORS.

Perhaps no bill before the Legislature possesses more interest for the greater part of our readers, than this. The public mind has been directed for a considerable period to the subject; and while one party are looking with confident expectation for the passing of such a bill, to crown, as they think, their efforts with success, others are regarding it with indifference, or exerting themselves against what they deem the impending evil. The bill has, in the meantime, been rejected by a majority of four. This circumstance, however, instead of discouraging, ought rather to embolden its supporters—the next, or at farthest, the third attempt may prove successful. And even now, although the bill has not passed, yet it has been gravely and ably discussed in the halls of legislation; its importance has been admitted, and the honorable members, with a rare exception, have disclaimed all intention or desire to ridicule it.

We would wish to remind our readers of the action taken by our Church, at the last Synod, in this matter, where the following deliverance was come to:—

"That the Synod adopt the overture of the Presbytery of Kingston, on the subject of Intemperance, and, in accordance with its recommendation, agree to petition the Legislature of the Province to enact a law for the total suppression of the importation, manufacture, and sale of intoxicating drinks as a beverage; and that the Moderator and Synod Clerks be empowered to prepare, sign, and forward a petition to this effect; that the Synod moreover recommend each congregation to adopt similar petitions, and appoint the following committee to take further measures for the suppression of Intemperance, viz:—Mr. William Reid, Convener, Messrs. Bayne, Gordon, Smith of Grafton, Gregg, ministers; and Hon. John McDonald, Messrs. James Breakenridge, George Robertson, D. Cattanaeh, elders."

The consideration which most recommends this bill is, that it appears to be the only effectual means of suppressing intemperance. During the discussion in Parliament, the opponents of the bill declared that it would not accomplish this end. If a better means can be provided, let it be immediately adopted, but, to most persons, this bill recommends itself as the most likely instrument that can be used. Other means have been tried, and have effected much, and one of the effects has been a demand for the interference of the legislature. In this demand, the men who have laboured in the Temperance Societies, who have used moral suasion, and who advocate what others deem ultra views, are warmly supported by men who, from conscientious motives, withhold their countenance from Temperance Societies and pledges. Any enlightened opposition with which the bill meets, is not grounded on principles, but on circumstances, and when these circumstances are removed, the opposition will cease.

It may be profitable to review some of the objections made by the opponents of the bill, during the discussion in the House of Assembly:—

1. It was said, "that importation of intoxicating liquors could not be prevented—that smug-

gling, secret distilling, desperate banditti on the frontiers, riots and perhaps bloodshed, and other such evils, more demoralizing than the present state of things, would be the consequence; or the chewing of opium, which was represented as ten times worse." Now, we do not doubt but, to some extent, this is true. But we cannot conceive how any of the things mentioned can be more demoralizing than the immoderate use of strong drink. If you wish to make a desperate bandit, give a man of bold mind and strong passions, a double quantity of spirits, and you have him. If you wish to see riots and bloodshed, supply sober men with spirits enough, and you have demons raging; and we do think, that if the balance were struck, the peace and order secured in cities and on public works, by withdrawing stimulating liquors altogether, would far outweigh all the smuggling and rioting which would occur on the frontiers. As regards opium, why could not its manufacture or importation be prohibited by legal enactment?

2. Another objection is, "that Intemperance injures only the drunkard, and therefore cannot be prevented by law." The first part of this objection is too manifestly false to need an answer. Let the abused or murdered wife, let the homeless, starving children, let the victims of unbridled lust, for ever silence it. The second part is an unfair conclusion from the premises, for the law will confine the maniac who meditates suicide equally with him who meditates parricide, and all allow that to be just.

3. A third objection is, "that Christianity alone, and not acts of Parliament, can make a man sober." If by this be meant sobriety in the sight of God—a genuine hatred of the sin of intemperance—the objection is true; and in this sense, no sane man would contemplate such an effect from any bill. But if the drunkard cannot get the inebriating cup—if the reckless murderer cannot get the stimulating draught—if the libertine cannot inflame his lust with the exciting liquor, they will be sober men and peaceable citizens; and thus the bill proposed, would tend to external sobriety—of which alone human law can take cognizance.

4. A fourth objection was, "that the country is not in a state to carry out the execution of the law." This may be true; the objection, however, virtually concedes, that as soon as it can be done, it *should* be done; and it only remains, more thoroughly to enlist the intelligent and influential part of the community, so as to obtain their co-operation in carrying out the provisions of such a law, in order to secure the triumph of order and sobriety over every class of the population.

We were much struck with one fact brought out in the discussion, viz. that Intemperance is of much less frequent occurrence in the Lower province, than in the Upper. This is attributed mainly to the influence of the priests, and for this they deserve the thanks of all. But are protestants to submit to such a reproach, as to have it said, that the threat of a man, and the fear of a fictitious punishment, can accomplish more than the word of the Most High, and the fearful denunciations of the word of truth?

We conclude these remarks, however, with two extracts from the interesting speeches made in discussing the question:—

"Ah, but, persists some hon. gentleman, 'this measure is so extreme!' Very true, sir, but so is the evil. It is a vast moral evil. No man is utterly hopeless until he becomes a drunkard; when once that point is reached he loses self-respect, and all other virtues become readily familiar to him. As a physical vice its effects can hardly be estimated—the weakening of the mind—the enervation of the race. As a national and financial evil its ramifications can hardly be compassed. I devoted half an hour this afternoon to looking up the commercial statistics of the liquor trade of this Province, and I confess I was taken aback by the immenso extent of the results. I found from the latest returns that the annual quantity of wines and spirits imported is 637,652 gallons; of ale, beer, and cider 79,204 gallons; of wine for officers' mess, 7139 gallons; that the quantity of ale brewed in the country is 1,629,000 gallons, and of whiskey 2,269,141 gallons. Making the grand total of intoxicating drinks consumed in Canada, [independent of home-made cider, wine and beer,] not less than 4,622,136 gallons—or three gallons for every man, woman and child. The declared wholesale cost of these liquors is £291,544, and the duty paid on them 99,579—or in all £391,123. Now, sir, this is but the wholesale cost price—and I am sure I am within the fact when I say that ere this liquor is consumed its price has been doubled. I think it is far under the mark if we hold that £782,246—or over three millions of dollars—is annually paid by the people of Canada for intoxicating drinks—is annually extracted from the industry of the country and profitably consumed. I do think this a very lamentable picture of our social condition—one that demands prompt and earnest attention. The magical effect which the stoppage of this drain on the resources of the country would produce on the social comforts and happiness of our people, who can estimate? And there is another view of the case. There are now licensed in Canada 931 whiskey-shops—58 steamboat bars—3,430 taverns—130 breweries—and 135 distilleries—showing not less than 5,214 adults directly living by the traffic. Then the countless number of unlicensed taverns and whiskey-shops—and the salesmen engaged in the wholesale vending of the article must be added to the throng whose labour is thus lost to the community. But these are only the vendors—if we add the time lost to the buyers in drinking, and from the effects of drinking—the loss of health which it entails—the pauperism and crime which it produces—the fires and shipwrecks and loss of property in every way, which are its consequences—we get lost in the vast field of evil which expands before us."

"The evil, Mr. Speaker, is extraordinary in its character, and it should not be surprising that the remedy should be so too. The very fact that any legislation is required touching the traffic in spirituous liquors proves that incidents attach to them which are not common to other merchandize. You do not restrict the sale of tea, coffee, sugar, or other articles of like nature. You license persons to sell spirituous liquors. Why is this? You do not license men to sell beef, pork, flour, potatoes, or anything of that kind. In fact, the common sentiment of civilized countries, by their legislation, has branded this one species of merchandize with the mark of Cain.—If you may restrict the sale of spirits to taverns, you may on the same principle restrict it to apothecaries' shops. It requires a good reason for placing any restrictions whatever upon the traffic. You conceive that the reason is good enough to justify you in imposing certain restrictions, and it only requires a stronger reason for imposing more stringent restrictions. The principle is precisely the same. The inducement is the interests of