

# The Observer.

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## Observations.

BY MARC MARIUS.

The elections are over in the city and like the rest of the heelers I should say that I voted for Fleming, although I did not. But that is neither here nor there. Fleming is there and next to the man I voted for, I believe he is the best man. What a stirring up he could give things at the City Hall if he were so inclined, but I am afraid that with all his talk he will only give us half-way measures.

I believe I know Mr. Fleming fairly well. I first met him in Montreal when he was courting his first wife, an amiable person then a proof-reader on a Montreal paper. I have known him and watched his career ever since. He is what in military language would be called a Fabian. His policy has always been caution. Nothing that can be done to benefit the city will he do unless he is forced by his friends or his desire of and love for popularity. He has a glorious opportunity, but will he take advantage of it? I hardly think he will.

Last week I promised to take as my text the police force. Now I do not wish to be understood as being opposed to a police, but I think the system in this city is all wrong. Our system combines all the worst elements of the civilian and the military systems. By the military system, I mean an institution governed by military laws and rules like the army, such as the Irish Constabulary or the North-west Mounted Police; by the citizen system, the fashion that obtains in towns and municipalities and in some cities where the constable is a citizen and is not governed by military rules.

Our system is a compound of the worst elements in both systems. We have the insolence and meanness of the citizen system coupled with the overbearing martinetism of the military. The average cop thinks he is lord of creation. He is patronizingly familiar to the citizens since he is himself a citizen. He will not chase a burglar out of your premises for fear his superior officer may catch him off his beat. If you catch him doing a wrong act he will lock you up and charge you with being the guilty one. He will drink your whiskey and then lock you up for drunkenness.

In the army Tommy Atkins is as good as the general. Her Majesty has laid down certain laws and if Tommy does not break the law and he obeys orders he can smile in supreme contempt on

his superiors. The law is the same for officer and private, and the rights of the one are now as jealousy guarded as those of the other. If a general breaks the law he can be brought to task by even a private. In our police force, such is not the case. The officers tyrannize over the men under them. The men have no rights that an officer is bound to respect. Sometimes a man gets tired of being abused and called a liar by his superior, and a sergeant is knocked down. A uniform is handed in the next day and that is all that is ever heard of it.

But the officers are never found guilty of breaking the rules. The officers from the chief down argue that it would hurt the standing of the officers with the men if they were reprimanded or carpeted for anything. It is a notorious fact that officers are often half drunk and sometimes wholly so while on duty. Off duty many of them spend their spare time in the saloons. But not a word is said against this for fear it would hurt official prestige.

The men, seeing their officers half drunk, naturally follow suit and get into trouble, but I venture to say that half of the force are in a partial state of intoxication every night in the year. Then a poor citizen comes along with a small "jag" on. The constable makes some brutal remark which he, if of good breeding, naturally resents. A few high words follow and the citizen is lugged off to the nearest patrol box and sent humming to the station, there to spend the night on a floor covered with crawling vermin, and in the association of thieves, burglars, and sometimes murderers. Next day he is up in the police court a disgraced man and is fined, not because he has broken the law, but to soothe the ruffled dignity of a half drunken policeman.

Now, I do not see any reason why a man should have to appear in court to answer to a charge of drunkenness. In some places now in the States, the officer in charge of the police station can release a prisoner charged with drunkenness as soon as the prisoner is sober. The prisoner is asked if he has been arrested on a similar charge during the year. Any one arrested three times on a charge of drunkenness is detained and imprisoned, rather than fined. If a prisoner makes a misstatement to the officer in charge, he can be re-arrested on a warrant, and imprisonment without the option of a fine is the consequence.

This system is found to work well wherever tried. The small fines imposed every morning for drunks do not pay the cost of administering the law. The money in nine cases out of ten comes

from the pockets of the wife and family who are the sufferers. Then again, if a man knows that a fine will not get him off in the police court he will be much less liable to get drunk a third time, for it is the dread of a law not the infliction of its penalties that makes us good citizens, as it is the dread of fire that keeps us from burning our fingers.

A word before I quit with the police magistrate. I am not prejudiced against him for anything he has ever done to me, but I have sat in the police court and felt sorry for him. Felt sorry that a man with the appearance of a gentleman could inflict such cruel jokes as he makes upon the sufferers in the dock. The remarks that he makes to the prisoners, in his coarse humorous style, would be more suitable coming from the lips of one of Torquemada's troopers than from a judge in a Christian community. Why sneer and crack jokes at the objects of misfortune? Poor creatures, it is pity and friendly counsel that they want, rather than the scorbatic humor of Col. Denison.

I had intended to make some further observations about the conduct of the police, and their wonderful faculty for finding out that a man is drunk when he is only a little overcome by fatigue or taking astronomical observations on a cold, clear night, leisurely leaning against a telegraph pole, but I find my zeal has outrun my space.

I think if we had fewer police we should have less cases of drunkenness; I am quite sure we should have far fewer charges of drunkenness. We have too many of the "gentlemen from Ireland" on the force; they are so glad to show their little brief authority and to distinguish themselves at headquarters, that they make "a charge" whenever they can.

I agree that if a man can walk home he should be left alone. If the fool falls down and hurts himself, let him, it may do him good and teach him to be careful for the future. And if he be helplessly drunk take him to the station house, let him sleep until sober, and then send him about his business. If a man be habitually drunk in the streets and so becomes a danger and a nuisance, charge him and give him a month's imprisonment, without the option of a fine. But we must change the present system, which encourages our ardent and enthusiastic "Bobby" to see a "drunk" in every noisy night-bird who may invade the sacred territory of the active constables' beat, and to run him in, with the sole object of running up the constable's record for fussy officiousness.