

# Canada Temperance Advocate.

MONTREAL, MARCH 15, 1853.

## Vagrancy—Its Causes and Cure.

Webster, defines vagrancy to be "a state of wandering without a settled home." As the term is generally applied it includes the idea of mendicancy, or at least living without any definite means of support, except by chance or beggary or thievery. Considerable attention has recently been given to the subject. We do not well see how that can be avoided for the fact is forcing itself before the public, that vagrancy and the dangerous classes are multiplying fast. Dr. Nelson's Report and that of Captain McGrath before alluded to, demonstrate that there are vast numbers of persons, old and young, male and female, who are "without a settled home" impoverished and miserable. We refer not only to Montreal and Quebec, the chief places in Lower Canada, but to the principal cities and towns of Upper Canada. We know something of Bytown, Kingston, Toronto, Hamilton, Brantford and many other places, and they are all proportionately in nearly the same condition. We suppose there is no wish to deny the fact, or to diminish its painful aspects. It affects us all. As in the human body, if one member suffer, the whole suffers with it, so in the body politic, if one class be diseased, and vagrancy abounds, the whole body must feel more or less the disastrous effects.

In considering the causes of criminal vagrancy, we may lay ourselves open to the charge of riding "an hobby," as the vulgar saying goes. But we respectfully ask the moderate drinker and the opponents of prohibitory legislation, how they account for criminal vagrancy. Admitting that a part of it arises from misfortune, a large part could not thus be accounted for, except all outward evil is simply a misfortune. It is recommended by some, the Montreal Gazette, for instance—that we ought to have Houses of Industry—Asylums for the poor,—and Houses of Refuge for destitute children. Perhaps then it is a proper inference that in the opinion of those who advocate the establishment of these houses, the want of them is a cause of vagrancy. Well perhaps it is to some extent, but we must surely look elsewhere for primary causes. Take twenty boys and an equal number of girls, who may as vagrants beg or pilfer in any Canadian town or city. Enquire diligently into the moral and industrial habits of their parents, and it will be found in most cases that they are intemperate and profligate, if living, and if these be dead, and the children orphans, then again in most cases, liquor killed them. Yes! they were they were murdered by the traffic in intoxicating drinks. In this country, drinking habits produce the same effects as in the mother country. There we have much more and better statistical information than here. The Chaplain's of the prisons prepare quarterly Reports very carefully drawn up. The Editor of the "*Weekly News and Chronicle*" says he has read "many of these documents. Speaking of children and young people imprisoned for crime and vagrancy he says:—

"They see nothing before them but brutality; drunkenness, quarrelling, and vice, in many of its worst phases in their own homes; their parents neglect them, set them the worst example, and often compel them, by ill treatment, to commence a life of thieving and lying. And when the children live day after day for successive years in the abodes of filth, and drunkenness, and idleness, and vice, what can be expected but that they will be pests to society and a burden to the country?"

From the Report of the Chaplain at Hull, the "*News and Chronicle*" makes a few extracts, some of which may be appropriately quoted here. They are remarks on cases of Juvenile crime occurring in the last quarter of 1852.

"R. K., 14; father *always drinking*: is much neglected by him; is driven away by him from the house, and abused, and called a thief; went to St. J's School a year or two ago, and can read; goes nowhere now on Sundays.

"W. S., 12, lives with parents in the town; father is a lumper; has no employment: *father gets drunk* and abuses mother, and will not let him come home at nights; sleeps out where he can; has no knowledge of religion.

"Mary Ann E. is a young prostitute, only 16 years of age; parents live in Leeds; often gets drunk with young girls like herself, and 'kicks up a row;' did not know the man she is charged with robbing; cannot read.

"James R. is 10 years of age; has two brothers; step-mother has four children; father is a coachmaker, and *is always drinking*, and does not send him to school; lives in a yard in W. street; expects to be shipped before he goes out; goes sometimes to the Roman Catholic Chapel."

We add one other case.

"W. C., 16, lives with father in Lincoln; father is a labourer, and *gets drunk* once or twice every week; mother very poor, and family in great distress; four children besides himself; cannot read; cannot repeat the Lord's Prayer; never goes to church or chapel; spends Sundays in a neighbour's house, or in the streets or fields with other lads."

It is perfectly clear then that parental intemperance led these poor children to vagrancy and crime, and Mr. McGrath says the increase of arrests in Montreal is mostly "for intoxication, or offences resulting therefrom." How can it be otherwise with our almost countless grog shops and monstrous distilleries. The *Montreal Gazette* recently published the statistics of our imports by the Port of Montreal during 1852. Let us look at this table of figures and facts, with reference to the liquor business. Of Brandy there were imported 101,702 gallons, of Gin 56,639 gallons, of Rum 16,249 gallons, and of Whisky 29,027 gallons. Of the domestic or home manufacture of Whiskey we have no recent statistics, but it is enormous. Who are the consumers of these vile compounds and distilled poisons? We fear many rich and respectable people take a share and may become vagrants thereby, but we know the present race of vagrants have become such by intemperance, and the hosts of poor, miserable, uneducated and ill-clad children are brought to their sad plight by the same sickening cause. They are generally speaking the innocent victims of a pernicious system, which while it legalizes the sale of liquor, produces its constantly increasing fruit, of criminal, dangerous, and vagrant persons. Will any sane man—will any rational editor deny this? Surely not! It is patent to every man having the light of his eyes, that the present license system is pre-eminently the cause of vagrancy.