

THE BULLFROG.

*Nec sumit aut ponit secures,
Arbitrio popularis aures.—Hor.*

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THE LICENSE LAW.

Some five months back, we called public attention to the reckless and ill-advised manner in which spirit licenses had been granted to all who were legally qualified to obtain them, and we pointed out some of the most glaring evils consequent upon the abuse of a power which should at all times be used most sparingly by the Civic authorities. We gladly return to the subject, because in certain quarters we note a disposition to censure the proceedings of the City Council, upon a question of vital importance to the moral and social welfare of the community at large. We have before us the Ordinances, and most recent Provincial Acts of the city and we sincerely trust that no considerations of a party or private nature will be allowed to interfere with the provisions of the License Act, which Act, if rigidly and impartially carried out, will go far towards counteracting those evils we formerly denounced. The wholesale manner in which licenses have hitherto been granted and renewed has been productive of untold misery, and has done more towards demoralizing the community than the abuse of any other power vested in the hands of the people's representatives. The liquor traffic is not regulated by the ordinary rules of commerce, inasmuch as the supply to a large extent creates the demand, and an extraordinary large supply is commonly found in connection with a demoralized state of society. In granting spirit licenses, there are other things to be considered than the revenues of the city and the characters of the applicants. Licensing Magistrates should be guided not merely by that which is lawful but likewise by that which is expedient. Without in any way seeking to enforce morality by law, a magistrate may yet further the interests of morality by exercising a wise discretion upon those questions whereon the law grants him a discretionary power. Now, there is perhaps no question upon which a Magistrate is invested with more discretionary power than upon the license question. By granting or refusing a license, a Magistrate may confer a benefit upon a section of society, or he may sanction a grievous offence against society at large. Mr. A. may be highly respectable and well able to pay for a license, but such considerations do not justify a Magistrate granting Mr. A. a spirit license, should it be clearly proved that the locality wherein Mr. A. purposes establishing his business is already overstocked with retail spirit stores. The respectability of the applicant in such a case should not in any way bias the Magistrate's decision, inasmuch as the presence of a respectable spirit vendor among a host of smaller publicans would merely cause the latter to undersell the former by vending the vilest poison at the cheapest possible rate. The chief supporters of the smaller liquor stores are those who drink, not for the sake of gratifying their palates, but rather for the sake of getting drunk, and for such no liquor is unpalatable so long as it is fiery and strong. The great evil to be combated in this city, is the undue excess of spirit shops, independent of their character or mode of business. The dismal statistics of drunkenness are regulated, not by the size of liquor stores, but by their number. Ten grog shops, valued at £200 each, will turn out far more drunkards than two liquor stores valued at £2000. There is no surer way to nourish evil than to place temptation to evil

within easy reach, and we know of no city wherein the opportunities for dram-drinking are so frequent as in Halifax. Turn where we will—North or South, East or West,—our principal thoroughfares are, to speak, lined with spirit bottles. The time has arrived when, for the sake of our reputation, the most stringent and uncompromising reform is absolutely imperative. The License Regulations drawn up by the City Council are, taken as a whole, wise and expedient, albeit capable of some slight improvement. The following sentence of the opening paragraph will commend itself to all sensible men:—"No licenses to sell liquors shall be issued or granted to any person who now keeps or hereafter shall keep a house of ill-fame,"—and a little further on, we learn that—"the Mayor and three Aldermen shall have power to suspend any such license, if in their judgment the order and welfare of the city require it." There cannot, we fancy, be any two opinions regarding the character of most of the licensed houses of our upper streets, and we trust that the Mayor and Aldermen will not renew any licenses in these localities before taking evidence as to the real nature of the houses in question. If the judgment of any three members of the Civic body can approve the present condition of Barrack and Albermarle Streets, as conducing towards the 'order and welfare of the city,' the sooner the City Council is reformed the better for the reputation of our city. We are glad to find that Constables are now "empowered to enter in or upon the premises, or into the shop, store, dwelling-house, or other building of any person or persons who (holding a license or unlicensed) is or are suspected of violating any law respecting the sale of intoxicating liquors, or of violating the license law." This power, if wisely used, will doubtless replenish the City Coffers at the expense of many who have too long set the license laws at defiance. The old and weak argument quoted in favor of almost unlimited licensing—that Constables had power to enter licensed houses only—is now effectually and wisely disposed of, and we hope to see a little extra vigilance on the part of the Constabulary—especially as regards the southern portion of the city. The evidence necessary for the conviction of suspected spirit retailers is clearly defined, and Magistrates would do well to reject any quibbles which may be put forward relative to an admitted consumption of spirits without payment for the same. Turning to Schedule A, we find that licenses are granted under three heads, viz—"Tavern Licenses," "Shop Licenses," and "Hotel and Eating House Licenses." The tavern license sanctions the sale of "intoxicating liquors only, and no other articles, either provisions, goods, wares, or merchandize of any description." This wise Act seems especially aimed against that monstrous evil to which we formerly called attention—viz—the combination of the grocery and spirit trades. As matters now stand, almost every Grocer is also a dram seller, and for one man that habitually gets drunk at a regular tavern, there are fifty habitual dram drinkers who would never have tasted spirits had they not been compelled to purchase their groceries in an atmosphere of rum. But there are those among us who argue that the majority of the Grocers are men of the highest respectability—men whose stores are models of propriety—men to withhold a