

## The Failure of Gas Inspection in Halifax, &c., &c.

---

HALIFAX, N. S., August 1, 1900.

During the present session at Ottawa, clause 36 of the Gas Inspection Act has been altered. From a taxpayer or gas consumer's standpoint the administration of gas inspection is so faulty, the wonder is that the time of Parliament should be engaged in so trifling a change. Apparently, the only effect will be to relieve four or five gas undertakings from paying fees amounting to \$9 per year each, and add \$6 each to some smaller ones.

The writer is familiar with the agitations and causes leading to the first Gas Inspection Act, 1861, in Britain. He was also a spectator in the gallery at Ottawa, 1873, when the first Dominion measure was under discussion.

The intent of gas inspection was to serve and protect the interest of the gas consuming public, the assumption being that gas undertakings were able to protect themselves. *Gas experts*, however, who have had the qualifying experience, know full well that the benefits to gas undertakings have been incalculable and to consumers problematical.

Before gas inspection in Britain, gas undertakings made *only very* moderate profits; *many* had a struggle to pay dividends even with high selling prices, but the inspection law has been one of the contributing causes for increasing profits in leaps and bounds, giving dividends of 7, 10, 12 and 14 per cent., with large margins for rest, and constantly diminishing selling rates.

Take the important factor "*the meter*." When inspection was first introduced the inability of *dry* meters to register all their gas was so well known, gas undertakings were very slow to adopt them. *These* faults have been gradually overcome, and the dry meter is now popular.

Ninety per cent. of the meters in use were wet meters, gas undertakings being firmly persuaded they were an absolutely fair measuring instrument for buyer and seller, unless tampered with on the consumers' premises; stricter systematic observations, stimulated by the inspection law, gradually developed an awakening that the confidence had been a fool's paradise.

In the earlier history of gas undertakings 25 per cent. to 50 per cent