

dence of witnesses conversant with the state of opinion in those communities, and claiming specially to represent the working classes by the reports of various public meetings held upon the subject, and by the returns of many canvasses made in large towns with the view of ascertaining the sentiments of the inhabitants upon this question.

Your committee would, however, observe that great caution must be exercised in affixing a value to the results of any such canvass. Although no imputations of dishonesty rest upon the canvassers, it has been proved to your committee that in many instances the canvass has been of a partial nature, and does not adequately convey the real sense of the community whose opinions it professes to represent. Moreover, it is evident that a canvass conducted by persons whose object it is to obtain a particular expression of opinion is not one of a character to command such implicit confidence as one conducted by more impartial persons. Therefore, whilst so far admitting the value of such canvasses as to accept them as corroborative evidence of the existence of a feeling in favour of further restrictive legislation among a considerable portion of the community, your committee are of opinion that no proof has been afforded of such a general demand as should induce Parliament to disregard those other considerations which lead to a different conclusion.

It has been proved to your committee that a very large number of persons make use of public houses on Sunday against whom no complaint whatever is alleged, and to whom further restrictions to the extent contemplated by the Bill would be productive of serious inconvenience, and whilst this inconvenience would occasion great discontent among such persons, it by no means follows that a commensurate benefit would result with regard to the class against whom such restrictions would be especially directed. Those who drink to excess form a very small per centage of the whole number of persons who make use of public-houses upon a Sunday, and it is probable that many of these persons, if deprived of their present facilities for obtaining liquor, would have recourse to drinking in private houses and to various methods of evading the law. For however beneficial may be the results of restriction within certain limits, its enforcement to such an extent as to cause any violent interference with the habits of the people has a tendency to create a discontent which is sure to be followed by evasion, the law is brought into disrepute, and effects are not unfrequently produced the very reverse and opposite of those intended by the Legislature.

It is, moreover, clear to your committee that there would be great difficulty in enforcing the restrictions proposed in the Bill. Not only would the duties of the police be materially increased but the duties so imposed would be at once harassing to them and annoying to the public. To the vexed question of 'who

is a *bond fide* traveller?' the Bill would add the question 'what is a *bond fide* meal?' and this is only a sample of the difficulties under which the publican would be obliged to carry on his business.

Your committee further observe, that the proposed restrictions do not afford any hope of the settlement upon a permanent basis. Most of the advocates of the measure openly avow that they would accept it only as an instalment, and many of them declare their desire to put a stop to the whole retail trade in excisable liquors. In that trade a very large amount of capital is embarked: and so long as the licensed victuallers and keepers of beer-shops stand in the position of men carrying on a recognised and legitimate trade and one moreover subjected to heavy and special taxation, it would be unjust that their operations should be embarrassed, and their property depreciated in value by constant attempts to impose upon them restrictions which do not appear to be demanded by any urgent public necessity. Your committee however believe it to be a question worthy of consideration, whether it would be advantageous to those licensed victuallers and keepers of beer-shops who may be desirous of closing their houses on Sunday, that licenses should be granted at a reduced rate for the sale of liquors on week days only; but that it is one upon which they have not felt themselves empowered, by their order of reference, to take such evidence as would guide them to a conclusive opinion.

The beneficial working of the Public-houses Scotland Acts 1854-62, which has been declared by a Royal Commission, and of which evidence has been given before your committee, does not in their opinion establish any proof that a law similar or approaching it in strictness would be either acceptable or expedient in England. For even those witnesses who spoke to the success of the Scotch law admitted that there was so remarkable a difference between the habits of the English and those of the Scotch people in their use of public-houses, that your committee are of opinion that no trustworthy inference could be drawn from the fact of that success.

Although it cannot be denied that drunkenness, to a considerable extent, both on Sundays and other days, is to be found in this country, yet the admission appears to be general that the present law is working well, and that under its operation a great diminution of drunkenness has taken place. From this fact it has been argued that further restrictions would lead to further diminution; but, having regard to the experience of the past, and to the agitation consequent upon the passing of a less stringent measure than the present in 1854, which measure was repealed in the following year, your committee are inclined to believe that the safe limit of restrictive legislation has been reached, and that further measures in the same direction would be unwise and injudicious. The praiseworthy exertions of the advocates of temperance must not be