

THE DRINK TRAFFIC IN CALEDONIA FIFTY YEARS AGO.



THE drink question is at present occupying the minds of many statesmen, so it may not be out of place to enlighten the rising generation of teetotalers, local optionists, prohibitionists, Good Templars, blue ribboners, and other fraternities, of the position the traffic occupied in Auld Scotia fifty years ago and upwards. At that period, any respectable individual, whether a grocer, draper, tailor, mason, joiner, shoemaker, or other tradesman, of age could have obtained a license for alcoholic liquors. Suitableness of premises was never taken into consideration, and there were no restrictions whatever as to hours of opening or shutting. The traffic was allowed to go on without hindrance, morn, noon, and night. The only supervision was against smuggling; but, with every precaution, many a smuggled anker found its way to the public. There were many excisemen of Burns's mind and method. In his "Cry and Prayer to the Scotch Representatives in the House of Commons," he says:—

“ Tell them wha ha'e the chief direction,
Scotlaud an' me's in great affliction,
E'er sin' they laid that curst restriction
On aqua vitæ ;
An' rouse them up to strong conviction,
An' move their pity.

Stand forth, an' tell yon Premier youth
The honest, open, naked truth ;
Tell him o' mine an' Scotland's drouth,
His servant humble :
The muckle deevil blaw ye Sooth
If ye dissemble !

Paint Scotland greetin' owre her thrissle—
Her mutchkin-stoup as toom's a whissle ;
And d——d excisemen, in a bussle,
Seizin' a stell,
Triumphant crushin't like a mussel
Or limpet shell.

Then, on the tither hand, present her,
 A blackguard smuggler right behind her,
 An' cheek-for-chow a chuffie vintner,
 Colleaguin join,
 Picking her pouch as bare as winter
 Of a' kind coin.

Is there, that bears the name o' Scot,
 But feels his heart's bluid rising hot
 To see his poor auld mither's pot
 Thus dung in staves,
 An' plundered o' her hindmost groat
 By gallows knaves ?”

In our towns, cities, and villages, licensed and unlicensed property, fifty years ago, was of equal value. What, then, has enhanced the value of licensed premises? Why, monopoly, and monopoly alone. The Tories and Unionists talk of giving the publicans compensation. Give every individual who is able, willing, and has a good character, a license, and the traffic will soon compensate itself. Property will again stand on its own merits.

A leading Scotch newspaper had a leader the other day on the drink traffic, in which it was said:—“We suppose there has always been some sort of supervision or other over the liquor traffic.” It is truly amazing, considering how much has been said and written regarding the drink question, that few or any take the time or trouble to trace out or inquire into its history or origin. It is less than 250 years since the first duty of 3d. per gallon was imposed on alcohol by Charles I., and a tax of 4s. per acre taken off the land to please the King's nobles. There was no duty previous to this, consequently no need for either license or supervision. The present state of affairs in the drink traffic has been solely built up and hedged round by teetotal faddists and fanatics, who have no art nor part in its use, but to denounce its abuse. They hold up the moderate consumers of alcoholic liquors as worse than drunkards! Temperance with them is another word for teetotalism. Neither the moderate nor immoderate users of alcohol are taken into consultation. The faddists go in for heavy duties, restrictions, and all the frauds of clique licensing and mischievous monopolies. With them there is no sin in robbing through the drink traffic.

It is strange, yet true, that the very men and women who, to a certain extent, were fed, clad, and bred by the liquor traffic in our

beloved land fifty years ago, are now among its greatest opponents. True, the trade is more potent now, by reason of its monopoly. Who upholds that monopoly? In how few instances was a livelihood obtained by the traffic alone at that period. It was generally sold as an auxiliary in those days by the tradesmen already referred to, just as ginger beer and lemonade are now-a-days by the small dealers.

The teetotalers—they cannot be termed the temperate party—are in great straits for scriptural authority for prohibition. What would they not give for a proof of the non-intoxicating character of the wine our Saviour made at the marriage feast? How they would glory in a Bible beatitude like this:—Blessed are the teetotalers, for they are the salt of the earth! Teetotalers have organised a new species of hypocrisy, stamping the very Bible as imperfect. They hold up the bards of Auld Caledonia to scorn—the four R.'s—Ferguson, Burns, Tannahill, Nicoll. Take away alcohol from our land and our literature, is their cry. They forget that

“Freedom and whisky gang thegither.”

This line is over 100 years old, but it is over 500 years since Wallace and Bruce won both of these for us. England, as we have said, enslaved alcohol again for us, putting it into bonds. Caledonia has been robbed of millions yearly, and had fusel oil, “kill-the-carter,” and innumerable blends and bombastic brands palmed off as the pure mountain dew; the price of such poisons spreading poverty and misery, death and destruction all around.

Burns was right, freedom and whisky must go together, in spite of fads, cranks, and isms. Bigots would separate the sheep from the goats, and divide the tares from the wheat here on earth. We look to a higher power, far away above and beyond either a bacchanalian, vegetarian, or a teetotal standard. If an apple caused the fall of our first parents, teetotalers are certain the drink traffic is the cause of keeping their children from getting back to Paradise.

It was a spouter, holding forth in one of our provincial villages on the abuse of alcoholic liquors, less than sixty years ago, that gave rise to the name and term teetotaler. He was impressing his audience on the merits of tea, and advising them to stick to that beverage. One of his hearers cried out—“Would you drink tea-totally?” “Yes,” he replied; “teetotal!” and from that time

abstainers glory in a name which covers many a sin as heinous in God's sight as drunkenness.

It is a good Tory maxim—"Have reverence for the past and caution for the future." Teetotalers care neither for the one nor the other, despising the liberty of the individual, and burdening the moderate and temperate with a double portion of the State's revenue. They consider it just and proper to plunder and rob all who choose to use alcoholic liquors! How very different was it in Caledonia fifty years ago. The inhabitants lived in harmony one with another. They were honest, frugal, clean, tidy, and couthie, with a local option of that period of license and liberty in full swing. The teetotal efforts in reducing licenses, and raising the duty on alcoholic liquors, goes for nothing so far as sobriety is concerned. High prices, inferior drink, and debasing shebeens, have been the fruits of fanatical opposition to Caledonia's native cup. The ex-Premier, in a letter the other day, denounced restriction as a fraud: and does any sane person think Auld Scotia will ever submit to prohibition? The only just, true, and perfect plan would be to go back to "Freedom and whisky." Let the government leave the drink traffic to the people, and let them make, sell, and drink, as they did before the days of Charles I. The drink traffic occupies a place and position never intended by the Creator of all. It could not have been raised to its present throne unless by the aid of the Devil and all his angels. Pride, place, and power are in its grasp, and nothing short of freedom can work a cure.

Nicoll, the good, the pure, and true poet, in his courting expedition to Kate Carnegie, sings out:—

"Guidwife, bring a bicker; I'll slocken my drouth—
That ale wasna spoilt i' the brewin'."

And then winds up with—

"Jist a'e ither stoup; what the de'il mak's me sad?
Gae, laddie, an' saddle my naigie;
Gin ony ane spier whaur I'm till on the jaud—
I'm awa' to court Katie Carnegie!"

Is there any sin in the song?—

"I ance was a wanter, as happy's a bee;
I meddled wi' nane, and nane meddled wi' me;
I whiles had a crack o'er a cog o' guid yill—
Whiles a bicker o' swats—whiles a heart-heezing gill
And I aye had a groat if I hadna a pound:
On the earth there were nane meikle happier found."

There is not a truer life among all the teetotal roll of celebrities than that of Robert Nicoll, poet and editor.

Tannahill sings of the "coggie":—

" In days o' yore our sturdy sires,
Upon their hills sae scroggie,
Glow'd with true Freedom's warmest fires,
An' foucht to save their coggie !

Chorus—Then oh ! revere the coggie, sirs !
Our brave forefathers' coggie :
It roused them up to douchty deeds,
O'er whilk we'll lang be voggie.

Then, here's—May Scotland ne'er fa' doun,
A cringin', coward doggie,
But bauldly stan' an' bang the loon
Wha'd reave her o' her coggie !
Then, oh ! revere the coggie, sirs !
Our guid auld mither's coggie !
Nor let her luggie e'er be drain'd
By any foreign roggie."

and in many other pieces he upholds the "coggie."

Robert Fergusson, in his "Drink Eclogue—Brandy v Whisky," winds up with the landlady's verdict:—

" In days o' yore I could my living prize,
Nor fash'd wi' dolefu' gaugers or excise ;
But noo-a-days we're blythe to lear the thrift,
Oor heads 'boon license and excise to lift.
Inlakes o' brandy we can soon supply,
By whisky tinctur'd wi' the saffron's dye."

Even in his day, there is a cure for a "drappie" too much in "Caller Oysters." He finishes with—

" A' ye wha canna stan' sae sicker,
When twice ye've toom'd the biggest bicker,
Mix caller oysters wi' your liquor—
An' I'm your debtor,
If greedy priest or drouthy vicar
Will thole it better."

The privilege of distilling whisky free of duty was accorded by the Crown to Forbes of Culloden, upon his barony of Ferintosh in Cromarty, in consideration of certain good services done by him at the time of the Revolution. Such rivers of whisky streamed from that distillery, that Ferintosh came to be like another name for usquebaugh. The "Scotch Distilleries Act of 1785" abolished this monopoly, Mr. Forbes shortly afterwards, under the decision

of a jury, receiving, by way of compensation, the sum of £21,580. Hence the allusion to Ferintosh in Burns' "Scotch Drink":—

Thee Ferintosh ! oh, sadly lost !
 Scotland laments frae coast to coast !
 Now colic grips, an' barkin' hoast,
 May kill us a' ;
 For loyal Forbes' chartered hoast
 Is ta'en awa.

Thae curst horse-leeches o' th' Excise,
 Wha mak' the whisky stills their prize !
 Haud up thy han', Di'el ! ance, twice, thrice !
 Then seize the blinkers !
 An' bake them up in brimstone pies
 For poor d——d drinkers.

Fortune ! if thou'll but gi'e me still
 Hale breek, a scone, an' whisky gill,
 An routh o' rhyme to rave at will—
 Tak' a' the rest,
 An' deal't aboot as thy blind skill
 Directs thee best.

Dr. Farquharson said the other day that he could fill a good-sized volume with verses in praise of strong drink—and that this says a great deal in its favour cannot be gainsaid, for it is a fact that the poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.

"We may be certain that Coleridge and Lamb did not toil up Hampstead Hill to drink water at the Salutation and Cat; and the merry coffee-housing of the Club was mellowed by potations which stimulated the talk of Burke and Goldsmith. Coming down to latter days we see Dickens and Forster, and Stanfield and Maclise, at their early dinner before the play, and at their supper after the curtain fell. There was just enough liquor going to warm but not heat, and to set their tongues going with free but decorous elasticity. Sir Walter Scott's cheery little banquets were full of mirth and good-feeling; it was not soda-water that brought out the best points of his guests, and fused them into a harmonious brotherhood."

If we read and ponder on the history of our masters in verse and prose, we will find that our best literature has been inspired by the use of the "Barley-Bree." Shakespeare was no ascetic; and it is not probable that his unique knowledge of human nature could have been acquired if he had not mixed freely with the men of the coffee-houses and the tavern. Had Burns confined his potations to ginger ale, would he have wrote "Scots wha hae?" Byron

did not write "Don Juan" in his vinegar days. In fact, if you cast your eyes along the whole range of literary history, it is doubtful if any genius can be found who stormed Parnassus with a blue ribbon in his button-hole.

In conclusion, let us see what the father of our political economy, Adam Smith, has to say on the trade itself, and the motives which lead to drunkenness. "It is a losing trade," it is said, "which a workman carries on with the ale-house, and the trade which a manufacturing nation would naturally carry on with a wine country may be considered as a trade of the same nature, we answer that the trade with the ale-house is not necessarily a losing trade. In its own nature it is just as advantageous as any other, though, perhaps, somewhat more liable to be abused. The employment of a brewer, and even that of a retailer of fermented liquors, are as necessary divisions of labour as any other. It will be generally the more advantageous for a workman to buy of the brewer the quantity he has occasion for, than to brew it himself. And if he be a poor workman, it was generally the more advantageous for him to buy little by little from the retailer, than a large quantity from the brewer. He may no doubt buy too much of either, as he may of any other dealers in his neighbourhood; of the butcher, if he be a glutton, or of the draper, if he affects to be a beau among his companions. It is advantageous to the great body of workmen, notwithstanding that all their trades should be free, though this freedom may be abused in all of them, and is more likely so, perhaps, in some than in others. Though individuals may, sometimes, ruin their fortunes by an excessive consumption of fermented liquors, there seems to be no risk that a nation should do so. Though in every country there are many people who spend more than they can afford, there are always many more who spend less. It deserves to be remarked, too, that if we consult experience, the cheapness of wine seems to be a cause, not of drunkenness, but of sobriety. The inhabitants of the wine countries are in general the most sober people in Europe. Witness the Spaniards, the Italians, and the inhabitants of the southern provinces of France. People are seldom guilty of excess in what is their daily fare. Nobody gains a character for liberality and good fellowship by being profuse of a liquor which is as cheap as small beer. On the contrary, in the countries which, either from excessive heat or cold, produce no grapes, and where wine consequently is dear and a rarity,

drunkenness is a common vice—as among the northern nations. When a French regiment comes from some of the northern provinces of France, where wine is somewhat dear, to be quartered in the southern, where it is cheap, the soldiers, I have heard it observed, are at first debauched by the cheapness and novelty of good wine; but, after a few months' residence, the greater part of them become as sober as the rest of the inhabitants. Were the duties upon foreign wine, and the excise duty upon malt beer, all to be taken away at once, it might, in the same manner, occasion in Great Britain a pretty general and temporary drunkenness among the middle and inferior ranks of the people, which would soon be followed by a permanent and universal sobriety."

