

PROHIBITION
OF THE LIQUOR TRAFFIC NEEDFUL,
NOT REGULATION.

MARK.

Speech of EMERITUS PROF. F. W. NEWMAN, ^{oc.} *at the Meeting of the Council
of the United Kingdom Alliance, in Manchester, Oct. 17th, 1871.*

Our friend Mr. HOYLE remarked, that the resolution which he had to propose was the most important of the day. To obtain a guarantee of supplies, is, no doubt, very important. But what would be the use to us of even £200,000, if the money were unwisely spent? I almost think, that the Resolution which defines the purpose for which the money is raised, is as important as the Resolution to raise the money. I am requested to move:

“That the Council rejoices in the many and varied evidences of a rapid growth of public opinion in favour of legislation calculated to limit the influence of the Liquor Traffic: but, while recognizing the value of some of the proposals for Licence Reform, the Council reiterates its conviction, that the only relation which a civilized community ought to hold to the traffic in intoxicating liquors is one of PROHIBITION, and pledges itself to renewed efforts to accomplish the work for which the Alliance was organized.”

SIR WILFRID LAWSON has just declared, that he nails the flag of Prohibition to his mast. Other topics drew him off, and he assigned no reasons. But if what is here said is to go forth to the public, reasons should be given, however needless to ourselves; and the Resolution before me calls for them. If I had been asked to move this Resolution twelve years ago, I probably should have hesitated; but our knowledge has increased very much in these twelve years, and I will briefly mention the topics which occur to me.

PROFESSOR F. W. NEWMAN

ON THE DRINK TRAFFIC.

(Speech delivered at Leicester, March 14, 1871.) ~~mn~~ 8

Our friend Mr. Charles Thompson avows his popular sympathies; I am not sure whether he said, sympathies with popular freedom. I too have come hither wishing not only to support the popular welfare, but to insist that the measure which we recommend is in strict harmony with public freedom. One speaker has already disclaimed obedience to the Right Hon. Mr. Stansfeld's advice, that liberal electors would allow themselves to be drilled into a party. Aspirants for office must judge for themselves about what are called "party ties;" but I do not admit that electors owe allegiance to artificial parties at all. Such parties are very apt not to fulfil the promise of their name. The Democratic party of the United States became the party of slavery, and carried such laws that the advocates of freedom had to appeal to the higher law of morality and God against the law of Congress. If a party calling itself liberal acts illiberally, it may force us to the conviction that its name is a blind. On this platform we do not profess ourselves advocates of ins or outs, and it is well that our representatives should clearly understand that. Yet we are at liberty to indicate our individual preferences; and I venture to say that in zeal for freedom of the citizens I do not yield to Mr. J. Stuart Mill, to Professor Fawcett, to Mr. Stansfeld, or to your representative, Mr. Peter Alfred Taylor, all of whom I mention only for honour. I am glad that the three last are in Parliament; I much regret that Mr. Mill is no longer there. I earnestly wish to get the support of these gentlemen, and of others like them, for our Permissive Bill; and I have tried to discover where it is that I separate from them, and why. I believe it is because they either do not understand or do not admit the paramount duty of the State to study and support public virtue; indeed, too many persons flatly assert that this is not the duty of the State at all. I beg your attention to this point, for it is vital not only to our Permissive Bill, but to public liberty and to civilization. Montesquieu asserted, and only rash men will deny, that republicanism cannot last in a country socially corrupt. True freedom requires that law should be enforced, and should be good; these conditions demand a standard of public virtue which has been rare in past history. Besides, we have to look to the origin of civilization itself. All agree that it begins when the solemn sanction of the State is given to marriage, thus recognizing the rights and duties of the family, without which a community has no organic vital union, and children cannot be reared to virtue. Religion was called in to make marriage and law sacred; whence the union of Church and State. If now we sometimes have to break up the union, as in Ireland, it is only because of the unhappy dissensions of churches; that is, because in fact we cannot justly assume any church to be a true embodying of religion. We do not thereby disown religion, and much less virtue, from the State; but whatever all the churches have in common that is good, this we must cherish in the State; and shall cherish, I trust, if the disestablishment reach England, as many now expect. When a man is pronounced a criminal and punished as such, we regard him as guilty, as wicked. We use words of moral condemnation. A thief, a robber, a murderer, is not regarded as having merely annoyed us, like a rabbit which eats our crops, or a tiger which kills a man; but we call him base, wicked, disgraceful, perhaps infamous. How absurd to pretend that the State and the Law take no cognizance of moral guilt! It is a terrible mischief and calamity when legislators promote demoralization. I am sorry to add, that from 1834 till now our legislation is open to this charge. Why do I fix on that date? Because in 1830, when the Beerhouses under patronage of the Excise were introduced, both parties in Parliament had sincerely convinced themselves (marvellous as was the delusion) that the measure would promote temperance. But when a very short time exploded the folly, and Silk Buckingham's Committee in 1834 pronounced judicial condemnation on the Beer Act, the Grey Ministry, then omnipotent in Parliament, kept with a high hand the evil gains of the Exchequer, treated the Committee with spite, neglect, and contempt, and never afterwards tried to prove, or cared to pretend, that the Act promoted the public morality. Whichever party has been in power since then, the number of drink-

houses has been steadily increased, in direct defiance of the Committee's advice. Neither party has bestirred itself even to abolish the stupid and pernicious clause "To be drunk on the premises," though its abominably immoral tendency was notorious, undenied, and undeniable. Political economists (so-called) exploded moral considerations. To such an extent did this go that even Mr. Gladstone, while explicitly and emphatically admitting in theory to our deputation that moral considerations were and must be paramount, yet in practice established the new wineshops, which we now learn to have introduced a dangerous, mischievous, scandalous tipping among youths and ladies of our upper and middle classes. Whatever check was given in 1869—very imperfect it was, even to the beer houses, and as for the spirit shops it did not touch them; but the check, such as it was, came from the people, and was enforced upon Parliament from below. We had no aid from the professed economists. Alas! they did not seem to know the elementary fact, that nothing is so wasteful as vice. They will talk by the hour about pauperism, without a hint that vice causes pauperism. They will pretend that our population is too numerous; however certain it may be, and however easy the proof, that by merely abandoning useless and pernicious drink it might all be in a thriving state. It is habitual to every ministry, Whig or Tory, to rejoice in a full Exchequer, though it is filled only by the national vice—that is to say, by enormous industrial waste, and with vast expense to the more virtuous part of the community from police and jails and judicial apparatus and poor rates, besides the frightful moral desolations. All such legislation condemns a party, whatever name it assume. In fact, if a Tory regime were to support public virtue, it would in the long run promote public freedom; while an ascendancy of Whigs or Radicals which undermines morality must in the long run undermine freedom. We are, in my belief, now at a cardinal crisis. We have to see whether the newly-enfranchised electors will understand that the public justice, which is prosperity to the millions, can only be had from public virtue; that if the national supplies be wasted by vice, the industrial interests of the millions must suffer; and that there is no possibility of sound fundamental prosperity for an immoral people. It is now a vital question with England, since her upper classes are recreant to these truths, whether the movement from below will set up moral principle in political ascendancy.

Now our opponents object to the Permissive Bill, that it is arbitrary and tyrannical. Who would not suppose from this that we are wishing to introduce some new despotic principle? But it is not so. If they think so, it is their own confusion of thought; for the facts are notorious. Our ancestors were very jealous for freedom against Crown officers, that is, against an Executive irresponsible to Parliament. Yet they were so sensible of the evils contingent on a traffic in intoxicating drink, that they sanctioned a Permissive ordinance, entrusting arbitrary local powers to Crown magistrates, by which they might restrain this trade at their discretion, up to the point of total suppression. The institution is so old, that our opponents forget its essentially despotic nature. It has existed in full operation for many centuries, and no public evil has ever arisen from the severity, but only from the laxity, of the magistrates. Their power is simply absolute. What they bind or loose in Leicester, is bound or loosed in St. Stephen's and in Westminster Hall. It is a double despotism. They may either refuse shops to a public which desires them, or force shops upon a public which deprecates them. We propose to destroy one half of this despotism, and claim for the local public itself a power which supersedes the other half, whenever two-thirds of them are in agreement. This is an enormous softening of that other despotic side. Instead of one man, by his private will, without public discussion, suppressing the sale of these drinks over one or several parishes, we propose that two-thirds of the people should (in the extremest case) coerce the one-third, and only after public deliberation. In all our legislation besides, a mere majority has a coercive power; as 51 against 49, and not merely 67 against 33. The rightfulness of our claim can only be contested by assuming the extreme paradox that every individual has an indefeasible right to an open shop for his personal convenience, however great the public evils from it. At the same time the objector forgets that when all these licensed shops are exterminated, the chemist's shop remains and must remain; and we no more object to the supply

of alcohol than of laudanum from the chemist's. He forgets also that private brewing and private importation of wine will remain lawful, and that the combination of a dozen persons to do this is very easy, whenever they sufficiently wish it. I repeat therefore, that our opponents do not know what they say, if they resent the Permissive Bill of Sir Wilfrid Lawson as despotic, while they acquiesce (as do the Licensed Victuallers themselves) in the magisterial power as right and constitutional. We do not introduce a new despotism; but we greatly soften the existing despotism. It must be right that the folly of a few should be guided by the wisdom of the many, as the weak are supported by the strong. It must be right that the virtuous many should have the power of averting from themselves the calamities which the vicious few inflict upon us all. I call them few, but that is in comparison only; for alas, no one will compute less than forty thousand drunkards, and millions who drink too much; from which come millions of orphans and paupers, and legions of criminals. And forsooth, the advocate of freedom says, "Do anything rather than effectually tear up the deadly root of bitterness."

We cannot know how this or that public opponent reconciles to his understanding the unjust imputation of tyranny which he lays on us; but, in private, I find people to evade the argument by saying: "Well, I confess, I think it wrong that even magistrates should ever have a right totally to refuse licences." I heartily wish that some one would move in Parliament to deprive magistrates of this right; for it would bring out the important facts to the knowledge of every one. Nine-tenths of our opponents are quite ignorant that licences are refused, and the trade suppressed over great areas of land in all three kingdoms, and always with so good result that the beneficent despotism is not resented; nay, in most places is unquestionably received with active gratitude. At Bessbrook the people want the Permissive Bill to secure the continuance of prohibition. Moreover, it is visible that in two great experiments the relaxation of magisterial severity was disastrous. First, I need not speak in detail of the Beer Act of 1830. You know it too well. Even beer could not be exempted from magisterial despotism, without the greatest moral and industrial mischief. Next, perhaps, you know the great experiment at Liverpool. Or perhaps you do not. Allow me a few words about it. More than 20 years ago Liverpool discovered that it was the most unhealthy town in England. The citizens were shocked, and went zealously to work in paving and draining, and destroying cellars in which families lived. In short, in the course of 16 or 17 years, by the expenditure of three millions sterling out of the rates, they actually succeeded in so improving the habitations that the health of the town competed at last favourably with other towns of equal population. Of course they were delighted, and for a little time seemed to have their money's worth. But just then, the magistrates came to a conviction that it was no business of theirs to judge how many drinkshops the town needed; how should they know? The thing ought to settle itself by the law of "demand and supply." Hence they resolved to give as many licences as might be applied for, but to strictly respectable applicants only. In consequence, the shops were multiplied, in a little while the death-rate went up to the old height, and Liverpool found that her three millions sterling might as well not have been spent. The ratepayers were alarmed, and under their pressure the magistrates considerably reduced the number of shops; but, I understand, the habits of drink have become too inveterate, and the mischief has not been undone. "The slain by drink" in Liverpool are still a grievous chapter of annual history.

Such is the terrible plight to which the error of rulers reduces a town or a nation. The calamity of Liverpool is but a type of the calamity of Edinburgh, of London, of the whole United Kingdom. I hold in my hand a table extracted from the public documents, which gives, year by year from 1860 to 1869, the expenditure of the country on poor and police rates. England and Wales, Ireland, Scotland are stated separately. Take them singly or take them collectively, there is a steady increase year by year. As for the totals, we begin from £9,269,807 in 1860, and end at £13,541,827 in 1869. The increase of population was but trifling in comparison; but the increase of expenditure on alcoholic drinks has been steady and vast, and the revenue from them now reaches 25½ millions sterling. The Latin satirist Horace represents a rich

spendthrift pitying his poorer comrade in dissipation : "I am so rich that I can afford to be a fool," says he ; "but to you, poor fellow, it is fatal." Such, probably, was the secret utterance of the late Marquis of Hastings. Great England too may seem to be uttering such a boast. She, forsooth, can afford to destroy, every year, grain equivalent to 1,050 million four-pound loaves, and spend 110 millions sterling in intoxicating drink. Mr. Hoyle, in the book which I hold in my hand, estimates that in 1869 Lancashire alone spent on intoxicating liquors 13¼ millions sterling ; and what, he asks, did Lancashire get in return ? The Government books give the stern reply : Poor and police rates to the amount of £1,113,244 to be paid ; paupers, 102,694 ; vagrants, 30,000 or more ; lunatics, 4,706 ; inquests, 3,749 ; convicts, 90,257 ; suspected depredators, 5,913 ; houses of bad repute, 2,749 ; policemen, 3,316 ; drinkshops, 17,733 ; bushels of grain destroyed, 7 million, equivalent to 105 million four-pound loaves ; while only five or six thousand persons got employment in the manufacture of the drink. Is England indeed so rich that she can bear all this waste, all this vice, all this crime ? Do our rulers suppose that such deeds bring no retribution ?

I hear that some opponents of the Permissive Bill, and perhaps your excellent member, Mr. P. A. Taylor, do not object to the principle of setting some sharp limit to the number of shops by a scale of proportion to the population. It is said that Mr. Thomas Hughes, M.P. for Frome, would consent to forbidding more than one shop to 2,000 people. There was an ancient law, we are told, which enacted two alehouses as sufficient for every market town in the kingdom, a few great cities excepted. At present we have above 150,000 drink shops, or one to 200 people ; so that the scale of one to 2,000 would extinguish nine licenses out of ten. If Mr. Hughes will carry such a law, I will heartily thank him. I just observe that it would be vastly more severe on brewers and distillers, and on the revenue to the exchequer, than anything we are proposing ; but that is not our concern. To extinguish nine licences out of ten would not reduce the consumption by nine-tenths, for some people would take the trouble to go farther, or send farther, for the liquor ; yet it would greatly reduce it, and more and more as time went on, for the taste and the habit would decay. Still, the remaining shops would be centres of mischief, as we see if but one shop is open in a rural village. Sots, poachers, or thieves make it their favourite resort. Every drink shop, be there many or few, needs to be publicly watched over by magistrates and police. What a condemnation of this trade ! Surely, if the Government must watch over it at public expense, the easier and safer way is that only a publicly salaried agent should sell who would have no motive to sell too much. Thus, unless the Maine Law be adopted, the question recurs : after you have cut down the number of shops to the approved minimum, who is to have the regulation of the remaining shops ? Certainly that class of society from which the town magistrates are taken cannot be trusted ; for in the past they have for two full centuries sympathized with the capitalists who thrive on the miseries of their customers, and they have failed to contract the trade. They have not, and cannot have, the moral force necessary. The control of the trade will not be effectual if it come from above. On the other hand, the public itself cannot control, nor can it permanently sustain, any executive action. The attempt would be like burning your house to roast a pig. Popular enthusiasm is raised temporarily by a great evil, and, when at its heat, must effectually burn up the evil. We must make our work sure while our hand is in ; else the cause is lost. The entire lives of a community cannot be given to watch over one thing. Energy is wanted for twenty other things. No regulating of the trade for us ! Enthusiasm, once spent, cannot be recovered. We must bring in a totally new system, which will generate new habits and new principles, and thus be self-acting. If you leave the old principles, and only moderate the evil, it is certain that all the mischief will come back in half a generation. Entire prohibition alone can extinguish taste for the liquors. It succeeds wherever it is honestly introduced, and nothing else appears to have ever had permanent success anywhere.

* "Our National Resources, and How they are Wasted." By William Hoyle. Simpkin and Marshall.