

James Ewing Ritchie

The New Sunday Liquor Law Vindicated



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Liquor Law Vindicated

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THE

NEW SUNDAY LIQUOR

LAW VINDICATED

An Act came into operation in August, denominated “The New Beer Bill,” requiring public-houses to be closed on Sundays, with the exception of the hours 1 to 3 p.m., and 6 to 10 p.m. No sooner was it passed than it was found there was a great decrease in the number of cases of persons charged with drunkenness at the various police stations of the metropolis. Monday, instead of being a heavy day, was the reverse – the magistrates had little or nothing to do. But this great public good was not brought about without inconveniencing some parties. The publicans felt their craft was in danger, – that they were, as Benjamin Disraeli informed them the other day at Plymouth, “in a critical situation;” and that if they acquiesced in the law, the result would be most unsatisfactory, pecuniarily, to themselves. Accordingly, they have banded themselves into one compact Defence Association

– they have taken sweet counsel together – they have organised an opposition all over the land. Whether they have acted wisely is another matter: with the evidence just published in two enormous Blue Books, I think silence would become them better. And so thought the knowing ones in the trade when they accepted the new Bill instead of one that would have been harsher still. The opponents of the Bill – publicans by-the-bye – thus speak of it: Mr. Luce of Hampton Court, “thinks it a despotic and tyrannical Bill.” According to a Mr. Symes, “it is directed against all recreation on Sundays – all relaxation after the toils of the week.” Mr. Palmer said, “The Bill ought to be called the Liberty of the Subject and Licensed Victuallers’ Liberty Curtailment Bill.” I take these extracts from the report of a great meeting in Drury Lane in September. Mr. Lyne, also a publican, writes in the *Daily News*, that “since the curfew bell there never was a measure which produced such general discontent. Notwithstanding the genialness of the weather the social gloom which has settled in the suburbs is indescribable.” The *Daily News*, in the poor hope of saving itself from annihilation, by opposing the new Bill, and thus becoming the organ of the pot-house says: – “The Pharisees of our drawing-rooms and saloons ought, before they are allowed to hamper and annoy the honest poor by their enactments, to be compelled to share for a season in the labour of the poor, in order that they might have some conception of the privations which they entail upon their victims, and the possible consequences of such privation.” In another leader it draws the picture of a

working man returning from Brighton and starving in the streets in consequence of the new Bill. Such is an outline of the new Bill, as described by the publicans and their champion, the *Daily News*. Never was there a greater outcry and so little wool. One would fancy from the above remarks that an injustice was being done – such as the world had never witnessed before. You would have thought that at least we had been robbed of *habeas corpus*, or that still more valued right the Englishman's right to grumble. You would have expected every print to be filled with tales of terror – you would expect every man you met to have had a face of woe, and especially that the working classes, who have been robbed of their rights in so atrocious a manner, would have talked of armed resistance, or at least have provided themselves with pikes. The working men have not held a single meeting on the matter – not one single groan has been wrung from them by the unheard of oppression under which they now labour. So callous and indifferent are they – so utterly callous and indifferent are all other classes of society – that the publicans have been compelled to come forward and so do battle for the working man. What disinterested public spirit! English liberty, torn, bruised, bleeding, shunned by all who once worshipped her and whom she once blessed, finds refuge in a public-house! If you want her you must go to the King's Arms, or the Red Lion, and call for a pint of beer.

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