

The Afternoon Spent Debating  
a St. Thomas License.

MR. HARCOURT'S DEFENCE.

Mr. J. K. Stewart's Investigation  
of the Charges.

Mr. McColl's Motion Fully Answered—  
Side Issues Introduced—Hot Debate  
on the License System.

Legislative Chamber, March 28.

This afternoon was largely wasted by a discussion on apparently groundless charges, preferred by Mr. McColl, against the License Commissioners of Elgin. The Provincial Treasurer took very strong ground in his reply, and completely exonerated the commissioners, while Mr. McColl was shown to have been, to say the least of it, very careless in the statements which he had made in sustaining the charge.

ELGIN LICENSE COMMISSIONERS.

Mr. McColl moved for an order of the House for a return giving a copy of the report of Mr. Stewart, Provincial License Inspector, as to the charge that certain License Commissioners in the County of Elgin were owners of licensed premises and that licenses were refused certain parties on political grounds.

Mr. McColl, at considerable length, recited the evidence or circumstances that appeared to support the charges in question, which he considered never to have been disproved. The Treasurer last year had promised to take action in regard to any irregularity of license inspectors brought to his attention. Here was a case of the kind. Why had not Mr. Harcourt taken action as promised?

Hon. Mr. Harcourt, replying, said he had kept his word in respect to the pledge to which Mr. McColl had referred. During the past twelve months not a single irregularity had been brought to his attention. As to this particular case, he must take exception to Mr. McColl's statements. Mr. McColl had had no reason to make such contemptuous allusions as he had to Mr. O'Donoghue, one of the Elgin License Commissioners, who was a reputable man, and the holder of a position of importance and trust in the M. C. Railway. As for the gravamen of the charge, that J. G. Nunn's license was refused from political motives, Mr. Harcourt stated that he would first read two letters from undoubted Conservatives of St. Thomas. The first was from Mr. Jacob Wilcox, owner of the house in question, and therefore a man who would be interested in having a good tenant in his house. He, in this letter, expressed himself as exceedingly well satisfied with the change in the licensee; Mr. Nunn had proved himself incapable of running a good hotel; had kept the house dirty and out of order, and had permitted a great deal of drunkenness, especially on election day; the house had run down, and Mr. Nunn had run behind in his payments to all his creditors. His successor, the proprietor of the hotel went on, has improved its standing, and the License Commissioners deserved credit if they had effected the change. The second letter was from Mr. B. F. Housinger, a well-known Conservative merchant of St. Thomas, and was sweeping in its characterizations. It stated that the commissioners were perfectly justified in refusing the license, for Nunn was an all-round general dead-beat scoundrel, who had "done" the writer's father some years before out of \$200, and had tried to take advantage of him.

Furthermore, Hon. Mr. Harcourt went on, Mr. Nunn was not refused a license. More than that, even the license had actually been given to him, and by him transferred. He had asserted that his reasons for giving up his license were that he had had two good offers, that his wife was anxious to get out of the hotel, that his business as an auctioneer was in the way of his attending to the hotel, and that he was about to go into the farm-

pupil business. These latter reasons alone would incapacitate Mr. Nunn from continuing in the business. Mr. Harcourt said he could state clearly, after having made careful inquiry, that the three Elgin commissioners were men of excellent reputation, who were disposed to be fair and just to all parties. He was not going to justify any wrong act of any official of the Government. These officials must justify themselves by their actions. But it savored just a little of cowardice, he thought, for any hon. gentleman to speak of Mr. Stewart, the License Inspector, in the terms which Mr. McColl had used regarding him. Mr. Stewart had been shown to possess the highest respect and confidence of many of the best residents of the city where he was best known, Ottawa. Mr. McColl said he had volunteered to aid Mr. Stewart in securing an investigation; but here was Mr. Stewart's report, which he was prepared to lay on the table, stating positively that he had called personally on Mr. McColl to ask his aid in an investigation and had been refused it. Mr. McColl had even declined giving him names of witnesses who could be called. He could not reconcile these two statements. Mr. McColl also claimed that Mr. Nunn had come out of the transaction a loser, that he had lost his fortune. The truth was that Mr. Nunn had been a hopeless bankrupt a year before he left the hotel. Last year Mr. McColl said the loss of Mr. Nunn's license had driven him out of the country. That, again, was wrong. Mr. Nunn had simply gone to Grey County. As to the charge that Mr. O'Donoghue was the owner of licensed premises, he had admitted last year what the facts of the case then were. Mr. O'Donoghue had been the owner of premises to which a shop license was granted some years before he had been a commissioner; but before his name had been placed on the list of commissioners this property had been transferred for a nominal sum to the name of his wife. Mr. O'Donoghue had been notified that this must be discontinued, and he (the Treasurer) still maintained this position. He was not sure whether or not the same condition of things prevailed now, but if so it was quite certain that it would have to be discontinued. If such were the case the commissioner would be promptly requested to send in his resignation. The rule he (the Treasurer) had laid down last year, and which Mr. McColl had challenged him to put into operation, would therefore be followed in this case. In closing he reiterated his statement that no case of irregularity on the part of officials under his control would be allowed by him to pass unnoticed.

Mr. S. White said it had been proved that Mr. O'Donoghue had been the owner of a shop license, and on becoming a commissioner had transferred it to his wife for a nominal sum. He declared that when Mr. Stewart had called upon Mr. McColl he had been offered a list of wit-

nesses to prove the charges, and had "backed out of it." The investigation had been a farcical one.

Mr. A. F. Wood here rose and demanded that, "for obvious reasons," the originals of the letters quoted by Hon. Mr. Harcourt, and not copies, be laid on the table. After some discussion, the Speaker decided that the request was in order, and the originals were accordingly submitted.

Mr. White, continuing, read a letter which Mr. Nunn had sent to a local paper, asserting among other things that he had got the license only on condition that he transfer it. Mr. White then assailed Mr. J. K. Stewart in no measured terms, calling him "that peculiar man," saying that instead of making the investigation he "swelled and disgorged himself at the Reform Club," and declaring that he "had left the town ignominiously." He assailed Mr. O'Donoghue, who, as having refused to take an oath, could not give testimony that was of any value, and concluded by stating that the case showed the iniquitous character of the administration of the license system by the Government.

Mr. Whitney spoke next, complaining of the Treasurer's action in trying to turn the tables on Mr. McColl, instead of simply giving the facts requested. The evidence submitted by Hon. Mr. Harcourt was ex parte, and would have no value in a court of law. Mr. O'Donoghue's libel suit against Mr. Nunn, arising out of the letter previously quoted, had been unsuccessful. Mr. Whitney then read several letters warmly eulogistic of the character of Mr. Nunn.

Mr. A. F. Wood made some remarks upon the character of the letters which Hon. Mr. Harcourt had read, and then made some remarks upon the manner in which the license system of the Province is conducted.

Mr. Cleland followed, and denied certain of Mr. Woods' statements as to being refused a license in Owen Sound.

Mr. Clancy spoke, commenting severely upon Mr. J. K. Stewart, saying that his conduct in St. Thomas demanded an investigation.

Mr. McColl spoke briefly, holding that there were fully as many persons to testify in favor of Mr. Nunn as against him.