

The Extinction of the Betting Evil in Public News Rooms.¹

FOR several years past, complaints have been made by the reading public of disorderly gangs of betting men monopolising the newspapers, especially in the morning. At Wolverhampton, labourers out of work complained that they had to wait for hours before they could see the advertising columns; politicians left the room disgusted because no leading article or report of meeting could be read with comfort, on account of the annoyance caused by scores of betting men retaining the sporting columns on the other side of the papers. To add to the nuisance, a number of boys, with pencils and note-books, sent out of shops and factories, copied extracts from the betting columns daily, and even women were frequently seen similarly occupied.

Members of the Committee, in their occasional visits, not only heard conversation—in the temporary absence of officials, and in direct violation of the printed regulations before the eyes of the offenders in large type—but actually saw money passed **between** these gamblers and their victims in the news room.

The Chief Constable and Town Clerk were consulted, and the police did their best to mitigate the evil. This relief proved of little avail; great difficulty was experienced in removing hoards of loungers round the doors, spitting, smoking, and discussing the merits and demerits of horses in language unfit for quotation; to these evils was added another hitherto unheard of, viz., that timid ladies were deterred from entering the building and using the library, on account of the roughs assembling near the entrance.

After discussion, the Committee unanimously resolved to obliterate the betting and sporting columns in all the newspapers. This spirited move had the desired effect—no victory could be more complete; as the betting men, interested in nothing else whatever, left the building with one accord. Five

¹ Suggested, about eighteen years ago, in the Council Chamber, by Alderman James Walker, Wolverhampton.

months have now elapsed; perfect order has been preserved; and although the readers are as numerous as ever, no difficulty is experienced in any respect. Artisans who had not used the reading room for years, on account of the difficulty or impossibility of reading the news, have since returned, grateful to the Committee for the extinction of the betting nuisance. Letters of congratulation were received from manufacturers and from various parts of the country. No complaint has reached us on the score of delay, for by means of stencil plates cut to size of the betting columns, the whole is accomplished in a few minutes each day. The slight opposition of a few anonymous correspondents in the local press soon died away, and now everybody seems in favour of the reform. To all who suffer from the betting nuisance, obliteration is strongly recommended to restore the reading room to the dignity of a literary institution.

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