

# *In Dry Toronto*

*by*

*Stephen Leacock*

*Illustrated by*  
*C.W. Jefferys*

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# In Dry Toronto

As Told by a Montreal Man

Stephen Leacock

*Who wrote "Abdul Aziz Has His," Germany  
From Within," etc.*

*Illustrated by C. W. Jeffreys*

**I**t may have been, for aught I know, the change from a wet to a dry atmosphere. I am told that, biologically, such things profoundly affect the human system.

At any rate I found it impossible that night—I was on the train from Montreal to Toronto—to fall asleep.

A peculiar wakefulness seemed to have seized upon me, which appeared, moreover, to afflict the other passengers as well. In the darkness of the car I could distinctly hear them groaning at intervals.

"Are they ill?" I asked, through the curtains, of the porter as he passed.

"No, sir," he said, "they're not ill. Those is the Toronto passengers."

"All in this car?" I asked.

"All except that gen'lman you may have heard singing in the smoking compartment. He's booked through to Chicago."

**B**ut, as is usual in such cases, sleep came at last with unusual heaviness. I seemed obliterated from the world, till, all of a sudden. I found myself, as it were, up and dressed and seated in the observation car at the back of the train, awaiting my arrival.

"Is this Toronto?" I asked of the Pullman conductor, as I peered through the window of the car.

The conductor rubbed the pane with his finger and looked out. "I think so," he said.

"Do we stop here?" I asked.

"I think we do this morning," he answered. "I think I heard the conductor say that they had a lot of milk cans to put off here this morning. I'll just go and find out, sir."

"Stop here!" broke in an irascible-looking gentleman in a grey tweed suit who was sitting in the next chair to mine. "Do they *stop* here? I should say they did indeed. Don't you know," he added, turning to the Pullman conductor, "that any train is *compelled* to stop here. There's a by-law, a municipal by-law of the City of Toronto, *compelling* every train to stop!"

"I didn't know it," said the conductor, humbly.

"Do you mean to say," continued the irascible gentleman, "that you have never read the by-laws of the City of Toronto?"

"No, sir," said the conductor.

"The ignorance of these fellows!" said the man in grey tweed, swinging his chair round again towards me. "We ought to have a by-law to compel them to read the by-laws. I must start an agitation for it at once." Here he took out a little red notebook and wrote something in it, murmuring: "We need a new agitation anyway."

**P**resently he shut the book up with a snap. I noticed that there was a sort of peculiar alacrity in everything he did.

"You, sir," he said, "have, of course, read our municipal by-laws?"

"Oh, yes," I answered. "Splendid, aren't they? They read like a romance."

"You are most flattering to our city," said the irascible gentleman with a bow. "Yet you, sir, I take it, are not from Toronto."

"No," I answered, as humbly as I could. "I'm from Montreal."

"Ah!" said the gentleman, as he sat back and took a thorough look at me. "From Montreal? Are you drunk?"

"No," I replied, "I don't think so."



"All clergy drunk at seven in the morning? Deplorable!"

“But you are *suffering* for a drink,” said my new acquaintance, eagerly. “You need it, eh? You feel already a kind of craving, eh, what?”

“No,” I answered. “The fact is it’s rather early in the morning.”

“Quite so,” broke in the irascible gentleman. “But I understand that in Montreal all the saloons are open at seven, and even at that hour are crowded, sir, crowded.”

I shook my head. “I think that has been exaggerated,” I said. “In fact, we always try to avoid crowding and jostling as far as possible. It is generally understood, as a matter of politeness, that the first place in the line is given to the clergy, the Board of Trade, and the heads of the universities.”

“Is it conceivable!” said the gentleman in grey. “One moment, please, till I make a note. ‘All clergy’ (I think you said *all*, did you not?) ‘drunk at seven in the morning.’ Deplorable! But here we are at the Union Station—commodious, is it not? Justly admired, in fact, all over the known world. Observe,” he continued as we alighted from the train and made our way into the station, “the upstairs and the downstairs, connected by flights of stairs—quite unique and most convenient—if you don’t meet your friends downstairs all you have to do is to look upstairs. If they are not there, you simply come down again. But stop, you are going to walk up the street? I’ll go with you.”

**A**t the outer door of the station—just as I had remembered it—stood a group of hotel bus-men and porters.

But how changed!

They were like men blasted by a great sorrow. One, with his back turned, was leaning against a post, his head buried on his arm.

“Prince George Hotel,” he groaned at intervals, “Prince George Hotel.”

Another was bending over a little handrail, his head sunk, his arms almost trailing to the ground.

“King Edward,” he sobbed, “King Edward.”

A third, seated on a stool, looked feebly up, with tears visible in his eyes.

“Walker House,” he moaned. “First-class accommodation for——” Then he broke down and cried.

“Take this handbag,” I said to one of the men, “to the Prince George.”

The man ceased his groaning for a moment and turned to me with something like passion.

“Why do you come to *us*?” he protested. “Why not go to one of the others. Go to *him*,” he added, as he stirred with his foot a miserable being who lay huddled on the ground murmuring at intervals, “Queen’s! Queen’s Hotel.”

But my new friend, who stood at my elbow, came to my rescue.

“Take his bag,” he said, “you’ve got to. You know the by-law. Take it or I’ll call a policeman. You know *me*. My name’s Narrowpath. I’m on the council.”

The man touched his hat and took the bag with a murmured apology.

“Come along,” said my companion, whom I now perceived to be a person of dignity and civic importance. “I’ll walk up with you, and show you the city as we go.”

**W**e had hardly got well upon the street before I realized the enormous change that total prohibition had effected. Everywhere were the bright smiling faces of working people, laughing and singing at their tasks and, early though it was, cracking jokes and asking one another riddles as they worked.

I noticed one man, evidently a city employee, in a rough white suit, busily cleaning the street with a broom and singing to himself:

“How does the little busy bee improve the shining hour.”

Another employee who was handling a little hose was singing:

“Little drops of water, little grains of sand, Tra, la, la, la, la, la, Prohibition’s grand.”

“Why do they sing?” I asked. “Are they crazy?”

“Sing?” said Mr. Narrowpath. “They cannot help it. They haven’t had a drink of whiskey for four months.”



A coal cart went by with a driver, no longer grimy and smudged, but neatly dressed with a high white collar and a white silk tie.

My companion pointed at him as he passed. "Hasn't had a glass of beer for four months," he said. "Notice the difference? That man's work is now a pleasure to him. He used to spend all his evenings sitting round the back parlours of the saloons beside the stove. Now what do you think he does?"

"I have no idea."

"Loads up his cart with coal and goes for a drive—out in the country. Ah, sir, you who live still under the curse of the whisky traffic, little know what a pleasure work itself becomes when drink and all that goes with it is eliminated. Do you see that man, on the other side of the street, with the tool bag?"

"Yes," I said. "A plumber, is he not?"

"Exactly, a plumber—used to drink heavily—couldn't keep a job more than a week. Now, you can't drag him from his work—came to my house to fix a pipe under the kitchen sink—wouldn't quit at six o'clock—got in under the sink and begged to be allowed to stay—said he hated to go home. We had to drag him out with a rope. But here we are at your hotel."

**W**e entered. But how changed the place seemed. Our feet echoed on the flagstones of the deserted rotunda.

At the office desk sat a clerk, silent and melancholy, reading the bible. He put a marker in the book and closed it, murmuring, "Leviticus Two."

Then he turned to us.

"Can I have a room," I asked, "on the first floor?"

A tear welled up into the clerk's eye.

"You can have the whole first floor," he said. And he added, with a half sob, "and the second, too, if you like."

I could not help contrasting his manner with what it was in the old days, when the mere mention of a room used to throw him into a fit of passion, and when he used to tell me that I could have a cot on the roof till Tuesday, and after that, perhaps, a bed in the stable.

Things had changed indeed.

"Can I get breakfast in the grill room?" I inquired of the melancholy clerk.

He shook his head sadly.

"There is no grill room," he answered. "What would you like?"

"Oh, some sort of eggs," I said, "and—"

The clerk reached down below his desk and handed me a hard-boiled egg with the shell off.

"Here's your egg," he said. "And there's ice water there at the end of the desk."

He sat back in his chair and went on reading.

"You don't understand," said Mr. Narrowpath, who still stood at my elbow. "All that elaborate grill room breakfast business was just a mere relic of the drinking days—sheer waste of time and loss of efficiency. Go on and eat your egg. Eaten it? Now, don't you feel efficient? What more do you want? Comfort, you say? My dear sir: More men have been ruined by comfort—Great Heavens, comfort! the most dangerous, deadly drug that ever undermined the human race. But, here, drink your water. Now, you're ready to go and do your business, if you have any."

"But," I protested, "it's still only half-past seven in the morning—no offices will be open——"

"Open!" exclaimed Mr. Narrowpath. "Why! they all open at daybreak now."

I had, it is true, a certain amount of business before me, though of no very intricate or elaborate kind—a few simple arrangements with the head of a



publishing house such as it falls to my lot to make every now and then. Yet in the old and unregenerate days it used to take all day to do it. The wicked thing that we used to call a comfortable breakfast in the hotel grill room somehow carried one on to about ten o'clock in the morning. Breakfast brought with it the need of a cigar for digestion's sake and with that, for very restfulness, a certain perusal of the Toronto *Globe*, properly corrected and rectified by a look through the Toronto *Mail*. After that it had been my practice to stroll along to my publishers' office at about eleven-thirty, transact my business, over a cigar, with the genial gentleman at the head of it, and then accept his invitation to lunch, with the feeling that a man who has put in a hard and strenuous morning's work is entitled to a few hours of relaxation.

I am inclined to think that, in those reprehensible by-gone times, many other people did their business in this same way.

"I don't think," I said to Mr. Narrowpath musingly, "that my publisher will be up as early as this. He's a comfortable sort of man."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Narrowpath. "Not at work at half-past seven! In Toronto? The thing's absurd. Where is the office? Richmond Street? Come along. I'll go with you. I've always a great liking for attending to other people's business."

"I see you have," I said.

"It's our way here," said Mr. Narrowpath with a wave of his hand. "Every man's business, as we see it, is everybody else's business. Come along, you'll be surprised how quickly your business will be done."

Mr. Narrowpath was right.

**M**y publisher's office, as we entered it, seemed a changed place. Activity and efficiency was stamped all over it. My good friend the publisher was not only there, but there with his coat off, inordinately busy, bawling orders (evidently meant for a printing room) through a speaking tube. "Yes." he was shouting, "put WHISKEY in black letter capitals, old English, double size, set it up to look attractive, with the legend *Made in Toronto* in long clear type underneath——"

"Excuse me," he said, as he broke off for a moment. "We've got a lot of stuff going through the press this morning—a big distillery catalogue that we are rushing through. We're doing all we can, Mr. Narrowpath." he continued, speaking with the deference due to a member of the City Council, "to boom Toronto as a Whiskey Centre."

"Quite right, quite right!" said my companion, rubbing his hands.

“And now, professor,” added the publisher, speaking with rapidity, “your contract is all here—only needs signing—I won’t keep you more than a moment—write your name here—Miss Sniggins will you please witness this so help you God how’s everything in Montreal good morning.”

“Pretty quick, wasn’t it?” said Mr. Narrowpath, as we stood in the street again.

“Wonderful!” I said, feeling almost dazed. “Why, I shall be able to catch the morning train back again to Montreal—”

“Precisely. Just what everybody finds. Business done in no time. Men who used to spend whole days here, clear out now in fifteen minutes. I knew a man whose business efficiency has so increased under our new regime that he says he wouldn’t spend more than five minutes in Toronto if he were paid to.”

**B**ut what is this?” I asked as we were brought to a pause in our walk at a street crossing by a great block of vehicles. “What are all these drays? Surely, those look like barrels of whiskey!”



“So they are,” said Mr. Narrowpath, proudly. “Export whiskey. Fine sight, isn’t it? Must be what?—twenty—twenty-five?—loads of it. This place, sir, mark my words, is going to prove, with its new energy and enterprise, one of the greatest seats of the distillery business. In fact, *the* whiskey capital of the North —”

“But I thought,” I interrupted, much puzzled, “that whiskey was prohibited here since last September?”

“Export whiskey—*export*, my dear sir,” corrected Mr. Narrowpath. “We don’t interfere, we have never, so far as I know, proposed to interfere with any man’s right to make and export whiskey. That, sir, is a plain matter of business; morality doesn’t enter into it.”

“I see,” I answered. “But will you please tell me what is the meaning of this other crowd of drays coming in the opposite direction? Surely, those are beer barrels, are they not?”

“In a sense they are,” admitted Mr. Narrowpath. “That is, they are *import* beer. It comes in from some other province. It was, I imagine, made in this city (our breweries, sir, are second to none), but the sin of *selling* it——” here Mr. Narrowpath raised his hat from his head and stood for a moment in a reverential attitude——“rests on the heads of others.”

**T**he press of vehicles had now thinned out and we moved on, my guide still explaining in some detail the distinction between business principles and moral principles, between whiskey as a curse and whiskey as a source of profit, which I found myself unable to comprehend.

At length I ventured to interrupt.

“Yet it seems almost a pity,” I said, “that, with all this beer and whiskey around, an unregenerate sinner like myself should be prohibited from getting a drink.”

“A drink!” exclaimed Mr. Narrowpath. “Well. I should say so. Come right in here. You can have anything you want.”

We stepped through a street door into a large long room.

“Why!” I exclaimed in surprise. “This is a bar!”

“Nonsense!” said my friend. “The *bar* in this province is forbidden. We’ve done with the foul thing, forever. This is an Import Shipping Company’s Delivery Office.”

“But this long counter——”

“It’s not a counter, it’s a desk.”

“And that bar-tender in his white jacket——”

“Tut! Tut! He’s not a bar-tender. He’s an Import Goods Delivery Clerk.”

“What’ll you have, gents?” said the Import Clerk, polishing a glass as he spoke.

“Two whiskeys and sodas,” said my friend. “Long ones.”

The Import Clerk mixed the drinks and set them on the desk.

I was about to take one but he interrupted. “One minute, sir,” he said.

**T**hen he took up a desk telephone that stood beside him and I heard him calling up Montreal. “Hello, Montreal. Is that Montreal? Well, say, I’ve just received an offer here for two whiskeys and sodas at sixty cents, shall I close with it? All right, gentlemen. Montreal has effected the sale. There you are.”

“Dreadful, isn’t it?” said Mr. Narrowpath. “The sunken, depraved condition of your City of Montreal; actually *selling* whiskey. Deplorable!” And with that he buried his face in the bubbles of the whiskey and soda.

“Mr. Narrowpath,” I said, “would you mind telling me something? I fear I am a little confused, after what I have seen here, as to what your new legislation has been. You have *not* then, I understand, prohibited the making of whiskey?”

“Oh, no, we see no harm in that.”

“Nor the sale of it.”

“Certainly not,” said Mr. Narrowpath, “not if sold *properly*.”

“Nor the drinking of it?”

“Oh, no, that least of all. We attach no harm whatever, under our law, to the mere drinking of whiskey.”

“Would you tell me, then,” I asked, “since you have not forbidden the making, nor the selling, nor the buying, nor the drinking of whiskey—just what it is that you have prohibited? What is the difference between Montreal and Toronto?”

Mr. Narrowpath put down his glass on the “desk” in front of him. He gazed at me with open-mouthed astonishment.

“Toronto?” he gasped. “Montreal and Toronto! The difference between Montreal and Toronto—my dear sir—Toronto—Toronto——”

I stood waiting for him to explain. But as I did so I seemed to become aware that a voice—not Mr. Narrowpath’s, but a voice close to my ear was repeating,

“Toronto—Toronto—Toronto.”

I sat up with a start—still in my berth in the Pullman car—with the voice of the porter calling through the curtains, “Toronto—Toronto.”

**S**o! It had only been a dream. I pulled up the blind and looked out of the window and there was the good old city, with the bright sun sparkling on its church spires and on the bay spreading out at its feet. It looked quite unchanged, just the same pleasant old place, as cheerful, as self-conceited, as kindly, as hospitable, as quarrelsome, as wholesome, as moral and as loyal and as disagreeable as it always was.

“Porter,” I said, “is it true that there is prohibition here now?”

The porter shook his head.

“I ain’t heard of it,” he said.

THE END

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Illustrations have been relocated due to using a non-page layout.

A cover was created for this ebook which is placed in the public domain.

[The end of *In Dry Toronto* by Stephen Leacock]