

TAMPERING WITH A METER.

Hotel Licensee Fined.

ALBANY, May 13.—At the Albany Police Court, after a hearing extending over a day and a half, Mr. A. E. Burt, R.M., found Christian de Rink, bart licensee of the Premier Hotel, guilty of a charge of having wilfully prevented the electric light meter on the said premises from registering correctly the quantity of electricity supplied, thereby fraudulently consuming current. A penalty of £15, with £11/3/ costs, was inflicted, in default three months' imprisonment with hard labour. Defendant, who conducted his own case, immediately notified his intention of appealing. Mr. G. A. Cooper (Messrs. Haynes, Robinson, and Cooper) conducted the prosecution for the Albany Municipal Council, and, after the first day's hearing, notified the council's intention to rely on the case covering meter consumption for the month of March, withdrawing the allegations in respect to December, January, and February last. De Rink pleaded not guilty, and the hearing throughout was marked by brusques between himself and counsel for the prosecution, and, in the closing stages, by conflict with the Bench, the R.M. more than once threatening to remove defendant from the court. He stated he had been forbearing to a certain extent with de Rink, on account of his excitable French temperament.

Evidence for the prosecution was tendered by Joseph Harold and William

dered by Joseph Harold and William James Verran, attached to the municipal power-house. The former alleged that in April, 1930, de Rink said, in the presence of a witness: "My account won't be so large as this next month—in fact, I'll bet you 5/ it will be under 50 units." Subsequent readings each month did show reduced amounts. Witness carried out meter tests, and found nothing wrong, and later recommended that the meter be changed. This was done last February. The meter replacing it was a new one, direct from the storeroom, and this was subsequently replaced by yet another meter, taken from vacated shop premises. This had always recorded correctly. When he removed the new meter, he found scratches on the base plates. On March 21 he went to the hotel, with his brother, the Town Clerk, and the Assistant Town Clerk, and inspected the meter. They found a piece of metal pin placed through one wire and resting on the other wire, thus stopping correct registration. The scratches on the new meter led to the belief that the pin had often been used. De Rink later refused permission to read the meter, and had been warned by the Town Clerk. From March 6, when the meter was changed, to March 14, it had recorded 22 units. This was equal to the full total for February. The pin was not in the wires when he read the meter on the first of the month.

William James Verran gave evidence of finding the pin and reporting the matter to the council officials, and the changing of the meters. He found the pin on March

to the council officials, and the changing of the meters. He found the pin on March 21. He spoke to de Rink in his office on March 23, and the latter showed him a piece of wire, but this was of different shape, one end having been broken off and the other slightly bent. De Rink said "he would like to find the — who had been monkeying with his meter."

Defendant claimed that he took the Town Clerk upstairs and showed him the pin still in the wires three days after its discovery. He sought an adjournment for the purpose of calling evidence in rebuttal of a statement by the Town Clerk that he told him of the incident on the afternoon of March 21, as he did not get back from Perth after a fortnight's absence until March 22. In the following day's hearing Mrs. Wilson and Norman Grove (hotel yardman) supported this statement on oath.

De Rink said he had reported the smallness of the light account, and asked for a change of meters. With Verran he tested the meter, and it had to be knocked to start it. That was in February. Later a new meter, of 5 amps, was put in, and his account showed the same number of units as before. He would swear he removed the pin three days after it was claimed to have been found by Verran. He had reduced the light capacity of the hotel by one-third, and the boarders had dropped 75 per cent, on the corresponding period of last year owing to depression. That explained the reduced current consumption. He alleged that Verran had placed the pin in the wire "to get even," because of remarks he had passed on the

placed the pin in the wire "to get even," because of remarks he had passed on the capabilities of Verran and other council employees.

The R.M. said that the defendant must fail, because the Act did not require the council to prove its case; defendant must prove his innocence. No matter where a hotel was situated he could not believe the meter consumption could be as low as 22 units. He (the Magistrate) used as much some months in his own private home. De Rink could congratulate himself that he had not been charged with the other three months' accounts.