

# PERFECTING THE SCOTT ACT

## The Common's Debate on the Prohibition Question.

Yesterday's sittings of the Commons was devoted to the discussion of Mr. Flint's resolution in favor of provincial local option, and of the two amendments thereto, one by Mr. McClure in favor of the adoption of prohibition throughout Canada, and the other by Mr. Parmelee, that the result of the plebiscite vote did not warrant the introduction of prohibitory legislation.

The result was the adoption by a large majority of the amendment proposed by Mr. Parmelee, with a further clause added, on motion of Mr. Douglas, in favor of enlarging the scope and perfecting the machinery for the enforcement of the Canada Temperance Act, otherwise known as the Scott Act, which will have the support of the government.

After Mr. Flint had spoken to his motion, Mr. Wallace charged the government supporters with shilly shallying, and said that if he got a chance he would propose an amendment in favor of compensation to the liquor interests affected. Quebec was the most intemperate province in Canada. His position was in favor of prohibition with compensation.

Dr. McDonald (Huron) said the scope of the Canada Temperance Act should be enlarged and provisions perfected for its enforcement.

Mr. T. Dixon Craig (East Dorham) promised to give his vote for the Parmelee amendment. Personally he was a prohibitionist, but felt that it was quite apparent that neither the government, the parliament nor the country was ripe for prohibition.

The Prime Minister said that as leader of the House he should state the view which, in his opinion, ought to prevail on this occasion. He did not pretend to do more than give his individual opinion, the question not being a ministerial one, although the government took a certain course on it a few years ago. While in opposition they had pledged themselves to give the people an opportunity to pronounce on prohibition and they had fully carried out their pledge, submitting the question exactly as the friends of temperance had asked. The result was well known, and since then he has taken the position that although there had been a slight majority in favor of prohibition, public opinion had not spoken in so certain a voice as to make it advisable to enact a prohibitory liquor law at this stage.

It was preferable to look at the vote cast in favor of prohibition, and in some respects this might be claimed to be large, although not 25 per cent. of the electors. But under the circumstances he has concluded that public opinion was not so far advanced as to make a prohibitory law advisable.

There was no unanimity of opinion among prohibitionists, and three or four different opinions could be distinctly seen. There was Mr. Flint's view that the vote polled did not justify national prohibition but would justify provincial prohibition. Another view was given by Mr. McClure, who favored absolute prohibition throughout the Dominion. Then there was the view of Mr. Craig, to whom he must give the credit of having always spoken consistently and honestly, who was in favor of prohibition, but was also of opinion that the time had not yet come for its enactment. Mr. Wallace was of opinion that a prohibitory law would be advisable if coupled with compensation. There was also the view of Dr. McDonald that the cause would be best promoted by perfecting the Scott Act. All these gentlemen were pronounced prohibitionists, and no two agreed. Under the circumstances he was more than justified in claiming that the government had rightly interpreted the verdict of the people when they had decided that the time had not yet come for the enactment of a prohibitory law.

The House had three propositions before it, but practically only one, as he thought he might put aside Mr. McClure's amendment. Practically the only proposition was that of Mr. Flint to enact a prohibitory law to affect the provinces which had pronounced in favor of it—that is all except Quebec. Regarding this the Premier said:

"I have no hesitation in saying that in my judgment no more dangerous legislation could be placed upon the statute books. There is grave doubt, according to some lawyers, that such a measure would be unconstitutional and against the very letter of the act which forms the charter of our Dominion. But let us set aside and suppose that we had the power to enact such a law, would it be advisable in the interest of the whole people of Canada that the parliament of Canada should commence to legislate on sectional lines? Could there be a more dangerous principle to introduce into legislation than that we should not legislate upon broad national lines applicable to all Canada, but simply to certain sections of the community?"

"If we were to enact such a statute as that favored by Mr. Flint, what would be the condition of things? We would intensify the line of cleavage. For instance, we would have the manufacture of spirits and other liquors concentrated in the province of Quebec, and that province would be the great centre from which would radiate the liquor traffic. If we had the manufacture of liquor concentrated into one province, and this to be done by law and by the lines of cleavage separating Quebec from the rest of the Dominion, I do not think it would be a healthy sentiment that would follow

or that it would promote proper development of our country.

"So it is of no use to resort to any questions of expediency in that matter. We must face the question fairly, and the question is that either the country is ready for prohibition or it is not. If it is ready the people will have it when they want it. If not, let us act accordingly. For my part I have come to the conclusion that the country is not ready for prohibition.

"I do not wish to make an invidious comparison between one province of Canada and another, but I think I can fairly claim that the province of Quebec is at least as temperate as any other province, and in some respects I can claim that it is more temperate, because there is more actual prohibition to the acre in that province than in any other part of our country.

"I think we can all be proud of the progress that has been made by the cause of temperance in every part of Canada. Compare what we see about us in this year of grace 1900 with what we know to have been the case forty years ago. Why, there is no comparison. It is not the same country or the same people. Between 1863 and 1866 it was my privilege to address more than 200 meetings in all parts of Canada, and in these 200 meetings I never saw a man under the influence of liquor except in three places. This is a condition of things which, I believe, could be matched in no other part of America.

"What can we do further to advance the cause of temperance? For my part I am not a prohibitionist. I have nothing to hide about that; I do not want to sail under false colors; but I claim with all modesty that I am a temperance man. I think I can claim also that though I do not pretend to be a prohibitionist, I am as much a temperance man as if I were a prohibitionist.

"But there is still something to be done in favor of temperance. In 1878 Mr. McKenzie put upon the statute book the Canada Temperance Act (Scott Act). If the friends of temperance think that by perfecting that system it would be more effective in the cause of promoting temperance, I think it would be the duty of the government to give effect to that wish. If the friends of temperance should signify their desire in that way, I can say for my part, and I think I can speak on behalf of my colleagues, that the government would be willing to respond. Look at the question in all its aspects. I do not see that any better method can be devised at the present time to promote the cause which we all have at heart, whether we are prohibitionists or not."

### MR. FOSTER SPEAKS.

Mr. Foster said he proposed voting against the Parmelee amendment. The temperance cause is the cause of the people. Every farmer knows that to kill weeds he must go to the roots. To cut the weed off on the surface, means that the weed is still left to grow. It is just that way with boils, ulcers, eruptions, pimples and similar diseases of the flesh.

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perance people of Canada had had enough of plebiscites, without any effect following, and had not the heart to go into the Dominion plebiscite. As long as Quebec held out against prohibition it could not be passed. The Premier's statement of the case today was not what he had made before the plebiscite. Why had not the Premier stipulated for the majority vote of those on the lists? Nothing wrong in such an agreement between the prohibitionists and the anti-prohibitionists in the Liberal convention, but it was certainly improper to keep it secret. If prohibition was ever attained it would be by sending a majority of men to Parliament to enact and carry out such a law.

### THE FINANCE MINISTER.

Mr. Fielding replied to the charge that the government had deceived the people as to the majority that would be required to secure the passage of prohibition. He quoted the utterances of the two ministers in the Upper House of Parliament in 1886, before the taking of the plebiscite, to show that it was distinctly understood it would require more than a bare majority to secure passage of such a law. There was no misunderstanding among the temperance people. They knew that a small vote would defeat the object of the plebiscite. This had been urged in every temperance journal of Canada and after the vote had been taken such strong temperance advocates as Rev. Dr. Potts, Mr. J. S. Robertson, Secretary of the Canadian Temperance League, Mr. Craig M. P., and more recently Rev. Dr. Goodspeed, of Toronto, had freely expressed the opinion that a prohibitory law based on the prohibition plebiscite would be a mistake.

Mr. Fielding put the question flatly to Mr. Foster, leading the Opposition to define the position of the Conservative party on the prohibition issue.

The Finance Minister paused for a reply, but Mr. Foster was silent.

Mr. Bergeron (Beauharnois) said that he would like to see a division on Mr. Melure's amendment, though in favor of temperance he was opposed to this amendment.

Sir Louis Davies recalled Mr. Foster's declaration of policy in 1891 that in "a moment of weakness" he had voted for immediate prohibition. In the absence of any subsequent change of front this was Mr. Foster's position to-day. Sir Louis argued that from a constitutional standpoint it would not be competent to pass legislation of this nature for one part of Canada alone, and cited as his ground for this statement the interpretation put upon section 91 of the British North America Act.

### MR. BELL, OF P. E. I.

Mr. Bell (Prince, P. E. I.) who had seconded the Flint resolution, did not agree with the constitutional aspect of the case as put forward by Sir Louis Davies.—Ottawa Free Press July 4th.

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