

The Camp Fire.

A MONTHLY JOURNAL
OF TEMPERANCE PROGRESS.

SPECIALY DEVOTED TO THE INTERESTS OF
THE PROHIBITION CAUSE.

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NOTE.—It is proposed to make this the cheapest Temperance paper in the world, taking into consideration its size, the matter it contains and the price at which it is published.
Every friend of temperance is earnestly requested to assist in this effort by subscribing and by sending in facts or arguments that might be of interest or use to our workers.
The editor will be thankful for correspondence upon any topic connected with the temperance reform. Our limited space will compel condensation. No letter for publication should contain more than two hundred words—if shorter, still better.

TORONTO, FEBRUARY, 1896.

A DOMINION PLEBISCITE.

From time to time propositions have been made in the Dominion House of Commons for a national plebiscite on the question of prohibition. On different occasions these suggestions have been offered as amendments to resolutions in favor of prohibition. They are therefore looked upon with hostility by our friends. It was also argued that our system of responsible government did not recognize this method of securing an expression of public opinion on proposed legislation.

The action of different Provincial Legislatures has now established a precedent for the taking of plebiscites. The theory that such action was not practicable has been exploded by the taking of the action. This actual action has, however, taken away to a great extent one of the strongest arguments in favor of a plebiscite. The desirability of finding out public opinion has been urged. The Provincial plebiscites have shown fairly what public opinion is.

Such plebiscites have been taken in Manitoba, Ontario, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. The opinion of New Brunswick has been expressed by a resolution of the N. B. Legislature. Quebec, the Northwest Territories, and British Columbia are the only places that have not spoken. Still it is proposed that a national plebiscite should be taken. The Liberal party in a great convention has declared in favor of this course. The leader of the party has repeatedly asserted that if such a plebiscite be taken, and if it shows that the people favor prohibition, his party will favor the enactment of a prohibitory law. This is the furthest that any national political party has yet gone in declaration in favor of prohibitory law.

Some years ago at a convention in Toronto, the present Finance Minister, Hon. George E. Foster, argued strongly in favor of a plebiscite. One of the plebiscite resolutions in the Dominion Parliament was moved by Mr. George Taylor, the Conservative whip. It may fairly therefore be assumed that the plebiscite plan is one which either political party can accept.

Temperance workers look upon a plebiscite as needless. They believe that the present situation warrants immediate action looking towards actual prohibitory legislation. They have however, no particular prejudice against a plebiscite and would cheerfully favor such a course if it could be shown that it would help on the cause. As matters stand at present, political parties treating the question as they do, it seems as if the plebiscite road is

the quickest road towards the enactment of a prohibitory law.

There is nothing to keep the party at present in power from arranging for a prohibition plebiscite at the approaching general election. If such a vote is taken and it results in a majority for prohibition, our cause will make a mighty advance. Then if the Conservative party comes back to power it will come with full knowledge of public sentiment. If the Liberal party is in the ascendant, the leaders of that party will take office knowing public opinion and pledged to prohibitory legislation.

The agitation, discussion and general campaign work that would accompany such a plebiscite would strengthen us and prove a powerful means of developing public sentiment on the right side.

While we believe that Parliament ought to take immediate action, while we earnestly call upon our friends to do all in their power under any circumstances to secure the election of prohibitionists to Parliament, we must admit that the taking of a Dominion plebiscite with the promise of prohibitory legislation if the people so desired, is at present the shortest possible road to the enactment of a prohibitory law. To that action the Liberal party is pledged. The Conservative party is not committed against it. If the Conservative party in Parliament will take immediate action on that line, it will earn the thanks of all earnest friends of the Temperance cause, and will materially help us in the great struggle in which we are engaged.

POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE.

There is a growing feeling in Canada against blind adherence to political parties. This is hopeful and right. Public opinion has been too much and too long trammelled by the fetters of unreasoning partisanship. We have a right to be thankful for any evidence of emancipation from this stupidity.

The extent to which partyism has been cultivated has developed such a widespread belief in the strength of this sentiment that comparatively few persons are willing to admit that there is any freedom from party influence. This makes independence difficult. It has even led to narrowmindedness in men who claim to be independent. They are so accustomed to be suspicious, to believe partyism dominates, that they are too ready to impute party motives even where they do not exist.

Independence of party should not mean that a man is not free to commend any political party action that is right. Yet it has not infrequently occurred that good men, men whose motives ought to be above suspicion, when they have declared that their judgment approves certain political action, have been met with strong and reiterated accusations of partisanship. It would seem as if some so-called independents believe that independence means abuse of everybody else.

The true independent will criticize what is wrong and unworthy in political parties. He will be just as free in his approval and support of political action that is right. Independence then does not mean hostility to politicians. The true independent will be free from the control of party, but will be ready and prompt to approve right political action, and support any politician or party that will work for the accomplishment of what is right.

It is folly to assume that there are no independent-minded men except those who have no party affiliations. Men who are honestly Conservatives, and men who are honestly Reformers, may be as truly independent, and, in

work for what is right, may be even more influential and potential than those who take the ground that everyone who is a Liberal or a Conservative is therefore necessarily trammelled by wrong motives or unworthy prejudices.

THE DELAYED DECISION.

The jurisdiction question was argued last summer before the Privy Council, just as the Council was about to adjourn for the regular recess. It is probable therefore that the judges had not time to thoroughly consider the arguments laid before them until they came together again.

The Court sat again in the latter part of 1895 and it is generally understood that the question was then gone over and a decision arrived at. It is probable that this decision has been put into form and will be rendered when the Court sits again. This is expected to be about the middle of the present month. The decision may be rendered even before this paper is in the hands of our subscribers. In any case we are close to the settlement of this long uncertain question. The air will speedily be cleared. We shall see and know exactly where we stand. We shall be ready for immediate definite action.

The decision may be too late to enable us to secure legislation from those Provincial Assemblies which are now sitting. It will probably however, give time enough to enable those Assemblies to make a declaration of their intention relating to legislation. There will then be an opportunity for temperance workers to consider that declaration and formulate their ideas in reference to carrying it out. The question of local option will also be settled; and our friends in Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba and the Northwest Territories may be enabled to go ahead on this line without delay. In any case a vigorous campaign is about to begin.

While the important question of Provincial legislation is thus disposed of, and the way opened for local work, we must not neglect the all important matter of national prohibition. We must not be turned aside from the work of securing the nomination and election of members of Parliament who will work regardless of party for the enactment of national prohibition.

The next twelve months will be fraught with heavy responsibility for prohibitionists, and will be an important era in the history of our reform. We shall have splendid opportunities for definite work with more prospect of good results than we have ever had before.

TAKING ALL WE CAN GET.

One of the most serious mistakes ever made by the prohibitionists of the Province of Ontario was their abandonment of the Canada Temperance Act when that measure was repealed in the counties which had adopted it.

The official returns showed unmistakably that even for the short time it was in operation the law had materially lessened criminal drunkenness. There were sixteen counties that changed entirely from license to Scott Act in 1885 and 1886, and which had therefore unitedly one full year of Scott Act operation. In these counties the average commitments to jail for drunkenness in the last two license years, aggregated 533 per year. During the Scott Act year they aggregated 218.

Temperance men however were impatient. Some who had anticipated greater results were disappointed. They did not recognize the fact that such a change in legislation must meet with difficulties at the outset, and that it would require time to secure all the benefit that the law could give. Political complications arose. Official

action relating to the law did not meet the desires of earnest workers. Disgust with the difficulties found in the working of the law seemed to blind the public to the good it was accomplishing. Repeal contests came on at this critical time, and the law was wiped out in every part of Ontario in which it had been adopted. Then the Scott Act was abandoned.

To-day we see our mistake. Had there been more stability in our ranks; had we immediately taken up the work of securing re-enactment, we would to-day be in a vastly better position than that which we occupy. Other provinces stood by the law and are reaping the benefits of their wise action. Possibly they did not find the work as difficult as it was in Ontario.

Take for example, the province of Prince Edward Island in every part of which the Scott Act is still in operation. There the law is being enforced. In the City of Charlottetown during January of the present year, the number of convictions for drunkenness was five. The number of convictions for violations of the Canada Temperance Act was seven. Last week there were several commitments to jail for third offences.

The report of the Royal Commission tells us that for the three years ending 1893 the average consumption of strong drink in the Dominion of Canada was about four and one-half gallons per head of the population. The consumption in the Province of Ontario was almost seven gallons. The consumption in the Province of Prince Edward Island was less than three-fourths of one gallon.

It has been suggested that the Scott Act and similar laws may tend to retard the attainment of total prohibition by giving workers something else to absorb their attention. The condition of public opinion in Prince Edward Island gives no support to this theory. This province made the best record in the plebiscites that were taken two years ago. The temperance question is everywhere in the province a live one. The demand for better legislation is emphatic and general. In fact the only argument deducible from the situation is that the Scott Act has proved a powerful means of developing and keeping up public opinion against the liquor traffic.

It is wisdom to demand all that we desire. It is folly to despise and belittle anything in the line of temperance legislation that we can secure.

THE NEW SECRETARY OF STATE.

Hon. Sir Charles Tupper has been elected to the Dominion Parliament for the constituency of Cape Breton. Prohibitionists will watch closely the actions and utterances of the new Minister anxious to know whether his access to office is to be a gain or a hindrance to our cause.

In days gone by Sir Charles was an active friend of temperance, a member of the Grand Division Sons of Temperance in Nova Scotia. He has publicly in Great Britain strongly endorsed the prohibitive legislation which was some time ago in operation in our Northwest Territories. If he is true to his Canadian record on this question, he will be a tower of strength to the prohibition cause in the Cabinet that already contains a number of total abstainers and avowed prohibitionists.

It is to be hoped that during the present session Mr. T. B. Flint will be able to secure a division upon the prohibition resolution of which he has given notice, and that the new Secretary of State will then have an opportunity of letting the Canadian public know what position he takes upon one of the most important questions in the political arena to-day.