

absurdity is no greater applied to one side than to the other.

Hon. Mr. MILLS—The hon. gentleman has not answered my question.

Hon. Mr. FERGUSON—I have answered that it would be absurd with so small a vote as that, but my contention is that the vote was not small—that the vote was 23 per cent of the actual strength on the voters' list compared with 28 per cent which the hon. gentlemen received when they appealed to the country for support at a political election, and hon. gentlemen know very well that in a political election, where personality comes in and powerful political organizations are at work, it is very easy to bring out the vote compared with a vote on a bare abstract principle. We know very well that the whole influence of the government—at least in one province—there were provinces where it was not safe to exert it—was thrown in order to secure a large vote against prohibition in the interests of the government, and I have not the slightest doubt that the affirmative vote, large as it is, 278,000, of men who went out purely to vote for a principle without supporting any political platform or personality of candidates—and in many cases without the spur of opposition—would have been larger had Government influence not been exerted. Hon. gentlemen know how powerful the spur of opposition is, and I have no doubt in Prince Edward Island if the opponents of the measure had only gone to the meetings and opposed the temperance people, the affirmative vote would have been doubled. It was the apathy and indifference which is sure to arise out of the fact of their being no opposition, that made the vote as small as it was, although it was a respectable vote in Prince Edward Island. The opponents of prohibition were wise in their generation in not holding meetings and showing their hand in Prince Edward Island, for if they had the result would have been doubly as favourable to prohibition as it proved to be. I have no hesitation in saying that the government have performed a part in regard to this matter of prohibition that is very far from creditable to them as a government and to Canada as a portion of the Empire. I think hon. gentlemen will

search in vain for an instance in which the people of any country have been trifled with to the extent that the temperance people of Canada, among the very best people of the country, have been trifled with in regard to this question of prohibition. An election was called, the advocates of prohibition did not ask, as I said before, for a vote on this question. The government, for their own purposes took this course to dodge the question, but they endeavoured to create an impression that having submitted the question in this form they were more favourable to the principle of prohibition than there opponents were, and in that way they received a very large vote that they would not otherwise have received in the elections. When the object was gained, of getting the votes of the Conservatives who believed in prohibition, we began to see a shying back on the question of prohibition, and at times it began to look as if we would not have the plebiscite itself. A year ago it looked as if the hon. gentlemen opposite would be glad to see the question shelved. I could see at the time a desire that some catastrophe would occur in order that they might shirk the taking of the plebiscite, a hope that something might turn up to get them out of the difficulty in which they were placed. They put the question before the people and members of the administration went from town to town in the province of Quebec and made speeches in which they condemned the whole question of submitting it to a plebiscite. Mr. Geoffrion said the government had, in a moment of weakness, promised a plebiscite, but they would not give prohibition. Mr. Geoffrion made the statement (I have never heard it questioned) that the government had actually made up their minds at that time that no matter what the vote was there would be no prohibition. Their object was to keep the vote as low as possible in order that they might escape from the promise they had made. We have the spectacle of the people of this country being put to a vast amount of trouble, a very considerable amount of public and private expense incurred, people called away from their employment at a busy time of the year and all this was done while it had been already practically determined that that vote should be treated with the utmost contempt.

Hon. Mr. SCOTT—There is no justification for that statement.