

of prohibition in this country. Although one pities the miserable inconsistency of the hon. gentleman which is apparent in his conduct, yet one cannot but admire his audacity when he said that although he once voted for prohibition he did it in a weak moment. But, Sir, upon this point—and it is one as to which we ought not to quibble about consistency or inconsistency, because it affects not one man, but the honour of the House—not only the Minister of Finance, but the House has pledged itself by an enormous majority that when it once became satisfied that public opinion was ripe for prohibition, it would be ready to enact such a measure. That is the only question we have to satisfy ourselves upon, and how are we to satisfy ourselves upon it? Simply by taking a vote of the people, either in the ordinary constitutional way or in the way of a plebiscite. Sir, the arguments advanced by the hon. Minister of Finance, who I may say holds a brief for the liquor interest to-day, against taking the vote in the ordinary constitutional way, are insuperable.

Mr. FOSTER. I desire to rise to a point of order. The hon. gentleman has no right to state that I hold a brief for the liquor interest.

Mr. DAVIES (P.E.I.) Well, if the hon. gentleman will tell me for whom he does hold a brief, I will withdraw my charge, and make it consistent with the facts.

Mr. BOWELL. If he were half as well paid as you were for the short time that you held a brief, he would be very well paid.

Mr. DAVIES (P.E.I.) That is very pertinent to the subject. I admire the appropriateness of the remark made by the hon. Minister of Customs. It is intended to be personally offensive, but owing to the fact that it is so appropriate to the discussion, I will forgive him the intrusion. I want to know if we can test public opinion by the ordinary mode—

Some hon. MEMBERS. Order.

Mr. SPEAKER. The question has been raised as to whether the hon. gentleman was in order in charging the hon. Finance Minister with holding a brief for the liquor interest. I may say that I hope the hon. member will withdraw that expression.

Mr. DAVIES (P.E.I.) Certainly, Mr. Speaker, if you are of opinion that that expression should not be made, I do not need any argument upon it—I will bow to the Chair and withdraw it without any hesitation. Sir, on the question whether we could test public opinion in the ordinary constitutional mode at a general election or not, the hon. Minister of Finance—who does not hold a brief from the liquor dealers, but who alone knows for whom he does hold a brief, which is on the opposite side from the brief which he held when he spoke four or five years ago—has convinced me that we cannot test public opinion properly at a general election. Every hon. gentleman knows that at a general election there are one or two prominent questions which divide the great political parties; and he knows that nine-tenths of the electors vote on these great questions—questions of state, questions of policy, financial questions such as that which were argued at the last general election—and he knows that a very small fragment of the people are prepared to say: We have no interest in

these great questions of state, and we are going to vote on this one little question of whether we shall have prohibition or not. Every practical politician knows that you may go on for the next twenty years as you have been going for the last twenty years, and so far as the general elections are concerned you will never be able to deduce from their results, whether a preponderating mass of the people are in favour of prohibition or not. Sir, I base my argument on these two propositions: First, that you have been discussing for nearly a quarter of a century whether the people are in favour of prohibition or not, and after having held a dozen elections you have never been able to come to a conclusion; and, secondly, you have declared by a resolution that when you can come to a conclusion, you will vote in favour of that conclusion; and, I now say that, that being the case, if there is another proposition which holds out a fair prospect of enabling you to form a conclusion, although open to some objections, such as novelty, you are bound to accept it. When I last addressed the House on this question, I stated that if an opportunity were afforded to me, I would move directly and squarely that this question should be submitted to the people, and I had a resolution prepared to move in the following words if my hon. friend from South Leeds (Mr. Taylor) had not anticipated me:—

“That all after the word ‘That,’ in the original resolution, and all the words of the amendment be struck out and the following substituted:—

“In view of the large number of numerous signed petitions presented to this House from all parts of the Dominion, praying for the passage of a law prohibiting the manufacture, importation and sale of intoxicating liquors for beverage purposes, and in view also of the continuous agitation existing on the subject, and the inutility of passing such a law unless supported by a decided majority of the electorate, and the differences of opinion now existing as to the wishes of the electorate, this House is of opinion that the question of passing such prohibitory legislation should be submitted directly to the electorate at an early day in the form of a plebiscite.”

That resolution has nothing vague or uncertain about it. It leaves the question, divorced from all other questions, to the people, the source of power, whose opinion we should take as our guide, and it will enable us to carry out the pledge which we have embodied in the resolution carried in this House before, and will, I think, meet the wishes of the better class of prohibitionists and the better class of thinking men in this community.

Mr. JAMIESON. I have only a word to say. In the first place, I must express my regret at the turn which the debate has taken. It has been the object of the temperance people of this country as far as possible to separate this question from party politics, and it was the desire of the temperance people, whose spokesman I am on the present occasion, to have this resolution discussed upon its merits, entirely aside from any political complications. I may say further, in reference to the suggested amendment of the hon. member for Queen's, P.E.I. (Mr. Davies) that as I stated before, so far as I understand the sentiment of the temperance people of this country, they will not and cannot accept a proposition to submit this question to a plebiscite. If that amendment were passed, I have no hesitation in saying that the temperance people would not fight the question at the polls, because such action would be in direct opposition to their sentiment on