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Ontario Prohibitionists Discuss the Referendum.

A great convention of Ontario Prohibitionists was held in Toronto on Tuesday last. It is reported that 1200 delegates were present. The principal if not the only matter considered was the Prohibitory Liquor Bill now before the Legislature, especially the referendum feature and the conditions under which it is proposed to be taken. The task of the President, Rev. Dr. A. W. Mackay of Woodstock, was not an easy one, for the convention was under high pressure, the demand for expression was tremendous and sought relief in resolutions which delegates insisted on reading in order or out of order. Finally the convention settled to a discussion of the subject on the line of two resolutions or sets of resolutions, the first presented by Mr. F. S. Spence as the report of the Executive Committee of the Alliance, and the second moved by Rev. Dr. S. D. Chown as an amendment to that moved by Mr. Spence. Mr. Spence's "report" condemned the bill before the Legislature on the ground of its "making prohibition conditional upon difficult, unreasonable and unjust requirements," declared that it could not "be accepted as a fulfillment of the Government's pledges," and expressed deep regret that the Government had not "carried out the simple definite promises of Sir Oliver Mowat, reiterated by Hon. A. S. Hardy and Hon. G. W. Ross, to introduce a bill to prohibit the liquor traffic to the limit of the declared power of the Province." The report further especially objected to the provision that the Act must be supported by a majority exceeding half the number of those who vote in the general election, and declared that "any condition that would permit the opinions of a minority of the voting electorate to prevail would not be considered by the prohibitionists of Ontario as a fulfillment of the Government's promise nor as entitling members of the Legislature who voted for it to their confidence and support." Objection was also urged on the ground that, according to the proposed conditions of the referendum, Prohibitionists must poll a large vote in order to secure the legislation they desire, while anti-prohibitionists may succeed without taking the trouble of voting. The report, however, did not advise the rejection of the referendum, but on the contrary called for the appointment of a deputation to wait on the Government and "ask for a removal from the bill of the unfair conditions complained of." Dr. Chown's resolution differed from that presented by Mr. Spence in that it asked the convention to condemn the referendum as "an evasion of responsibility," and "a breach of faith," and to call upon the Legislature to "amend the bill by striking out the provision for a referendum." Other amendments were offered but obtained little consideration. The main arguments used in support of Dr. Chown's amendment was, that faithfulness to pledges given demanded on the part of the Government acceptance of direct responsibility for a prohibitory law without recourse to a referendum, and that in order to any valuable assurance that the law would be enforced it must be a Government measure, having the strength of a political party behind it. On the other hand it was urged that though the action of the Government deserved censure, yet the thing to be principally kept in mind was the interests of prohibition and, in the words of Mr. Spence, "The temperance people had not a case on which they could go to Parliament and object to a law that only required the ratification of the people for its enforcement." He was therefore in favor of accepting the referendum under fair conditions as specified in the resolutions. This view prevailed with much the larger part of the Convention. The resolutions moved by Mr. Spence were carried and a deputation appointed to wait on the Government with a view to obtaining the changes sought for.

The Delegation Meets Premier Ross.

The delegation, appointed by the Toronto Prohibition Convention to urge the demand for changes in connection with the proposed referendum on the Prohibitory Liquor Act, waited on the Ontario Government on Wednesday. Members of the Temperance Alliance were present to the number of about one hundred, with other persons including some representatives of the liquor trade, as spectators. The interview was of course marked by courtesy on both sides, but also by the utmost frankness. Dr. MacKay as spokesman for the delegation said that although the Alliance had not approved the principle of a referendum, they had agreed to accept it under protest, and they were there to ask for a fair referendum—that was, as they considered, one in which the majority of those voting should determine the issue, and that the vote should be taken at the time of the municipal elections. Dr. MacKay's presentation of the matter was supported by remarks from Mr. Spence, Mr. C. J. Miller, Mrs. Thornley of the W. C. T. U., and Dr. Carman. Mr. Spence questioned the constitutionality of the referendum. Mr. Miller said the country was ripe for the partial measure of prohibition which the bill before the Legislature embodied and that the Convention just held showed that the sentiment of the Temperance people was against the referendum. Dr. Carman warned the Government that the course it had proposed would arouse on the part of the prohibitionists indignation which would make itself felt when the proper time arrived. In his reply to the delegation, Premier Ross called attention to the necessary character of the present law, which one of the speakers had correctly characterized as "partial prohibition." The country had of course spoken somewhat emphatically in favor of total prohibition, but it had never spoken on the question of partial prohibition, and he therefore justified the referendum on the ground that the people had not declared their will in reference to such a measure of prohibition as the proposed law could give. The referendum was but an extension of the local option principle as practiced in connection with the Scott Act, and the high parliamentary authorities which he had consulted had assured him of its constitutionality. Mr. Ross proceeded to discuss the terms of the referendum. As to the date, he said it would be changed, and intimated that the proposal to make it coincident with the municipal elections would receive favorable consideration. But as to the majority required to bring the Act into force, the Premier stood firmly by the terms of the bill. The enforcement of the law would be no easy task, and the Government at first had decided in favor of a three-fifths majority, but that had been objected to as too large. The present proposal meant that if three out of every eight persons on the electoral lists should vote for the law it would be carried. That, he considered, was a fair proposition, and was as far as the Government would go. If the temperance people could not succeed in getting a majority of votes on the basis agreed on, they did not deserve to be successful. If this popular endorsement were secured for the Act, the Government by proclamation would make it the law of the land, and would give its whole effort to make the law effective. In conclusion Mr. Ross said to the delegation that he would like them to think over the matter for a while as if they were in his own place, to look at the matter from the standpoint of a man whose views were in accord with theirs on the fundamental principles of temperance, and who had the additional responsibility of having to put them into legislation.

Lord Rosebery and the Liberals.

The reappearance of Lord Rosebery as an active force in British politics has evidently done nothing so far to improve the condition or the immediate prospects of the Liberal party. On the contrary it has emphasized the causes of division and apparently made harmonious action between the discordant elements the more impracticable. The course being taken by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, the present leader, appears plainly to indicate that Lord Rosebery's policy is not his policy, and that he is not prepared to become one of his lordship's lieutenants. While Lord Rosebery has said that the party must cut clear from the past and has definitely declared against home rule for Ireland,

Sir Henry has as definitely declared for home rule. In reference to the South African war too the position of the two leaders lacks much of agreement. Lord Rosebery is distinctly imperialistic in his views, while Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman shows much consideration for those who condemn the war as unnecessary and unjust and insist upon peace on terms which would recognize more or less the contention of the Boers. Whether or not the Irish Nationalists will show any practical gratitude toward the Liberals for Sir Henry's recent re-endorsement of their cause remains to be seen, but a party from which is eliminated those Liberals who are opposed to home rule and those who adopt Lord Rosebery's view in reference to the settlement of the South African difficulties can hardly hope to present an opposition which the Government will feel it necessary to consider very seriously. This is the more to be regretted because the Government, both for its own good and that of the nation, is greatly in need of a vigorous and well generalised opposition. The London Correspondent of the New York Tribune attributes Lord Rosebery's failure to accomplish any practical results at this time to his lack of constructive ability and administrative originality. He has taken away all the Liberal principles at one swoop, and has not set up anything to replace them. He has represented a species of political agnosticism. Something besides the levelling process is required if the old articles of the Liberal faith are to be expunged. A new democratic creed must be formulated. Until this is done Lord Rosebery cannot reunite the distracted party.

Compensation.

With the discussion of the prohibition of the liquor traffic as an immediately practical question, comes the question of compensation. A good deal that is plausible may be urged in favor of compensation, and it may be admitted that, if the liquor traffic can be effectually ended by prohibition, the country could well afford to pay something handsome in order to secure so great a boon. But we think that a fair examination of the subject will show that the claims of the liquor traffic to compensation are of the slimmest character. The business cannot pretend to stand on the same basis as that of legitimate and useful industries. It is a business in reference to which the principle of restriction has long been applied. It has existed on sufferance of the Government from year to year. Its rights to existence have constantly been challenged and its sphere of operation from time to time curtailed. Moreover, a constantly growing public sentiment has continually demanded its abolition, and the liquor traffic has had many warnings to set its house in order since it must die and not live. If those engaged in the liquor business have turned a deaf ear to these warnings and have failed to transfer their capital and their energies to other industries, have they any right to complain and demand compensation if Government, reflecting the will of the people, finally pronounces the doom of the liquor traffic and declares it to be illegitimate and outlawed among the industries of the land? But if there is to be compensation why should not both sides of the account be considered and a balance be struck? If the liquor business has been a wholesome industry, continually adding to the wealth of the country, like agriculture or mining or the fisheries or manufacturers, then let the loss to be incurred by its promoters in its abolition be paid for. But if it has been a kind of industrial vampire, fattening upon the life-blood of the country, it has surely no claims to consideration. Who is to recompense the country for all the loss that it has suffered at the hands of the liquor traffic during all these years of its existence? If the men who have grown rich by manufacturing and selling liquor and those who have had their living by retailing it, are to be so kindly considered that they must have compensation for any loss to be suffered by the abolition of the liquor traffic, what about the men and the families and the communities which have suffered loss incalculable and irremediable by the operation of the same traffic? Let the liquor business square its own side of the account and then come and talk about compensation.