

The Advocate.

LOUIS P. KRIBS

Editor and Proprietor

ISSUED EVERY WEEK

HEAD OFFICES

ABERDEEN CHAMBERS

Corner Adelaide and Victoria Streets.

TORONTO, CANADA

Subscription:

Per Year, in Advance, . . . \$4.00

Advertisers:

Card of Rates on Application.

Toronto and Montreal, Thursday, Feb. 15, 1894.

SIR OLIVER'S DEAL.

As was to be expected the press differs considerably as to the motives, objects, and probable results of the Ontario Premier's dicker with the Prohibitionists last week. In the main, however, there are but two general views—the party papers calling it a meslely trick or a divine inspiration: according to their political leanings. The *Globe* may be taken to fully express the views of the Government supporters, and it hails the compact with a shout of triumph, thus:—

To say that the interview with the Government was satisfactory to the Prohibitionists would be understating the case. It was plain that Sir Oliver Mowat's announcement was received with intense enthusiasm. He declared that if the final decision of the courts was that the Legislature could prohibit ale, he would, in the session following the decision, introduce a bill for that purpose. If the decision is that the Legislature has jurisdiction to pass only a partial prohibitory law, he will introduce such a bill as the decision will warrant, unless such power is so limited as to be ineffective from a temperance standpoint. The announcement is a momentous one and marks another long stage in the journey toward prohibition. A great majority of people have asked for it; the Government is pledged to carry out their will if the law allow. Even if the decision be adverse, the proceedings will have been far from useless, for the prohibitionists will be able to move upon Ottawa with two powerful arguments, the removal of all legal doubt, and the emphatic voice of the people of Ontario, of Manitoba, and of Prince Edward Island. In the meantime, however, the fight is in the Provincial arena, and the energies of the prohibitionists will be quickened by the general election which is at hand. They have never before been brought to even a contest with hope so abundant or with the issue so clearly defined.

Viewed in the light of party tactics the above is ably written and commendably zealous. It is untrue, of course, that "a great majority of the people have asked for it" (prohibition), but this little departure from the strict line will be amply atoned for in the Reform mind by the cheerful hint that, failing anything here, they will be reinforced "to move upon Ottawa." We have a haunting suspicion that the *Globe's* somewhat recently revived zeal in the cause of prohibition is not attributable entirely to interest in temperance work.

On the other hand the *Empire* probably voices Conservative sentiment. Its deliverance is the following:—

If any Conservatives have been flattering themselves that Sir Oliver's advancing age would render him an easy victim, they have only to look at the adroit way in which he has managed the prohibitionists to see that the old man has not lost any of his cunning, for a clever piece of stratagem has rarely been seen in Canadian politics. Last session those in favour of prohibiting the sale of liquor mustered in strong force, and Mr. Marter, as an exponent of their views, introduced a bill which would have stopped the retail trade. It was an awkward dilemma for Sir Oliver, who had declared more than once that his party was not a prohibition party, to be confronted with a measure like this, backed up by men who were evidently in earnest. But he was equal to the occasion. He promised the temperance people a plebiscite on prohibition if they would not bother him with it, and they took the bait and went home to prepare for the fray—nineteen-twentieths of them honestly believing that, if they showed a good majority for prohibition, Sir Oliver would give them some legislation at the approaching session.

They carried a very large majority of the votes polled, and the convention this week was to see what Sir Oliver was going to do about it. And right here comes the touch of the master hand in political cunning. It was going to be awkward for the Premier to do anything before the elections, yet he must retain the votes of the temperance people, so he has put them off again, and done it in such a way that most of them seem for the moment to be pleased at it. As a well-planned preliminary, such wily politicians as J. J. MacLaren and F. S. Spence had a hand in shaping the resolution with which their friend Sir Oliver was to be approached, and the latter had his answer carefully cut and dried and typewritten beforehand. The audience was captured—"and all went merry as a marriage bell."

It might well seem, when the deputation have laid their best doings before him, to sit down and puzzle out just what Sir Oliver has promised. When a man speaks off-hand to a deputation, and out of the fulness of his heart makes promises to them, it is hardly for the world to get exact words, for in such cases the words are not the best that could have been used to express the meaning, and much must depend on the general tenor. But when a wily lawyer, knowing that he has a difficult subject to tackle, sits down deliberately with his Cabinet of lawyers around him to plan out an answer, and presents it to the deputation like a legal document, it is to be taken as certain that it contains just what he intends to promise, and nothing more; he has expected. Then what does Sir Oliver's answer contain? It does not promise immediate action, nor even a action when the Supreme Court has decided, but shoves the whole matter until a judgment of the Privy Council is reached, whenever that may be. After that the promise is in two parts. First, if the Privy Council decides the Province has power to give complete prohibition, which he feels confident it will not, he will introduce a bill to that effect. Second, if the decision only grants power to give partial prohibition, he makes a promise with a string to it to introduce a bill to that effect. And the string is the important part of the promise, for he only promises to introduce this legislation if it is going to be "effective from a temperance standpoint," which opens up the whole question and leaves it to be fought out, while he is absolved from any promise, if he declares the opinion that in his judgment it would not be effective.

The sum, then, of Sir Oliver's answer is, First, a shuffling of the whole question till after the Privy Council has decided in England. Second, a definite

promise to introduce legislation if a judgment is given which he does not expect; and, third, a promise which amounts to nothing in the event of the decision which he does expect. In either case, the promise significantly stops short at introducing the bill. It will be interesting to hear what temperance people think of the answer when they have coolly considered it.

Evidently the Conservative organ does not expect anything good to come out of Nazareth even while freely admitting that there are no flies on Mowat. It is the less free perhaps in its condemnation from the fact that it doesn't quite know where it stands itself on this same question. Party exigencies have to be considered.

The *Mail* contents itself with the following testimony to Sir Oliver's political sagacity:

Sir Oliver Mowat has dealt very ably with the prohibition question. His reply to the deputation which waited upon him on Tuesday was a model worthy indeed of Mr. Gladstone, that great master of political tactics, who can make in a most definite way statements which upon close investigation frequently mean very little.

The *World* which the day after the Plebiscite clamored for a big reduction in licenses, now endorses the Premier for proposing to follow its advice in this way:

The *Globe* on the 10th of last month stated that the result of the present agitation in Provincial politics would likely be a change of representatives rather than a change of Government. Sir Oliver is losing no opportunity to make the prophecy true. He doesn't care what representatives are elected or what old friends and supporters he throws to the dogs provided his Government is retained in power. Yesterday he made the first move to keep himself and his Government in harmony with the new representatives that in his opinion are likely to be returned at the coming general election.

Representatives may change but the Government must remain. That's Sir Oliver's watchword.

He made a bargain with the Prohibitionists yesterday whereby he agreed to kick overboard the liquor interest that has so been instrumental in keeping him in power. Next week he will throw out a sop to the Patrons of Industry. He will probably concede the principle of local instead of provincial appointment of county officials. Later on we may expect to see him beguile the P.A.A.'s by granting the ballot in Separate school elections, and by otherwise treating on Archbishop Cleary's toes. This is the line of action Sir Oliver has adopted. Representatives may change. The Government alone must remain. The principles of twenty years count for nothing when it is a question of the Government retaining its grip on office.

And, perhaps, even, he will sacrifice some of his colleagues if necessity calls for it. Anything for power and patronage.

On the other hand, that solid Reform journal, the *Hamilton Times*, swallows the combination with a grimace, and sturdily declares its disbelief in the efficacy of the policy. It says:

For our own part, we have no faith in prohibition, partial or total, as the best remedy for drunkenness, and we hope the decision of the Privy Council will be that the Ontario Legislature has no power to enact a prohibitory law. If we are disappointed in this, the old experiment of trying to make the law effective will have to be worked out, and we predict that the result will be not unlike that

which followed the adoption of the Scott Act in so many countries—a general demand for repeal. Should the Privy Council decide that the power to prohibit resides with the Dominion Parliament exclusively, there will be a grand exodus of Tories from the prohibition ranks.

The *Hamilton Spectator* sees the string attached to the promise and puts its views tersely:

Sir Oliver has never done anything in a straightforward way, and does not seem to be able to. In his carefully prepared answer to the prohibitionists he has attached a string to his promise, by which he can pull it back when political exigency demands. Either the guileless prohibitionists did not see this string, or, seeing it, professed to be satisfied, in order that the temperance vote might remain with their friend Sir Oliver. "I will give you as much prohibition," says the wily little Christian statesman, "as the courts permit me to give—provided I and my wicked partners deem such legislation to be effective from a temperance standpoint." There's the whole promise.

The *London Advertiser*, of course, shouts for joy, while the *Free Press* laughs at the idea of there being anything serious in Sir Oliver's promise. Now, we do not agree with any one of these declarations and to correctly size up the situation preceding events must be taken into consideration. From the time of the repeal of the Scott Act until the opening of the Legislature last spring, the prohibition cause had gone on in the usual rut. The Dominion Parliament were acquiring information on the subject, and the general run of temperance people were content to await the publication of that information. What lifted the agitation out of the rut was the action of Mr. G. F. Marter, M.P. P., by the introduction of his now famous bill to prohibit retail sale in the Province. Mr. Marter's object in this was plainly political. He thought to cut the ground out from under the Government's feet with the temperance people. To that end he rallied around him the Advanced Prohibitionists, and it must be admitted struts valiantly to attain his end.

But he was out-generalled from the start. With Sir Oliver's astuteness on the one hand and the outside manipulation of J. J. MacLaren and F. S. Spence on the other he never stood a chance of success. The Plebiscite resolution put a bushel over his head and his flagrant inconsistency in opposing and voting against the Plebiscite in the Legislature and thereafter taking the stump in its favor did not tend to endear him to the public as one in whom reliance could be placed. Sir Oliver used the Plebiscite as a side-track and for the time being it answered his purpose beautifully.

While the Premier and the member from Muskoka were playing at foot-ball with the question, the prohibitionists were working with might and main. The vote on the Plebiscite was followed by the Prohibition Convention of last week. Between these two events a complete understanding had been arrived at between the Premier and his supporters in the prohibition camp. Sir Oliver was not to be asked to go beyond his declaration of last session, and in return he was to accept the plebiscite as the mandate of the people. Read the speech of Sir