

say again, what has been quoted as a reproach to me, and I say it boldly and earnestly, that that man is no true friend of the temperance cause or the prohibition movement who will enact a law to-day, if he does not firmly believe in his heart that that law finds its reflex in the overpowering conviction of a preponderating and active majority in the country in favour not only of its enactment, but its maintenance as well; and that he would do the worst possible service to the cause of prohibition to snatch a verdict for the enactment of the law, and find out afterwards if it were not a reflex of such a preponderating sentiment in the country, that it would become a dead letter on the Statute-book, a by-word in the community, and a reproach to the very temperance men who favoured its enactment. So I say the first thing that is necessary as a basis for the enactment of a prohibitory law, and for its maintenance, is a strong, preponderating conviction in the majority of the people of the country who are to be subject to the law, and who are to maintain it by virtue of that strong, preponderating conviction. Now, let us be honest with ourselves to-night. Do we in our heart of hearts believe that this country, from British Columbia to Cape Breton, has that strongly preponderating and actively co-operating sentiment in favour of the enforcement of a prohibitory law? If we do, let us vote for it and enact it. If we do not, let us be honest with ourselves, honest with the cause, and honest with the country as well. Now, Sir, I have one other point. I am met at once with the criticism: We petition you for a prohibitory law; these prove that the country needs it. Now, I am not one of those who would for one moment ridicule the petitions which have poured into and been laid on the Table of this House. I am pointed to the variety, and the scope, and the number of those petitions, and I am told that they are an index that the people are in favour of a prohibitory law. These petitions are, ninety-nine out of every hundred, honest petitions, honestly signed, and many of them bear the prayers of those who pen the signatures that those petitions might eventuate in a strong and effective prohibitory law. And I believe that these petitions merit the careful consideration of this House. But petitions do not show certainly and definitely the state of feeling of the country, and are not the basis upon which we can enact legislation of the importance of that which is proposed. I have every respect for the resolutions that have been sent here, resolutions of the synods, resolutions of conferences, resolutions of temperance societies. These are indications of opinion are excellent, but they do not offer to us that indestructible and certain basis upon which the law proposed could rest for its maintenance and enforcement. I do not believe that the indication given by the vote on the Canada Temperance Act and by the subsequent reversal of that Act, is a certain sign that the people are or are not ready for maintaining prohibition; and I ask members on both sides, coming fresh from their constituencies, if they can assure us they have a warrant or not from the people to vote for the enactment of a prohibitory law during this session. Therefore I say we have not that certain basis upon which, if we are honest, we ought to stand. I am met with the criticism: You doubt that the country is ready, and you do not want to

enact the law until it is, but give us no chance to say whether we are ready or not. That is a fair point to put and it has great weight with me. In reply I may say there are chances. You have the constitutional chance, the regular chance, the old chance every four years to elect a man in each county to represent you. Yes, but, they say, that does not fill the bill; when we come to a general election, we see two parties pitted against each other, and there are great questions which overshadow this question of ours, so that we are beaten out of the field and have no chance to get a fair expression of opinion. There is a good deal of truth in that, but it is also true, on the other hand, that if the temperance question does not burn itself to the topmost place in the general elections, that is fair proof that it has not the strong and wide basis it ought to have in order to find its expression and to maintain that expression after it has found place in the enactment of the law. Will it not be that every year this cause, struggling up through the superstructure of other questions, making its way to the front, will make itself at last the overpowering and overmastering question at the polls, and when it does that, it will have its own heaven given warrant for declaring it has in its favour the irresistible mandate of the people. That is my impression. Yet I acknowledge the difficulty. I have great sympathy with one of the strongest and best prohibitionist in his province, who, writing to me a couple of weeks ago, said: "Looking over the field, I have my doubts as to whether the sentiment of the country is strong enough to uphold a prohibitory law, if it were enacted to-day; but for God's sake give us a chance to vote for it outside of other questions." That brings me to the second proposed way of getting at the voice of the people, that is by reference to the people of the question alone, outside of the general elections, and without the disturbing influence of other questions. That is the referendum or the plebiscite, as you choose to call it. There are difficulties in the way. One of the chief difficulties is outlined by temperance men themselves, who, through the Dominion Alliance, which holds itself to be a strong exponent of the sentiment of the country, down through Methodist conferences, lodges of Templars and the like, say: We do not want any plebiscite; we want nothing but the good old British method of voting at the poll, when the man is before us, and when we embody, as far as we can, in our representative, the sentiments of the community; and that expression of the temperance people weighs with me and with this House against the proposal of a plebiscite or referendum. There is reason for their objection to that proposition. It is unusual, and people are properly a little chary about doing an unusual thing in regard to constitutional and political methods; but besides being unusual, it has this objection, that it is indefinite. Under the plebiscite the people would be asked to vote: "Are you in favour of prohibition or not," and they would mark their ballots "yes" or "no." But have they pledged in Parliament the representatives of the counties to prohibition? There is a general expression on the part of the people, but you have not concentrated that opinion in the individual representatives; and when these representatives meet in Parliament, unless they have a mandate from their constituencies to vote for prohibition or have pledged themselves specially to do so, they