

The Camp Fire.

A MONTHLY JOURNAL
OF TEMPERANCE PROGRESS.

SPECIALLY DEVOTED TO THE INTERESTS OF
THE PROHIBITION CAUSE.

Edited by F. S. SPENCE

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NOTE.—It is proposed to make "THE CAMP FIRE" the cheapest temperance paper in the world, taking into consideration its size, the matter it contains and the price at which it is published.

Every friend of temperance is earnestly requested to assist in this effort by subscribing and by sending in facts or arguments that might be of interest or use to our workers. The editor will be thankful for correspondence upon any topic connected with the temperance reform. Our limited space will compel condensation. No letter for publication should contain more than two hundred words—if shorter, still better.

TORONTO, MARCH, 1895.

THE ROYAL COMMISSION.

Three years have gone by since the appointment of the Royal Commission, nearly four years have elapsed since the House of Commons voted in favor of the commission. Again and again has it been promised that the report would shortly be forthcoming. Still there is no report. A general election is imminent. It looks as if the report would not be presented to the parliament that asked for it.

The appointment of the commission was unnecessary. It was generally looked upon as simply a device to relieve parliament of the trouble of dealing with a troublesome and urgent question.

The commissioners selected were nearly all men who in their inquiry showed themselves to be strongly prejudiced against prohibition. In many cases they did not even show common courtesy to witnesses who expressed themselves against the liquor traffic.

The appointment of the commission was needless. The wrong men were appointed. Their action was far from impartial. Their report has been unreasonably delayed. The whole undertaking is utterly discredited.

It is however, a costly failure to the country. The outlay upon it, unnecessary in any case, has been made excessive by the course taken and the long delay. Still it is not over. Surely it is time that the expensive farce was ended.

PROHIBITION CLUBS.

There ought to be in every municipality in the Province of Ontario, an organization of prohibition workers.

It may be called a prohibition club, or a league, or a union, or an alliance, or any other name that its members may choose. The word is unimportant; the organizations all important.

Such clubs are needed now to deal with the temperance question in the approaching Dominion election campaign. Every candidate nominated should be asked to state his position on the prohibition issue. There are thousands of electors who will be influenced, in marking their ballots, by the attitude of the candidates towards the prohibition movement, provided they know what that attitude is. We owe it to the prohibitionist voters to see that they are fully informed.

Men who have declared themselves favorable to prohibition and are elected with that understanding, will naturally be more anxious in the House of Commons for the promotion of that reform than if they had not been pledged.

A prohibition club is needful also to work for the return of the best candidate, from a prohibition standpoint, who is in the field. Where no candidate nominated by any political party is in favor of prohibition, then the platform adopted at Montreal calls for the nomination of independent candidates.

Whatever action is to be taken should be action agreed upon by friends of prohibition united regardless of party. This they cannot be without some organization in and through which to work.

Earnestly we appeal to our friends to see that there is some such organization in every part of our Province and Dominion.

THE DUTY OF VOTERS.

It is not uncommon to hear earnest temperance workers speak strongly and harshly of the littleness of interest taken by our legislators in the temperance cause. Members of Parliament are frequently roundly abused because they ignore this all important question.

The criticism is probably right. There is too much indifference in this matter. It must not be forgotten however, that the average legislator generally tries hard to win and retain the favor of those who have elected him. He therefore pays attention to just those questions in which he believes his supporters are most deeply interested.

The same is true in regard to parties. Political parties devise and advocate policies which they expect will find favor with the public. It may be that this is not the course of action that sterling principle would always dictate. It is, however, a fact.

If then, politicians and political parties slight the temperance question, they do so doubtless with the certainty that their constituencies do not require them to do anything else.

This is true. Legislators put party before prohibition knowing that they can rely upon a great majority of the electorate to do the same. More than this, they know that if they sacrifice their party, the electors will sacrifice them.

Just as soon as the temperance men have learned to practice what they preach, and are willing to sacrifice their party predilections for the promotion of prohibition, so soon will they find legislators following their example and supporting prohibition regardless of party.

The lesson is not that we should demand less of our legislators, but that we should demand more of ourselves. If the prohibitionists, who certainly constitute a great majority of the Canadian electorate, had reached the point at which they would always put prohibition first in marking their ballots, the whole question of prohibition would be solved.

QUESTION THE CANDIDATES.

Every candidate for the Dominion House of Commons should be called upon to state definitely and publicly where he stands upon the question of total prohibition.

Enquiries are frequently coming to the office of the CAMP FIRE from parties who wish to have suggestions as to forms of questions which it is desirable to use.

The friends of prohibition in every locality are in the best position to judge as to what their particular circumstances make desirable and right. At a meeting of the executive committee of the Dominion Alliance held some time ago, a series of questions was adopted as suggestive of forms that might be used.

This series of questions was intended to secure from the candidate (1) his personal views upon prohibition, (2) a

pledge to support legislation in parliament, (3) a promise that if elected he will co-operate with the other prohibitionists in parliament in work for the obtaining of prohibitory legislation.

The last point is very important. We need men in parliament who will put principle before party, and who will work with all prohibitionists regardless of party. We need men who will unitedly consider what is best for the temperance cause and then support that policy regardless of whether it helps or hurts their political party.

The questions referred to were framed with a view to meet the requirements above set out. Each candidate should be asked all three of them, or questions that will elicit the information and pledges which these three questions are intended to elicit. The suggested forms of questions are the following:—

1. Are you in favor of the prohibition of the liquor traffic.
2. If elected to the House of Commons will you support and vote for a prohibitory liquor law?
3. Will you co-operate with the other members of parliament who favor prohibition to secure the introduction and enactment of such legislation at the earliest possible opportunity.

A DOMINION PLEBISCITE.

It would hardly be correct to state that the present political parties have no policy on the temperance question.

The Conservative party have adopted the plan of a Royal Commission. They propose to wait until the Commission reports, and then frame a definite plan of dealing with the liquor question. This was the policy stated by the late Sir John Thompson when he was head of the Government and the leader of his party.

The Liberal party have declared in favor of having a Dominion plebiscite taken on the prohibition question. The leader of the party has further declared that if his party assumed the Government of the country, they would provide for the taking of a plebiscite, and if the plebiscite showed a substantial majority in favor of prohibition, then the party would proceed to enact a law in harmony with the people's opinion.

At first sight it would seem that this plebiscite plan is the shortest road open to the attaining of prohibition in Canada at the present time. A Dominion plebiscite with a definite pledge from the party in power, that a prohibition majority would be followed by a prohibitory law, would rally temperance men to the polls and probably result in majorities in favor of prohibition even greater than those obtained in the provincial plebiscites.

Prohibitionists however, claim that such action is entirely unnecessary. Four provinces have already declared themselves in favor of prohibition by immense majorities. No party or government needs any more evidence of public opinion in those provinces. There could not be polled in the provinces that have not yet voted any majority in favor of the liquor traffic equal to the prohibition majorities that have been recorded. If it is thought necessary to have the full figures, plebiscites in the provinces that have not voted ought to be sufficient. Temperance workers in Manitoba, Ontario, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia would feel that they were being put to unnecessary trouble and expense if asked to vote a second time.

The late leader of the Conservative party was opposed to the plebiscite plan. The present Finance Minister was however, at one time a strong advocate of it. It would be easy to have a vote taken in those parts of the Dominion that have not already voted. If this were done at the approaching

Dominion election, the Parliament to be returned would know the views of the electors of the whole Dominion, and there would be taken away from whichever party came into power any excuse for further delay.

IS DRUNKENNESS DIMINISHING?

Friends of the temperance cause in the Dominion of Canada are feeling gratified at the recent general reduction in the volume of the liquor traffic, and its attendant evils. Convictions for drunkenness have fallen off, the consumption of spirits has been reduced, there is a feeling that definite progress has been made.

It is true that the temperance cause is making progress. The falling off in convictions for drunkenness is not, however, the evidence of the measure of that progress. It is rather an evidence of the greater poverty which financial stringency has brought to the class of people who swell the drunkenness record.

This is no theory. It is a fact. Prosperous times are generally accompanied by an increase in criminal drunkenness. Hard times are generally accompanied by a falling off in the drunkenness record. It takes money to get drunk. Police courts generally deal with the drunks that are found among the poorer classes of the community. The high-toned inebriate seldom falls into the clutches of the officer of the law. At any rate he seldom finds his way into the police-court. There may be as much drunkenness as ever, there may be more drunkenness among the better off classes, without any evidence of the increase appearing in the police records.

We would like to take comfort from the official returns on this point; we can find none therein. The falling off in the drunkenness record is simply an evidence and result of the scarcity of money and the hard times through which we have been passing.

The financial depression has been telling also upon the ranks of temperance organizations. The membership of these societies has for some time been diminishing. This does not mean a falling off in temperance sentiment. There are different reasons for it, one of them being the scarcity of the money that is necessary to keep up lodge dues and other expenses.

We wish to call attention to the facts that the present decrease of drunkenness is not an evidence of advancing temperance sentiment, nor the falling off of temperance societies an evidence of declining temperance sentiment.

The present attitude of the Christian church towards the liquor traffic, the disappearance of the decanter and the bottle from many thousands of homes, the increasing disreputableness of the liquor selling business, the persistence with which prohibition is forcing itself upon the attention of politicians and political bodies, the demand of right citizens everywhere for more rigid laws against the traffic,—all these are signs of progress. It is, however, the progress of a developing sentiment, that has yet to close in mortal combat with the liquor evil. That evil must be dealt with by measures more radical than any that have yet been put into operation. Until this is done we must not be misled into believing that the plague of drunkenness has been materially checked by the agencies already in operation.

QUOTATIONS.

The church that sleeps in the presence of crime deserves to die and be buried in the nearest ecclesiastical potter's field.—*Bishop Hurst.*

The power of the religion of Jesus Christ should be set over against the power of the saloon and other agencies of the devil everywhere all the time.—*Biblical Recorder.*