

House shall recommend a Royal Commission on this subject. Why should the House take the responsibility of recommending a Royal Commission to His Excellency the Governor General out of the hands of his constitutional advisers? We may appoint a committee in the promotion of public business, or to investigate or obtain information on a subject requiring the action of Parliament; but the appointment of a Royal Commission is entirely in the hands of the Administration, and it is usually employed for the purpose of getting information for the Government to enable them to submit to the House some proposition relating to the administration of public affairs. Now, the hon. gentlemen on the Treasury benches do not require a vote of this House to enable them to appoint a Royal Commission. But, Sir, the appointment of a Royal Commission, under this motion, as my hon. friend the leader of the Opposition has most conclusively pointed out, is for the purpose of getting information which will not in the smallest degree assist us in dealing with this question. I apprehend that a large majority of the members of this House are in favour of prohibition. The only question upon which the friends of prohibition are divided is whether such a measure can be made practically operative in the country. Upon that I have already expressed my opinion. For the reasons that I gave at an earlier period of this discussion, I am of opinion that such legislation should be preceded by a proper ascertainment of the opinion of the country on the question, which can be most readily and most effectively had by a plebiscite. Now, I do not agree with the hon. Minister of Finance, that this would be in any degree a departure from the principle of responsible government, or would in any degree weaken the practice that has heretofore prevailed on the part of representatives of the people, of assuming the largest possible degree of responsibility in dealing with public questions. The object of obtaining a vote of the people upon the question is to ascertain whether they really desire a measure of prohibition or not. I believe that such a measure, if carried into operation with fair efficiency, would be of very great advantage to this country; but I am of opinion that a measure which would simply close the houses now licensed to sell liquor or the places licensed to manufacture it, and leave every person free to engage indiscriminately, without any fear of the law in the sale, with which it is proposed to do away, would be a worse state of things than that which we undertake to remedy; and I would like some assurance that there would be an efficient enforcement of the law before I would undertake to put such a measure on the Statute-book. The difference between a measure of this sort and ordinary measures which the representatives of the people are called upon to enact, is that there is no constant, active public opinion required in order to make ordinary laws efficient. If you put on the Statute-book a law against forgery or a law against theft, the number of offenders is very small, and the immense mass of the people, the entire community I may say, are in sympathy with the enforcement of the law, and are altogether against the offender. That does not hold good in the same way with regard to sumptuary legislation, and you must have a healthy, active, strong public opinion behind your law in order that it may not be inefficient. For that reason I am desirous that there should be

ascertained in the simplest possible way, that is, by popular vote, the opinion of the country on this question. What the hon. Minister of Finance has proposed does not bring the House any nearer to a solution. It does not enable us to ascertain what the opinion of the country is. These hon. gentlemen may appoint a commission; they may summon witnesses; they may take evidence; but what is it all about? About the evils of intemperance? Why, Sir, we know them. About the amount of money that is obtained from licenses? That can be easily ascertained; it is a matter of no consequence. About the amount of revenue that would be displaced? We know that already. About the appliances that are to be employed for making good any deficiency that would arise from the adoption of such a measure? That is the business of the Minister. He has all the means of obtaining information now, without a commission at all. A more inconsequential proposition than that which the hon. Minister of Finance has submitted to the House could not well be conceived, so remote is it from every practical consideration which it is possible to give to the question. Now, the Minister of Finance said that the former Administration had not gone as far as the petitions desired it should go. Well, the Government of that day did assume the responsibility of dealing with that question. We had a majority in Parliament, and we did not seek to shirk the responsibility of dealing with a question upon which public opinion was being agitated.

Mr. BOWELL. How?

Mr. MILLS (Bothwell). We introduced what was called the Canada Temperance Act, which is an optional law. It is a law which may be brought into operation anywhere, whenever public opinion chooses to bring it into operation. The Canada Temperance Act is rightly styled by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in the case of the Queen against Russell, in which their lordships said: It is a measure of prohibition for the whole country, but it is a measure which is left in abeyance until public opinion in the various localities chooses to bring it into operation.

Mr. BOWELL. Was not that after this House had authorized the Government to appoint a committee to travel through the United States and obtain information?

Mr. MILLS (Bothwell). If I remember rightly the House appointed a committee, and the committee conducted the enquiry, but the Government themselves appointed a commission.

Mr. BOWELL. The hon. gentleman does not go quite far enough. That committee recommended certain action to be taken, which is almost in the line of the motion made by my hon. friend on my left, and the Government acted upon it.

Mr. MILLS (Bothwell). Certainly, at that time we made enquiry, and were largely influenced by the opinions of our friends in New Brunswick, who had tried a prohibitory law which was made universally operative over the entire province. It was however inefficient, and in the vast majority of places it was not enforced at all. In two years it was repealed, and nearly every one who had assisted in putting the measure on the Statute-book was defeated in the elections. We were all of opinion, after very carefully considering the subject, that legisla-