

Legislation Was Postponed.

It was thought that a year ago this act could be still further improved, and the Government had carefully prepared a bill for that purpose. While that bill was under consideration we were met by the action of the Manitoba Legislature adopting Provincial prohibition. We were met, too, by strong demands from a very influential part of our population for similar prohibition in Ontario, and we thought that until this question of partial prohibition was disposed of we would allow the license law to stand. The larger would, of course, include the lesser in the estimation of the promoters of this latter movement. We therefore had no license legislation since 1897, although we were of the opinion, and perhaps that opinion will be shared by hon. gentlemen opposite, that our license law could be still further improved. Now, I mention this to show the progress we have made along the line of license legislation, and to bring us up to the point at which we now arrive, namely, to consider whether legislation shall for the present be abandoned, and whether we shall embark a measure of partial prohibition—and I say partial prohibition, because, by that, meaning prohibition to the extent of our constitutional limitation.

Manitoba Bill Adopted.

The Government has decided to bring in a bill in the terms of the Manitoba act, the provisions of which are well known to every hon. gentleman in this House; the main provisions, at all events, are well-known. That bill will be referred to the House in the usual way. Several objections are taken to what is supposed to be the policy of the Government in regard to it. In the first place, I shall take hon. gentlemen into my confidence and say we are not introducing that act to be passed in the usual way, placed upon the statute books by the assent of the Crown, and in that way becoming law when so assented to. It is proposed to introduce the act, to have it considered clause by clause, and

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at some time in the future refer that act to the electors of the Province of Ontario in order to get an expression of opinion from them, and if that expression is favorable, then the act will go into operation on the terms stated therein.

Propriety of the Referendum.

And now I am at once met by two objections, and that will be the burden of my address this afternoon, as to the propriety of taking this course. There are people who say that we as a Government should assume the full responsibility of a measure of this kind. There are people who say, on the other hand, that in sumptuary legislation like this, in following the precedents of legislation elsewhere, it is perfectly within our right to submit such legislation to the electors. Prohibition has never been made a party question in the strict sense of the term. Liberals have not taken it up as a question on which they asked for the decision of the electors in a party sense. The Opposition has acted in a similar way. How to account for this attitude of the two parties is rather a difficult matter. It would perhaps require considerable investigation and lengthened explanation to set at rest the attitude, to explain the attitude, of the public on prohibition as a party measure compared with or contrasted with the attitude of the public on other party measures. For instance, protection was made a party measure and manhood suffrage was in a certain sense made a party measure in this country, and confederation was made a party measure, and yet for thirty years, more or less, the question of prohibition has been before the Parliaments, first of the old Province of Canada, then the Parliament of the Dominion, and before this Parliament, and yet neither of the two great parties felt themselves disposed to raise an issue, a direct issue, at the polls on the question of prohibition in the same way

as issues are raised on the other questions I have named.

Not a Party Question.

That being the case, we are therefore presenting this question to the House not strictly as a party measure; we are not asking the electors to vote as Liberals or Conservatives; we are submitting it in the sense that it is a great question of vast importance to the people, a question that to some extent is of so great importance as for the time being to absorb or overshadow the differences which party leaders have made between each other, and ask for the opinion of the electors on this question irrespective of their party affiliations.