

present session; so that he at least did not deserve the charge. But he was not going to treat of subjects already much discussed; he was about to move, seconded by Mr. Clancy, the following amendment:—

"That all the words in the motion after the word 'that' be struck out, and the following be substituted: 'In the opinion of this House the present mode of appointing and paying by fees Registrars of deeds and other county officials is unsatisfactory and should be changed; and that the appointment of all the said officials, whose salary or remuneration is provided in whole or mainly by the localities for which they are appointed, should not be invested in the Executive of the Province, but in the people of the locality, either directly or through their municipal bodies.'"

Mr. Wood defended the principle of this in a speech of some length. He first called the attention of the House to an article which had appeared in *The Globe* a short time after the session opened. Either the article was handed in by hon. gentlemen opposite, or the writer was ignorant of the facts, for it made statements that were not true. It had asserted that the Opposition had kept itself in such a position as to be able to attack any course of the Government. It had said that the agitation had been carried on for the past few months only, and that the Government had introduced measures dealing with the subject before the Opposition had taken it up. This was a flagrant distortion of the facts. He had been for eleven years a member of the House, and during every one of those years the matter had been brought up in one form or another by the Opposition, while on April 15, 1891, he had moved a resolution that the system of payment by fees was objectionable, and that payment by salary should be substituted. That was three years ago, and an amendment had been moved promising treatment of the subject next year. In 1892 a bill had been introduced dealing partially with the evil. Sir Oliver Mowat had been unwilling to grant the reform then, and now he had promised a commission, which would be a very useful thing to talk of on the platform. Mr. Wood then entered into a detailed argument regarding the charges made against the fee system, making a liberal use of figures to prove the great inequality of the sums received, and disproportion between the payment of the appointee and the men doing the actual work. The whole system, he held, was corrupt in principle and practice and demoralizing in results. It was not possible for him to say that he could credit all the returns which appeared in the report of the registry offices which had been submitted to the House. There seemed good ground for supposing that the returns were so arranged as to make the best showing for the offices. His points, put briefly, were:—(1) That the agitation for the abolition of the fee system began with the Opposition many years ago, and had been put expressly before the House in the form of a resolution in 1891. (2) That the proposed changes, as then set forth, met with opposition from the Attorney-General. (3) That under the present system great disparities exist in the remuneration of officers. (4) That the sums received in many cases exceeded the services rendered. (5) That the deputies of the officials, as a rule, were paid a mere pittance as compared with the net income of the official appointed. (6) That if the payments now made for the actual doing of the work were the only payments, the Province would save upwards of \$250,000. (7) That the present system tends to the demoralization of officials, as shown in their statements; and (8) that there was no good reason or excuse, nor had there been for many years, for the existence or continuance of the system, and that its abolition would be in the public interest. Mr. Wood then, with equal conciseness, laid down the platform of the Conservative party as follows:—(1) The total abolition, root and branch, of the system of giving the fees to the officials; (2) a salary giving fair remuneration, together with a return of all receipts in the case of officials appointed by Government; (3) no further appointments to office, except to do work required at the hands of the person getting the appointment; and (4) all officials receiving their remuneration, either in whole or mainly, from the county for which they are appointed to be appointed by the county, either directly or by the County Council. With that policy they were ready to go to the people.

SIR OLIVER REPLIES.

The Attorney-General rose amid applause to reply as soon as the Speaker had read the amendment. The motion which the hon. member who had just sat down had moved, said Sir Oliver, was a striking instance of the inconvenience of the course he had seen fit to take. He had been getting together his figures and facts for a number of months past, and then came to the House and without giving notice of

his intention brings forward a motion on the subject as an amendment to the motion to go into supply. The House had been engaged in discussing the motion for several days, and had stayed other business that it might do so. Of course, the rules of Parliament allowed a motion of this kind, but it was extremely inconvenient, and when the plan was adopted in England he believed there was always personal notice given of the intention of any member who proposed to avail himself of the privilege. But, no doubt, the hon. gentleman had thought it would be better, from his point of view, to bring forward his motion at a time when the Government was not specially prepared to meet him. Of course, the motion had no object as regards legislation or any change of system in the House. It was not brought up that anything practical could be accomplished. Mr. Wood's purpose, as he had said, was to make known certain things through the country, with a view to their having an effect on the impending general election. Of course, it was a motion of want of confidence, and as such made it impossible for the supporters of the Government to vote for it, even if it were free from the other objections that applied to the motion. The hon. gentleman had estimated that a great saving would be effected if his motion were adopted. The Attorney-General said he would deny this altogether. He insisted that if reasonable salaries were paid to the various officers—such salaries as the hon. gentleman would himself, say for party reasons, admit to be fair, instead of the result being a gain to the Province of \$250,000, as the hon. member suggested, there would be a distinct loss to the public. The hon. gentleman's figures were entirely fanciful. (Applause.) Mr. Wood had stated that he (the Attorney-General) had on one occasion denied there was any disparity in the incomes from these offices. Of course, he had never done any

such thing. It would be absurd to do so. There was bound to be a disparity of incomes. There was a great deal more work and responsibility in connection with some of these offices than with others, and the incomes must be, of course, proportionate. The hon. gentleman admitted that the officers gave good service. No fault had been found with them. His objection rather was that they are too able for their work. If any complaint were made it would be investigated properly. The hon. gentleman had said there was no particular responsibility in the offices. That was not the case. He (the Attorney-General) heard the other day of a case occurring in which a Sheriff—he was not speaking of the Sheriff of Toronto—through a mistake on the part of his bailiff lost fully one-half of his year's salary. He had won the case in the lower courts, which held that the course of the bailiff was legal, but the case had been appealed, and the Sheriff had lost half his year's salary in costs and in the sum he had to pay. A single error on the part of a Sheriff in regard to certificates of executions, the omission of a single execution, would involve a loss greater even than that to which he had referred. The danger of such mistakes was much smaller in the case of small offices, or offices where the work was light, than in those offices where the duties were heavy. In these latter offices, consequently, the responsibility was very much greater. The hon. gentleman had referred to the disparity of disbursements. Well, all these returns of disbursements were made under oath according to the statute. The propriety of disbursements being greater in some cases than in others could not be debated without knowing what the circumstances of the cases were. No two offices could be conducted with exactly the same expense. There must be variations. One cause, for instance, was found in the fact that some of the holders of those offices were old officers. They had been appointed before the present Government came into power and were not in political sympathy with them. Being old men they could not conduct the business of their offices as cheaply as young or middle-aged men would be able to do. Consequently, the disbursements in these offices were greater than in others. Yet he thought the House would not deprive these officers of all the profits because they could not give their personal attention to all the business that might come up. He had himself always felt compassion for these old officials. The hon. gentleman had quoted figures from the returns of 1892. The fees of the officers were not in that year affected by the act which had since been passed by the Legislature in regard to the subject. The hon. gentleman had, therefore, no information on the subject.

Mr. Wood—I have a good deal of information.

The Attorney-General—Well, then, you have not given it to us. His speech was a very elaborate one, prepared very carefully no doubt, during a good many weeks, but really not containing any new ideas. Wherever there had been an opportunity of comparing the relative value of services of this kind paid by fees and those