

The galleries were well filled this evening at the Legislature in expectation of a lively debate on the ballot question, brought up in the shape of an amendment to Committee of Supply by Mr. Whitney shortly before recess. The Attorney-General rose to reply, on the House re-assembling, and delivered a very comprehensive and conclusive speech against the arguments and proposition put forward by the member for Dundas. He first pointed out that the ballot was never a Conservative measure, and the present attitude of the Opposition was typical of the change of position they were addicted to. The ballot had always been a Reform measure, and had been advocated by Reformers for many years in the old country before it was adopted anywhere. When it was introduced in Ontario the then leader of the Opposition and most of his followers had opposed the measure; and, on the other hand, it had been supported by the Reformers. Mr. Meredith was one of those who voted against the ballot at that time. They had condemned it then because it gave secret voting. Then they had been very strongly opposed to secrecy. Now there was nothing they were so much in love with as secrecy. They were prepared to sacrifice everything else to it. Mr. Whitney had spoken once more of the change of opinion on the part of himself in regard to his (Mr. Whitney's) bill relating to punishment for bribery. Mr. Whitney had already mentioned that little bill to the House some 25 or 30 times. He seemed to take a great deal of pleasure out of it. He wished he (Sir Oliver Mowat) could take similar pleasure out of his legislation. The measure had not been passed exactly as Mr. Whitney had brought it in, but he was glad the hon. gentleman took so much pleasure out of it. Mr. Whitney accused him of changing his opinions on the question of manhood suffrage also. This was not quite the case. He was sure he had never said or done anything adverse to the principle of manhood suffrage. He had always believed in it, but at the time the matter first came up in the House almost all the Conservatives, and many of the Liberal members, had been opposed to it, and consequently he had deemed it wiser to wait until public opinion on the subject had ripened. Now, in regard to the ballot system: There were two systems which prevailed, and were worth considering. There was also the American system, which preceded these other systems, and was certainly a bad one. It had been almost abandoned by the Americans themselves. Both the other systems had originated in Australia. One was in use in some of the colonies, and one in the others. The system adopted by some of the Australian colonies, by the Dominion, and by some of the States, looked upon absolute secrecy as the great thing, above all others, to be sought for in the ballot, and to which everything else should be sacrificed. They did not succeed in getting it, but that was what they aimed at. Then there was the other system, that adopted and prevailing in Great Britain and some of the Australian colonies. The lack of absolute secrecy is admitted in regard to it; but, on the other hand, the system was one which permitted the detection of fraudulent ballots, personation, the stuffing of ballot boxes, etc. These were matters of prime importance, and should be provided for in the ballot act. These evils did not exist in the Ontario elections, but they prevailed wherever the other system was in vogue, and returning officers were occasionally found conniving at them. It had been proved beyond doubt that the other system was not absolutely secret. Both systems had been very fully discussed in the British House of Commons, and in the British press and magazines, before the present system was adopted there. The system used in Ontario had been adopted because while it afforded partial secrecy it afforded facilities for the detection of fraud. It would be unfortunate if this were prevented. Mr. Whitney had said bribery and personation could be proved and punished without these facilities; but he overlooked the important bearing these votes had on the election itself, and how impossible it was, except under the present system, to detect the extent to which fraud had prevailed where it was known to exist. It was important certainly to punish the personator, but it was also most important to see that the will of the people was not thwarted by fraud. As to the system advocated by the Opposition it did not secure secrecy by any means. The deputy returning officer could, by making a mark on the ballot paper, as it was returned to him to be deposited, identify it with the person voting, and enable him to tell which way that person voted. Again, it had been proved that in some cases the returning officer put his initials on that portion of the ballot on the reverse side of which the vote would be marked, and when the

marked ballot was handed back to him for verification he was able to tell how the vote had been cast. The Dominion Government had acknowledged that this was so. The Attorney-General then pointed out that the system now prevailing in the Dominion had been adopted by the Reform Government in 1874, and Sir John (then Mr.) Abbott and Sir John Macdonald had in those days expressed their preference for the Ontario system, taking the ground that the justice to the people secured by the facilities for the detection of fraud afforded by that law were more valuable than any increase of secrecy afforded by the rival system. After trying the other system for sixteen years the Dominion Government had, in 1890, recognized that the system of ballot used by it was not efficient in securing the absolute secrecy claimed for it, and Mr. Chapleau had brought in a motion to have a Committee of Investigation appointed with reference to some new system which was supposed to have some advantages, but which the Opposition had objected to as placing too much power in the hands of the Government. It was to be remembered, too, Sir Oliver pointed out, that only on an order from the court could the ballots be seen by anyone under any circumstances. It was idle, therefore, for hon. gentlemen opposite to say that the system they proposed gave absolute secrecy. One gave as great secrecy as the other. When the measure was introduced here the Government had the advantage of the example of Great Britain. His hon. friend sneered at his quoting the usage of Great Britain. He preferred following British usage when he could consistently do so. In this case he did not do so as a matter of sentiment, but because of the practical utility and benefit of the system prevailing there. The ballot was adopted in 1872 in England after much debate and thought, and he had never heard of any agitation or strong desire for a change. Mr. Whitney had referred to Wigmore's book on the ballot as containing evidence of dissatisfaction in England with the present system. He had looked through the book, but

could find nothing to bear out that view. In any case, Mr. Wigmore was a member of the Boston bar, and could not be, perhaps, very well qualified to speak on the question of discontent in England. There were, however, passages in the book which certainly seemed to speak of the system as one that worked well on the whole. In other countries, moreover, the question had not been made a party matter, as hon. gentlemen opposite had succeeded in making it in Ontario. Mr. Whitney had urged that the lack of absolute secrecy caused many people to be even afraid to vote. He thought this must be surely imaginary. He had never heard of such a case, at any rate. Concluding, Sir Oliver Mowat, briefly recapitulating his arguments, said he thought the present system sufficiently secret for all practical purposes, and at the same time provided for the detection of fraudulent ballots. He had no hesitation in asking the House to vote down the amendment.

The debate was continued by Mr. A. F. Wood, Dr. Willoughby and Mr. S. White.

Mr. Meredith followed briefly, defending the Opposition for having changed from its position of twenty years ago, a charge, he said, which the Attorney-General was always throwing across the House. The secret ballot, he said, was refused by the Government because of the necessity it was under of securing the votes of a certain class of electors to keep it in power.

Hon. Mr. Ross followed. He pointed out that since the ballot was introduced there had been five general elections and numerous bye-elections, some 500 elections in all, and yet hon. gentlemen opposite had not been able to secure a single concrete instance of the detection of a vote under the system, or any instance of fraud in connection with it. Mr. Ross pointed out to Dr. Willoughby that in spite of his speech against the existing ballot, he must, nevertheless, believe the ballot was secret, since in his own riding of East Northumberland, according to evidence given under oath, a spy glass had to be used from a window opposite the polling booth to see that the voters who had been bribed cast their votes the right way. (Laughter.) Surely a ballot in which it required a spy-glass to use in this way must be admitted to be a secret one. Mr. Ross compared the two systems in detail, and argued that the Ontario system possessed numerous advantages over that prevailing at Dominion elections.

Mr. McKechnie and Mr. Clancy followed, speaking respectively against and for the amendment. The division was then taken, resulting in a majority against the amendment and for the Government of 23, the figures being, 30 for the amendment and 53 against.

The House was fairly full, and divided on straight party lines.

Messrs. McNaughton and McCallum, the Patrons of Industry and P.P.A. representatives, respectively, supported the Government, and Mr. G. Campbell, the Equal