

# Estimates Passed After a Number of Votes.

Legislative Chamber, April 9.

Half a dozen divisions occurred to-day, the Government being sustained by majorities ranging from 10 to 29. In the afternoon the ever-interesting subject of free versus prison labor was given an airing, the Conservatives availing themselves of the motion to sanction the agreement made with Messrs. H. A. Nelson & Sons for the purchase of the brooms and whisks made by the Central Prison, to move that such agreement should not be made until tenders had been called for. After a spirited debate the Government was sustained by a vote of 51 to 37. In the evening the House took up concurrence, and a rapid succession of divisions followed, the Patrons generally dividing, and their change from one side to the other causing the votes to vary to a somewhat unusual extent. Over one of these votes, that to abolish the Ontario School of Pedagogy, there arose a miniature debate, which was marked by a brilliant speech by Hon. Mr. Ross and a well-turned reply by Mr. Whitney. Another motion was that to reduce the appropriation for the item of farm feed and fodder for Toronto Asylum, and over this a sharp passage of arms arose between Mr. Haycock and the Provincial Secretary. The leader of the Patrons bore no malice, however, for within a quarter of an hour he strongly supported the Government's stand that it should control the expenditures on colonization roads, instead of handing the money over to the municipalities, as the Conservatives proposed to do.

A number of third readings were discharged when the House met, the bills thus practically becoming law being the Attorney-General's to make better provision for the widows of intestates in certain cases; Hon. Mr. Dryden's respecting veterinary surgeons; Mr. Middleton's to confirm by-laws 680 and 772 of Hamilton; Dr. McKay's respecting the debt of Woodstock; Major Hiscott's to confirm by-law 944 of St. Catharines; Mr. Biggar's respecting the Oshawa Railway Company and the Township of East Whitby; Mr. Wood's to separate certain lands from the Town of St. Mary's; Mr. Biggar's respecting the Oshawa Railway Company and the Town of Oshawa; Mr. German's respecting Coroners; Mr. Chapple's to amend the line fences act; Mr. German's to amend the act respecting benevolent, provident and other societies; the Attorney-General's respecting the chartering of trust companies; Hon. Mr. Dryden's for the further protection of persons employed in places of business other than factories; the Attorney-General's respecting the relations of landlord and tenant; the Attorney-General's to correct a clerical error in certain forms in the act respecting mortgages of real estate, and the Attorney-General's to make provision for temporary vacancies in certain offices.

## PRISON V. FREE LABOR.

Then Hon. Mr. Gibson moved the ratification of the renewal of the agreement between the Inspector of Prisons and Public Charities and Messrs. H. A. Nelson & Sons for the manufacture of brooms and whisks at the Central Prison for that firm.

Mr. Whitney moved in amendment that the House was of opinion that no agreement should be made for the sale of prison-made goods with any individual or firm until other individuals and firms had had ample opportunity to compete by public notice. The member for Dundas spoke very briefly, holding that it needed no argument to sustain his position that the Government should not abandon so completely the principle of free competition. The course which it had followed in making the contract as it had was improvident, in that the price it realized was too low, and it also tended to injure free labor.

Hon. Mr. Gibson defended the course of the Government in his usual quiet, logical manner. He first of all pointed out the need that the prisoners should be employed, that there should be diversity in their employment and that free labor should be interfered with as

little as possible. He then stated the fact that this was not the first time of this contract; that in 1879 it was with which the Government had a contract failed, and the contract was then made with Messrs. H. A. Nelson & Sons; it was renewed in 1884 and again in 1889. The Government had lately had experience of the evil effect following dealing with contractors who failed, and were in a position to appreciate the advantage of dealing with firms financially strong, who would not leave it in the lurch. The terms of the present contract, he added, were simply a readjustment of the former contract on the basis of the agreement being the same. One object of the Government in employment of prison labor was to interfere as little as possible with free labor, and on this count Messrs. Nelson & Sons possessed advantages in their trade which were largely outside of the Province, while broom-making had been found to interfere very little with free labor and to be fairly remunerative, the Government deriving from about 50 cents a day per prisoner. A further point was that it would be convenient to break the agreement, the firm in question has an interest in the patents on the improved machinery lately put in by means of which the Provincial Secretary remarked, output will be so increased that the new contract is expected to be more remunerative, though the rates are slightly lower. No Government had ever been known, Hon. Mr. Gibson said in conclusion, to advertise for tenders in a matter of this kind.

Col. Matheson made a few remarks saying that the Provincial Secretary had advanced no reason why the Government should not try to get as high a price as possible for the product of prison labor. Further, he held that the Government's contention that the industry paid was incorrect. The low figure at which brooms could be made he contended, was 42 cents per dozen while the Government produced them at 25 cents; for whisks the lowest is 40 cents per dozen, while the cost of the prison was set down as eight cents. By such prices he held that wages of honest workmen have been reduced.

Mr. Awrey spoke, holding that it was just that the prisoners should help support themselves and not be maintained by the labor of honest men. He then contended that the broom-making industry is the one that least inconveniences free labor; while as to the charge that the prices were too low, Awrey produced evidence to show that much lower rates are charged in the United States, instancing the prices at Syracuse, N.Y.

Dr. Ryerson argued against the employment of prisoners in competition with free labor. It would be better to keep the prisoners employed in carrying balls and chains or in filling holes in the sand. (Cries of "Oh! Oh!") He proposed that prisoners might be employed in doing the printing of the House.

Mr. Awrey—How about the printing? To this pertinent query Dr. Ryerson replied that the printers would not be hurt, because the contracts for printing were given at so low a price that it was a wonder to the printers how the work could be done at the figures.

Dr. Meacham advocated the printing of the Public School books in the prisons; then they could be sold at their present prices.

Mr. Gibson (Huron) contended that the criminals should earn their keep, and that to change their employment in the direction spoken of by the speakers would require so large an expenditure and cost as to make it an unprofitable change.

Mr. Crawford questioned whether the criminals under the present system were earning their keep, and whether the balance was not on the wrong side of the sheet. He thought that for tenders would result in obtaining higher prices, and surely there were other reputable firms in the same line of business as Messrs. Nelson & Sons.

Hon. Mr. Hardy said that the amendment did not introduce the question of prison versus free labor. It simply condemned the Government for not putting up the labor to public competition. This was the question, and he asked the House to consider the great importance of taking into account the discipline of the prison and the consequent importance that the Government should know the contractor should know the man who was to be allowed within the prison. He denounced the idea that the convicts should not be allowed to contribute to their own maintenance.