

THE ELECTION BILL AND THE PROFESSION.

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The ballot makes personation easy and detection difficult; it vastly facilitates the process of bribery, by removing the fear of discovery and punishment.

Bribery will not be prevented by merely moral influences—that is proved by all experience. No party hesitates to resort to it when necessary to success. No man, however virtuous in profession, was ever known to vote against his party because they were winning by corruption; he is content to share the spoils of victory and ask no questions. In very truth, nobody really looks upon it as a crime or upon a man who gives or takes a bribe as he views a thief. Everybody would prefer to win an election by honest means, but he would prefer to win by bribery rather than be beaten. Nothing but fear of the penalties really operates to deter, and even they go no further than to introduce more contrivance and caution in the conduct of the business. Whatever reduces the risk of discovery enormously increases the temptation alike to give and to take bribes.

It is scarcely denied that the ballot makes bribery comparatively easy and safe; but its advocates contend that, though it will not make men less willing to take bribes, it will make them less ready to offer bribes, because they cannot secure the fulfilment of the corrupt contract. Voters, it is said, will accept bribes from all, and promise all, and can only give to one; a man who will take a bribe will not hesitate to break his promise. This argument, however, assumes much that is not true in fact. The truth is, as our readers very well know, the great majority of the voters who take bribes perform their contracts faithfully. There is a strange point of honour among electors in this matter. They do not look upon the taking of a bribe as a moral, but only as a legal, offence; in their estimation there is nothing wrong in it, and it is only a question of safety from penalty. They think it very wrong to break a promise, and not one in twenty of those who accept a bribe without shame and without the most severe pricking of conscience vote otherwise than they had agreed to vote for the consideration given.

It must not, therefore, be hoped for that bribery will be diminished under the ballot, because the buyer will be unable to secure the vote he has bought. Even if individual votes could not thus be counted on, another form of bribery, practised largely in America, will certainly be adopted here. Wherever the ballot exists, bribery is conducted thus: Clubs, workshops, societies of men, sell themselves, not individually, but in the mass. The negotiation is conducted between a trusted man on both sides. It is intimated that the society will vote together; what one does all do; little is said, but much is understood;

signs are more expressive than words: under a stone in a field, in a hole in a hedge, the representatives of the society after the conference with the Man in the Moon find a certain sum of money. It is divided among the members, and the ballot of all is for the same man. If it be asked how they can be trusted, the answer is, that they well know that if they were to prove false they would soon spoil the market. But if there is a fear of such a consequence, the last resort is to buy conditionally that the buyer is returned,—the purchase-money not being paid till after the election.

This is not a theoretical evil, but one rampant at every election in the United States, and as familiar to the people there as was the head money to the electioneers of twenty years ago in this country.

The ballot will practically extend the area of corruption by providing facility for concealment of the facts. It will create a new and large class of corrupt voters.

Our readers experienced in elections are well aware that there are many voters who would gladly take a bribe, but dare not do so for fear of discovery. They have been partisans their lives through; they are connected with some church or chapel; they have always worn one colour, or called themselves by one name; and they know well that, if they were to vote against the party they had been associated with, all the town would be assured, as if it had been done before the eyes of all, that they had been bought. But these men, and they are many, would gladly put money into their purses if they knew that they could do so without discovery, and this the Ballot will enable them to effect without possibility of danger.

But it is said the penalties for bribery will continue as before; why should they be less effective to deter or to punish?

For this reason—that the means of detection are immensely diminished. Bribery is usually discovered now by this; that certain persons who had promised one party, or who were usually attached to one party, are seen to vote for the other party. It is then well known what was the inducement, and every detective engine is set in motion to obtain proof of the fact. But where the vote is not known, this is impossible; the clue to the act of bribery is lost, and in practice there is perfect impunity.

This, too, is confirmed by the experiences of the Ballot in all countries. If bribery is to be employed, the Ballot makes it easy and safe, as, indeed, its advocates do not deny; they assert merely that no man will think it worth his while to spend money in purchasing votes which he cannot secure. The answer to this is given above, and as it is contended it will be here so it is actually found to be in the United States.

Thus we encourage increased bribery and extended personation, for what?—to prevent one elector in a hundred from being influenced