

who know anything of the facts will scarcely doubt that whatever defects there may be in the administration of the license laws under the present system, the state of things is vastly better than it would be were the administration wholly in the hands of the local authorities, subject as they are to influences which are often too strong for their powers of resistance. Yet, while admitting, as we are in candour bound to do, the force and truthfulness of this reasoning, we agree with the Patrons that it is not conclusive. It is the kind of argument which proves too much, since, pushed to its logical results, it would be equally effective against self-government on a larger scale, and so against all popular and representative institutions. We should rather take the ground that where a thing is right in principle, the only proper course for a free and intelligent people is to put it in practice and let the people learn in the best of all schools how to do it properly and effectively. This is in reality the process which is going on in larger and smaller municipalities all over this continent. Though the results are still deplorable enough in many cases, there can be little doubt that on the whole substantial progress is being made. The educative work is being done, slowly, it may be, but effectively. The good citizens are coming more and more to the front, and there is every reason to hope that at no distant day the Anglo-Saxon will have shown his genius for self-government on a small scale, as he has already so wonderfully demonstrated it on a large scale.

With regard to the system of payment by fees, the theoretical case of the Patrons is equally strong, though practically the matter is of far less importance. On the face of it, there is evidently something wrong when one man in a large community can be placed by the grace of the Government in a position in which, without severe labour, perhaps with scarcely any personal labour, he comes into receipt of an income larger than the salary of the Prime Minister of Canada, or a judge of the Supreme Court. It is said, with obvious force, that the money is not taken from the public funds, and that it is just and proper that those who require the services of a registrar or a sheriff should pay for them. This must be admitted. We do not suppose that it is the charging of fees that is objected to. Nor are we aware that the fees now charged are thought to be exorbitant, save perhaps by some of those who have had to pay them. The point is that the office is a public office; that the fees are charged for a service which can be performed properly only under Government inspection and control; that the income, therefore, belongs to the Government, that is, the people whose agent the Government is, just as much as that from mines, or crown-lands, or any other source. This being the case there is

no justification for the bestowment of so large a portion of them upon any one Government favourite. Emphasis is given to the outcry against this system by the parading of the fact that Sir Oliver Mowat's own son, on the one hand, and certain strong partisan supporters of the Government, on the other, have been suddenly made comparatively rich by appointment to such positions. We regretted at the time of its occurrence, that Sir Oliver had permitted himself to be persuaded into appointing his son to the most lucrative position in the gift of his Government. The bitterest political enemies of the veteran Premier never did him a worse turn than did those influential friends and supporters when they persuaded him, against what we feel sure must have been his better judgment, into committing this bold act of nepotism. The Government will evidently have to give way on both the decentralization and the fee systems. But, after all, as Canadian governments go, these are but minor issues to offset a score of years of such service as Sir Oliver has rendered the Province. It is greatly to his credit and to that of his colleagues that their long term of office has been almost absolutely free even from serious charges of corruption, or gross political wrong-doing, save perhaps in the matter of the alleged gerrymander. Whether the people of Ontario are ready for a change remains to be seen. The spirit of change seems to be in the air. How it will work in Ontario will depend largely, we fancy, on the *personnel* of the rival claimants who may come forward to take their stand on the platform of the organization which is suddenly showing itself so powerful and on the whole so enlightened. If Mr. Meredith is to continue leader of the Opposition, his long and inscrutable silence must be doing great injury to his party.

By summoning the Legislature to meet for the transaction of business on the 14th of February, Sir Oliver Mowat has set at rest the fears and hopes of an immediate dissolution that were gaining ground. The announcement that the Legislature is thus to be permitted to live out its full term seems generally acceptable to both parties. Those may be wrong who think that Parliament or Legislature should in no case be dissolved in advance of the time-limit fixed by the constitution, but all must admit that strong reasons are required to justify a government in anticipating that limit. To make it a cast-iron rule that each Parliament should live out in every case its full term of years, would be to impose upon ourselves in another form one of the evils which we are accustomed to speak of as a blemish in the American system. Under that system the President becomes practically an autocrat during the four years of his administration, irremovable, save by death or impeachment, and hence practically irresponsible. Our system, under which the

Ministry of the day is the real executive, and may be displaced at any time by an adverse vote in the Commons, is, as is often pointed out, really much more democratic. But, as a matter of fact, a change of Government rarely occurs except as the result of a general election. Should a Ministry have strong reasons to believe that a great change of public opinion, in regard to some vital part of its policy, had taken place at a time when the existing Parliament had still several years of constitutional life before it, it would be clearly its duty to take some means of giving the people an opportunity to express and carry out their wishes. Perhaps the simplest and most direct way of reaching this end would be by means of the initiation and referendum, a method which seems to be growing in favour, even the *London Times* strongly advocating it. In addition to other serious objections to an appeal to the electors by a general election, such as the fact that the crucial question is sure to be mixed up with other issues, political and personal, the consideration that the power to order such appeal rests under our system with a party government, that such government is pretty sure to choose its time with reference to its own interests rather than with a simple desire to ascertain the wishes of the electorate, and that its success on partisan grounds, or on some side issue, may result in postponing the desired reform for years, make it but too clear that premature dissolution is much more likely to be used to thwart than to ascertain the wishes of the people.

After the remarks in other paragraphs in regard to the question of the best modes of appointing and of paying public officials were written and sent to the printer, Tuesday's papers came to hand with reports of the speech of Premier Mowat before the Young Men's Liberal Club of this city. In that speech Sir Oliver deals fully with these two questions. After reading his speech we do not feel called upon to modify the views expressed. Certain corrections of the Patrons' position in regard to one or two matters of fact are of some importance. The Premier points out that it is a mistake to assume, as the Patrons of Industry do, that the sheriffs, Division Court clerks, bailiffs, etc., are paid by the localities. They are paid by the Province and not by the counties or municipalities. Of course, where this is the case and when the duties discharged are of a provincial rather than of a local character, the principles which seemed to us sound do not apply. In regard to the question of payment by fees, the Premier seems ready to admit that if the income derived by the officials thus paid are in any case too high, they may be reduced, either by exacting a larger percentage for public uses or by the payment of fixed salaries. This is, we presume, all that is contended for.