

unsystematic, confused and desultory action of the House, or any common purpose in the measures which its committees from time to time recommend."* No wonder, as Mr. Woodrow Wilson humourously says, "As a rule a bill committed is a bill doomed. When it goes from the Clerk's desk to a committee-room it crosses a parliamentary bridge of sighs to dim dungeons of silence, whence it will never return. The means and time of its death are unknown, but its friends never see it again."†

But it might be supposed that when the committees do report to the House, full debate would be allowed. Not so. It may seem incredible, but it rests upon the authority of Senator Hoar, of Massachusetts, ‡ whose long congressional experience, we are told, entitles him to speak with authority, that most of the committees have at their disposal during each Congress but two hours each in which to report upon, debate and dispose of all the subjects of general legislation committed to their charge. And even that space of time is not allowed to free and open debate. The reporting committee man is allowed to absorb a great part of it, and as to the rest the speaker recognises only those persons who have previously come to a private understanding with the maker of the report, and these only upon their promise to limit their remarks to a certain number of minutes. What chance, we may well ask, would a Lord Shaftesbury, or a Plimsoll, or even a Gladstone, or any of the great reformers or philanthropists, whose names lend lustre to the records of the Parliament of Great Britain, have had under such a system as that prevailing in Congress?

But let me pass out of this stifling atmosphere to the freer air of the parliament at Ottawa. And, first, as to committees. Our House of Commons, it is true, has its committees, even its standing committees, but they are of the old-fashioned sort, which merely investigate and report. Nor are they appointed by the Speaker; they are chosen with care by a committee of selection composed of members of both parties. Moreover, the committees are very large—some of them two-thirds of the whole House—so that as Mr. Bourinot says—than whom no one is better able to instruct us,—“a lobbyist finds it practically useless to pursue his arts.”§ The committees entrusted with private bills in the Commons comprise from 43 to 162 members—that for railways being the largest. And as to opportunities for debate under our system, I will give you the words of Mr. Bourinot in his “Canadian Studies in Comparative Politics”:—¶ “The minister in charge

* Ibid. p. 61.

† Ibid. p. 69.

‡ Ibid. p. 72.

§ “Canadian Studies in Comparative Politics,” p. 62.

¶ Ibid. p. 59.