

land and houses in this settlement. It was found that a considerable portion of the rural land in the settlement was let in allotments of from ten to thirty acres at a present average rent insufficient to confer the proposed franchise. It was also found that very many of the houses in the Town of Nelson, which are hastily constructed of the cheapest materials, chiefly wood, and are of the smallest possible dimensions, do not yield a rent of £10 per annum. But it was not found that, in point of independence or intelligence, any of the persons paying the lower rents were inferior in the slightest degree to those who occupied larger portions of land or more expensive dwellings. We need only mention these facts, which can be substantiated with the greatest facility and precision, to demonstrate to your Lordship the unfairness (so far at least as this settlement is concerned) of establishing a property qualification for voters; and we trust, therefore, that in any Bill which may be passed by the Imperial Parliament for the government of this colony the principle recommended in the fourth resolution may be adopted as a right claimed by the colonists, which they are perfectly fitted to possess.

The suggested test of residency in the settlement, where the vote is given for six months previous to the day of registration, would insure a sufficient amount of interest in and experience of the requirements of the settlement, as no elector could vote in any case until he had lived eight or nine months in the settlement; while it would generally happen, from the fact of the period of registration not occurring for some time after the expiry of the six months following his arrival or from no election taking place for some time after the day of registration, that each voter would have had the benefit of from one to three years' experience of the affairs of the colony before he gave his vote.

With respect to that part of the exceptional clause in the resolution in question which relates to convicts or attainted persons, your Lordship will observe that it is proposed to entirely exclude from the privilege of voting any person "who at any time" should have been convicted or attainted as therein mentioned. The vicinity of the penal settlements and the number of convicts having tickets of leave who from time to time have and may come to this colony, render this provision essentially necessary in order to prevent persons who have been degraded by the commission of gross crimes from obtaining any voice in the administration of the public affairs; and it is the earnest wish of the inhabitants of this settlement that this provision should, under any circumstances, form part of the Act which may be passed for the future government of the colony.

With respect to the fifth resolution, which recommends that the mode of voting be by ballot, there are many reasons which render it applicable to the constituencies of New Zealand; and the attentive consideration of its own merits has obtained for it here a very general and increasing approval, the progress of which may be illustrated by a recital of what took place at the several public meetings before alluded to, in which every shade of opinion on this as on the other subjects considered was elicited during the discussions, throughout which this question seemed pre-eminently to excite the greatest amount of controversy; and the decisive majority in its favour at the conclusion of these discussions, notwithstanding many adverse indications at first, is the most convincing testimony of the strong impression created of its perfect adaptation to the feelings and wants of the settlement. At the first of the preliminary public meetings there was a small majority against it, at the second there was a majority of one in favour of it, at the third and fourth it was carried by large majorities; and at the final and general public meeting, after a most animated and adjourned debate, involving a most patient discussion, which extended over many hours and which was characterized by an attention and amount of good temper which could not have been exceeded in any assembly, it was again carried by a majority consisting of considerably more than two-thirds of the voters.

It is our duty, on a question which caused such a prolonged discussion, to notice at considerable length the arguments which were advanced most prominently during these discussions. The advocates of the ballot found it difficult at first to divest the subject of certain association of ideas which existed in the minds of several of those opposed to it, and which, without being at all relevant to the question, formed almost the whole strength of a very vigorous opposition. The abstract truth was at first lost sight of that secrecy and privacy of voting are compatible with the fullest exercise of the judgment, with freedom of choice, and with honesty of intention—that a man had an equal opportunity for choosing well as ill in voting by ballot as in open voting, while he was much more likely to choose well than ill when left to his own unbiassed judgment. The opponents of the ballot assumed that secrecy was only compatible with hypocrisy; that the ballot would be but a means for exercising a species of Athenian ostracism, which gave in former days to base men the power of banishing their benefactors, as in the recorded case of Aristides. This objection led to a misrepresentation of the real merits of the principle, and rendered the ballot obnoxious to the epithets of unmanly, un-English, &c. This objection found a ready response in the minds of several who saw, in the opposite system of open voting, a pretension to the opposite qualities of manliness, honesty, and straightforwardness, totally omitting to recognise the existence of those various abominations so universally practised at all elections conducted upon the principles of open voting, comprising intimidation, bribery, and every species of corruption which can be brought to bear upon the weaker voters during the open struggle of the hustings, and which abominations no laws hitherto enacted have been able to reach or control. The difficulty which the advocates of the ballot found in leading the minds of their earliest opponents to the consideration of the real merits of the principle was further increased by the very circumstances which has just been advanced, as the strongest plea for the extension of the suffrage to every adult male—namely, the independence of the working class. Such has been the advancement and good conduct of this class that they are fully conscious of their improved position and of their escape from that power of domination over them by the higher classes which once so painfully repressed them. To many of these the principle of open voting seemed to offer an opportunity for the assertion of their newly-acquired independence; or, in other words, of showing that they were manly, and afraid of no man, there being at present no parties to be afraid of, as in these settlements there is as yet no wealthy upper class, although property is in many instances accumulating, and there may be considerable concentrations of it before long. With such a temptation to prefer open voting where the voters are undoubtedly at present in an independent position, it becomes the more remarkable that a preference for voting by ballot should finally have prevailed, this feeling being gradually confirmed from a recollec-