

been common at elections.' The Australian ballot has proved a benefit to the United States in so far as it took the printing and distribution of ballot-papers out of the hands of the various political parties and protected the voter from undue interference at the polling-booth. But the 'absolute secrecy' is a myth. The number of every voter is written on a turned-down corner of the ballot-paper in the order in which he records his vote. This number, with the voter's name appended, is forthwith entered in a book kept at each polling-booth; and the whole is retained sufficiently long in a free-and-easy custody of semi-responsible persons to render it a matter of comparative ease for them to ascertain how every vote was cast. Even during the actual scrutiny the destination of any particular vote may be determined without difficulty by the scrutineers. The New Zealand ballot is apparently but a bedraggled variant of the Australian. It has the three following crying faults: (1) It gives even less of the protection of secrecy to the elector than does the Australian system; (2) it makes personation much easier; and (3) it affords special facilities for carrying out the good old American motto: 'Vote early and vote often.'

In fact, there is no system of ballot with which we are acquainted that offers so miserly a modicum of protective secrecy to the voter. We make a record in folly by writing on the turned-down corner of each ballot-paper the number which the voter holds on the printed electoral roll! It needs no DANIEL to see that this at once opens the door to wide possibilities in the matter of determining, at the scrutiny, on which side any particular vote is cast. Under our present system such discovery may be made without difficulty by the scrutineers in any one of the following ways: (1) By the accidental or intentional turning up of the number of the ballot-paper; (2) by holding the turned-down corner of the ballot-paper (which is of the flimsiest kind) to a strong light, as to that of a window or to that reflected from a scrap of broken mirror on table or desk; (3) by the fact that in the many varieties of folding adopted by voters, the number on the electoral roll must, in a great many cases, come directly under the eyes of the scrutineers; (4) by the sanctioned use of other pencils than those supplied in the booths—a method which enables a 'squared' elector to provide evidence as to the manner in which his vote was cast. We do not know what becomes of the voting-papers after the scrutiny. But if it be true, as stated to us, that they are retained for a considerable time and without adequate safeguards, then it is manifestly possible for individuals to ascertain how every vote in any given electorate was cast. The old Greek plan of voting with inscribed potsherds was preferable to this. The effective protection of the elector is, after all, the main purpose of the ballot. For this reason we are strongly convinced that neither the presiding officers of the polling-stations nor others present during the voting should have anything to do with the counting or scrutiny. The reason is very obvious. The presiding officer has, we understand, to witness his stamp on every voting-paper before it is dropped into the ballot-box. Apart altogether from the chances—referred to above—of noting the voter's number on the ballot-paper during the scrutiny, there must necessarily be a great variety of methods of folding the papers, some of which he could notice and indentify when perusing them. It is no answer to this to say that his oath binds him to secrecy. The possession of such knowledge should be made practically impossible, instead of being, as it is, a matter of comparative ease. Scrutineers who are present during the polling have it in their power to acquire the same information as the presiding officer. As a rule, they have also a greater interest in acquiring it. And as they are bound by no oath of secrecy their possibilities of securing information constitute a far greater danger to the secrecy which should safeguard the elector in the exercise of his right. The proper purpose of the scrutiny should be merely to secure formality of voting, not to imperil the secrecy of the ballot.

The chief flaw in our system manifestly lies in the ballot-paper. It is not, but it ought to be, a political truism that the ideal ballot-paper should show only (1) the names of the candidates, (2) the cross or other mark which indicates the elector's choice, and (3) the presiding officer's stamp. It

should give no indication whatever, direct or indirect, to show who used it. The prosecution of personation and certain other offences against the Act should be secured in some way unconnected with the voting paper itself. The system adopted in Great Britain—or at least in Scotland—presents the nearest approach to the ideal that we know of. The returning officer is a Sheriff of a County, or a Recorder, or other official whose position cannot be affected by changes of Government. He provides each presiding officer at the polling-stations with a locked, sealed, and empty box, retaining the key himself. This box must be returned to him with lock and seal intact and with an affidavit from the presiding officer of each polling-place that he has seen so many voting papers placed in it. These papers are supplied by the returning officer to each presiding officer, with butts, numbered consecutively like cheque-books. Each voting paper is stamped on face and back before being presented to the elector. At the same time his number on the roll is marked on the butt only. This is an improvement on the New Zealand system; for the identity of the voter can be ascertained only by reference to the butt. The secrecy of the vote is further safeguarded by a wise provision which deserves the flattery of imitation in New Zealand: authority to examine the butt of any particular paper can only be obtained, on special cause being shown, from an election judge of the Supreme Court. And we are not aware that any such authority has yet been given. The presiding officer at each polling-place is empowered to clear the room of loiterers. When illiterate voters present themselves and demand assistance the room is cleared of all persons but the illiterate and the presiding officer, and no person is admitted until the former has passed out again. When polling time is over, the butts, unused and spoiled papers, etc., are sealed by the presiding officer and forwarded to the returning officer. They are never opened except by order of the Supreme Court and in the presence of the Court. In due time they are, unless challenged, destroyed unopened. Personation and double-voting—so easy in New Zealand—are prevented or made both difficult and dangerous in Great Britain by having the constituencies divided into wards or districts. Each has its own polling-place, its own presiding officer, and that portion of the roll containing the names of the electors in that district. Identification is thus made comparatively easy and two temptations practically removed from the path of the shady elector. Here is a system much of which might be advantageously adopted in New Zealand. As it stands, our Ballot Act is, perhaps, the most defective of the many that are in force throughout the Empire, and strangely out of harmony with the progressive character of our legislation in other directions.

Diocesan News.

ARCHDIOCESE OF WELLINGTON.

(From our own correspondent.)

December 23.

The Retreat for the priests of the archdiocese begins on the 17th prox.

Mrs. Campbell, the wife of one of our best known shipping masters, died suddenly last Saturday evening.

His Grace the Archbishop and the Rev. Father Ainsworth will rest until the beginning of February, when they will continue their missions, commencing on the West Coast at Westport.

Mr. P. McColl, an early arrival in New Zealand, died here on Sunday last. His funeral took place on Tuesday, when the Rev. Father Holley officiated.—R.I.P.

The Rev. Father Ginisty, S.M., of St. Patrick's Church, Sydney, arrived on Thursday. He is to preach the Retreats for the Priests of the Archdiocese, the Sisters of Mercy, Wellington, the Marist Brothers at Stoke, and the Sisters of St. Joseph, Wanganui.

The following pupils of the Sisters of Mercy at Palmerston North passed the Royal Academy of music examination:—Local Centre, higher division, (singing).—Isabel Oliver, Marion Wallace, and Clare Campion. Junior (piano).—Clare Campion. Elementary.—Evelyn Rawlins.

At St. Joseph's Church on Sunday last the Sacrament of Confirmation was administered by his Grace Archbishop Redwood to over 100 children and adults. The Mass was celebrated by Ven. Archdeacon Devoy, and an appropriate sermon was preached by his Grace.

The Fabian Dramatic Club had been somewhat unfortunate in their choice of dates for the production of 'Caste.' The Bland Holt Company concluded their season on Wednesday, and an amateur performance on the following evenings required a greater