

In the course of some remarks at the banquet of the Oxford Old Boys held at Toronto last week, E. W. Nesbitt, M. P. for North Oxford, expressed the opinion that the time had come, or was coming, for the application of some kind of test to foreigners in this country seeking the full rights of citizenship. An alien, Mr. Nesbitt thinks, before being admitted to the privilege of the franchise in this country, should be able to show that he has some knowledge of how this country is governed and of the meaning and use of the ballot. It is neither an ideal nor a safe condition of things, in Mr. Nesbitt's view, when a man who knows no more about the duties of his citizenship than to sell his vote to the first, or the last, man who offers to buy, is allowed to take his place in the polling booth on the same level and to count for as much as the most intelligent Canadian.

The view expressed by Mr. Nesbitt is growing in favor. As he pointed out, our franchise laws were enacted when conditions were quite different from what they are today. When manhood was made the basis of citizenship it was Canadian manhood that the legislators had in view. Since then the great influx of population from all over the world has complicated the problem. It was intended and expected that manhood suffrage would be an important educational agency in training Canadians of all conditions in the duties and responsibilities of citizenship, so that the government of the country, might be in reality as broadly based as the manhood of the country, but a new problem has been raised by the growth of immigration.

It is becoming more and more evident that the first step towards converting the foreign element into Canadian citizenship is not the indiscriminate bestowal of the franchise on every one who can be induced to accept it. It may be difficult to devise a test that would be effective and practicable; but to admit the difficulty is not to deny the need. In the United States the problem of assimilating the alien elements has become so serious that an educational test which would exclude from the country all immigrants of over sixteen years who are unable to read. Many of those who recognize the necessity for some kind of restriction are not prepared to go this far. It cannot be forgotten that much of the necessary work in the building up of any new country may be, and is likely to be done by men who have not had the advantages of even a primary education. A man may be unable to either read or write and yet have the material in him to make him a useful member of the community; but it does not follow that everybody who is allowed into the country should be given the right to vote just as soon as he knows enough about Canadian politics to know that the vote may have a market value. The proposed educational test for the franchise is not free from objection; but it is difficult to suggest a better one.