

previous night with the key attached and hung inside the aperture by a string, so that any one could pull it out and open the ballot-box, a number of voting-papers being thus taken out and distributed.

Mr. Isitt appears to have endeavoured to get further information in this direction, but the gentleman positively declined, and it is just probable that this gentleman's son may have been instrumental in the opening of the ballot-box and abstracting some papers therefrom, or in somehow obtaining possession of this voting-paper.

Mr. Isitt at once informed Mr. Thomson as to the alleged manner in which the ballot-papers had been abstracted, and handed him the voting-paper in question, on condition he should not part with it, and Mr. Thomson in turn acquainted the police, who endeavoured to verify this allegation by inquiring at the Buckle Street polling-booth, where some artillerymen were drilled; but, although all the artillerymen who were in the drill-shed that evening were interviewed, no information of any person having tampered with the ballot-box could be obtained, Mr. Thomson being so informed, and the police reports on the subject being left with him at his request.

It appears that, although it was alleged that a number of voting-papers were abstracted and circulated, no information was forthcoming during the inquiry of any other genuine voting-paper being in circulation.

On certain information being recently given on this subject, the police reports were sought, but could not be traced, having been left in possession of Mr. Thomson, Returning Officer (*vide* Inspector Ellison's report in explanation attached), and in consequence Mr. Thomson has again been interviewed; but, although he believes he left the reports with other election documents in a ballot-box in his office in Wellington, every possible search has been made, but they cannot be found.

From the inquiries Mr. Thomson has made at Mr. Ferguson's, printer, Lambton Quay, he is satisfied beyond doubt that the ballot-paper he now holds is a genuine one, and was printed by that firm with all the others used at the election, and he is also satisfied that it was not taken surreptitiously from their premises. He declined to hand it to me without Mr. Isitt's authority, but Mr. Isitt has now authorised its being handed over, and the document is now herewith annexed.

I have also had an interview with Mr. Ferguson, who identifies the ballot-paper under investigation as a genuine one; and, whilst there are ways and means of obtaining papers of any description from that source, I scarcely think it was thus obtained.

Mr. Isitt, when interviewed, promised to make further endeavours to get permission from the gentleman who handed him the ballot-paper to disclose his identity, but on the 5th instant he informed me by telephone that, although he had again seen him, on the 3rd instant, he still declined, saying it would be the means of ruining his business if it was generally known that he had taken the ballot-paper to Mr. Isitt.

The ballot-papers when printed appear to have been delivered by the printers to Mr. Thomson between the 22nd and the 24th March at the Courthouse, where Mr. McKenzie, Deputy Returning Officer, No. 1 booth, was engaged with Mr. Thomson counting them out and placing them in the ballot-boxes in accordance with a list provided by Mr. Thomson, and as soon as the requisite number was counted out and placed in each box the box was locked, and the key, which was tied to it by a string, was hung inside the aperture, the boxes being sent out to the booths during the afternoon or evening of the 24th March (the day previous to the election).

Whilst the ballot-papers were at the Court they appear to have been deposited either in Mr. Thomson's room or in a room allotted to Mr. McKenzie to count them into the boxes; and, although Mr. Isitt is said to have called on Mr. Thomson several times about this time, it is questionable if he could have got possession of a ballot-paper, the boxes and ballot-papers being always carefully locked up during the absence of Mr. Thomson and Mr. McKenzie.

From the returns sent in by the Deputy Returning Officers of twenty-one booths the following are the only inaccuracies which occurred:—No. 3 Booth, Sydney Street Schoolroom: 700 counted into ballot-box; 699 received by Returning Officer; after ballot only 697 accounted for. No. 8 Booth, Leven, Shallicrass, and Co.'s Mart: 700 counted into ballot-box and received by Returning Officer; after ballot only 697 accounted for. No. 14 Booth, Schoolroom, Pirie Street: 700 counted into ballot-box and received by Returning Officer; an additional 100 supplied and received; after ballot 803 accounted for. No. 15 Booth, Victoria Hall, Adelaide Road: 700 counted into ballot-box and received by Returning Officer; after the ballot only 699 accounted for. No. 16 Booth, Drill-hall, Buckle Street: 700 counted into ballot-box; 698 received and accounted for by Returning Officer: this is the booth where, it is alleged, the box was tampered with. Altogether, therefore, four ballot-papers only were unaccounted for, and this deficiency might easily have occurred in the counting-out of the voting-papers. The allegations that a number of voting-papers were abstracted from the ballot-box at the drill-shed, Buckle Street, and distributed is altogether erroneous, as the total number received there—viz., 698—were accounted for.

It appears, however, that when Messrs. Thomson and McKenzie had finished counting out the requisite number of ballot-papers (which were tied up in packets of 100) into the boxes, on counting the surplus they found they were a packet (100) short, and although they had a recount they were still 100 short, and in consequence made inquiry at the printers, who alleged they supplied the 16,000 as ordered, no trace being found of the missing packet. Mr. Thomson concluded, however, that the printers were in fault, and had printed 100 short. No further information can now be obtained respecting this packet, which if supplied must have been taken from Mr. Thomson's office; but I rather favour Mr. Thomson's conclusion that the printer was in fault, and had printed 100 short, the transaction being a pressing one carried out hurriedly.

During this inquiry the Hon. the Minister of Justice handed me the memorandum annexed marked "A," dated the 29th December last, which is addressed to the Returning Officer at Nelson by Mr. F. W. Isitt, New Zealand Alliance, asking for samples of local-option ballot-papers,