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1901-07-26

House of Representatives

Mr. Speaker took the chair at 2 o'clock p.m., and read prayers. '

PETITION

Mr. HUMECOOK, presented a petition from Mr. John Robertson, : M.A., of Moonee Ponds, with respect to the -matter of gold monometallism legal tender and its errors.

Petition received and read.

TEMPORARY PORTERS AT GENERAL POST-OFFICE

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Mr TUDOR

asked the Minister representing the Postmaster - General, upon notice -

Whether he is aware that men employed' as temporary porters at the Melbourne General Post-office do not receive a weekly half-holiday, though they are alleged to be doing the same work as the permanent porters who get the half-holiday each week ?

Whether he will take steps to see that they receive one half 'holiday per week t

Minister (without portfolio)

Sir PHILIP FYSH

- The Postmaster-General is aware that the men employed at the 'Melbourne General Post-office as temporary porters do not receive a full half-holiday each week, but their work, though similar, is not the same as that performed by the permanent porters, as the latter have greater responsibilities. He cannot promise to take steps to see that they receive more holiday time than at present. As their work is not continuous, they are not required to be in attendance 48 hours per week, and they are allowed to leave at 3 and 3.30 p.m., instead of at 6.30 p.m. on Saturday afternoon.

RETURNED MILITARY OFFICERS

Mr CROUCH

asked the Prime Minister, upon notice -

Whether, as stated in the press, the Government has decided that "it is undesirable that officers who have had rank conferred upon them whilst serving in South Africa should be required to forego such rank on their return to the Commonwealth"?

Whether he will apply this rule to those who, other than officers, have received promotion in South Africa?

Minister for External Affairs

Mr BARTON

- The Government has decided that officers of the Commonwealth forces promoted for service in South Africa shall be allowed to retain their rank on their return to the Commonwealth. It would not be found practicable to apply this rule to all cases, other than officers, as in the case of those permanently employed there could not be found positions in which to place them in accordance with their rank. Therefore, they would either have to forego their positions or forego their rank. But, wherever found practicable, it is the desire of the Government that those who win promotion on service shall retain it on their return.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Debate resumed (from 12th July, vide page 2514) on motion by Sir John Quick -

That, in the opinion of this House, a National Department of Agriculture and Productive Industries, on the same lines as that of the United States of America, ought to be organized and maintained in connexion with the Government of the Commonwealth.

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Mr SYDNEY SMITH

- I listened with a good deal of attention to the remarks . made by the mover of the motion, the honorable and learned member for Indi, and the honorable member for

Echuca. There can be no question that it raises a very important issue, affecting the interests of the whole of Australia. It may be asked, and is asked by some of the States, what right has the Federal Parliament to deal with the question of agricultural education. Some contend that it should be left to the States. They further urge that we have no power under the Constitution to deal with the question. I shall proceed to

show first what course is adopted in the various States and. in other countries with regard to agricultural education, and also what steps, in my opinion,, should be taken to put this matter on a satisfactory basis. The Constitution provides, that -

The Parliament shall, subject to this Constitution, have power to make laws for the peace, order, and good government of the Commonwealth, with respect to : -

Trade and commerce with other countries and among the States.

Bounties on the production or export of goods, but so that such bounties shall be uniform throughout the Commonwealth.

Quarantine.

The Parliament also has the power to appropriate the funds of the Commonwealth. If honorable members will refer to the Constitution of the United States they will see that so far as the formation of a department of agriculture is concerned, our powers are greater than the powers it gives. The importance of this matter is emphasized when we consider the growing production of Australia.. If we take the returns which are submitted in The Seven Colonies of Australasia, we find that the agricultural, pastoral, dairy, and forestry production in 1899 amounted' to £61,406,000 or, including mining and manufactures, to £11 2, 273,000. In 1881 our total production was only £71,000,000, so that it has increased by over £40,000,000 since that year. . What progress has been made in regard to agriculture generally? In 1881 the 'area under crops in Australia was 4,489,000 acres, whereas in 1899 it had increased to 8,666,000 acres. In 1881 our area under wheat was 3,002,000 acres, and in 1899 it had increased to 5,614,000 acres. In 1881 we produced 21,378,000 bushels of wheat and in 1899 the production had increased to 39,998,000 bushels. We are producing now more than we require for the people of Australia. Therefore it becomes necessary for us to open new markets for our surplus products. In 1889 the export of butter from Australia amounted to 800,000 lbs., whereas in 1889 it had increased to 25,000,000 lbs. We have to find markets for £18,000,000 worth of wool, £1,000,000 worth of tallow, £2,200,000 worth of meat, and £1,500,000 worth of hides and skins. While we have this large surplus, and while the production in agriculture is largely increasing every year, I fear we have not taken the steps which should be taken to capture the remunerative trade of Great Britain and other nations. Our area is about 3,000,000 acres. The area of Denmark and Holland - two small countries - is not a hundredth part of the area of Australia. Yet what do we find? Out of £111,000,000 worth of food supplies imported by Great Britain from various countries every year, Denmark contributes nearly £13,000,000 worth, and Holland nearly £6,000,000 worth. In other words, these two countries, with only a hundredth part of the area of Australia, export about 17 per cent. of the food supplies, which include butter, margarine, cheese, wheat, flour, eggs, fruit, bacon, beef fresh, hams, mutton fresh, milk, pork, and poultry. One notable instance of what can be done is furnished by Denmark, a little country about a two hundredth part of the area of Australia with a severer climate, in which the farmer's have to house their stock for. many months in the year, and furthermore, to import food largely for their cattle. Notwithstanding all these disadvantages, Denmark last year contributed no less than £8,000,000 worth of butter, out of £17,000,000 worth which the old country imported. I point out these facts to show the great possibilities there are before Australia, if we would only take up this question in the way in which other nations are doing, and put forward our best efforts to improve the condition of affairs here. The honorable and learned members for Bendigo and Indi referred to what is being done in America, and in the motion we are asked to follow the lines of the Agricultural department of the United States. I am not one of those who believe in being tied down to the scheme of any particular country. I think we ought to have a free hand to adopt what we think suitable from America, and what we think suitable from other countries. We ought not to follow slavishly the lines of the agricultural system of America, because

I can see clearly that in some cases it would not be wise for Australia to do so. The United States established a department of agriculture in 1862. We find that the Act sets forth that a department of agriculture shall be established, the general designs and duties of which shall be to acquire and diffuse amongst the people of the United States useful information on subjects connected with agriculture in the most general and comprehensive sense of the word, and to procure, pro- ' pagate, and distribute amongst the people new and valuable seeds and plants. Another Act was passed in 1862 which granted large areas of land to the various States in order to assist agriculture. I find from a report presented to Congress last year that the Federal Government of the United States is now appropriating very large

sums of money for that purpose. The amount last year, I believe, was about 3,000,000 dollars. That appropriation includes various branches of investigation, and deals with publications, statistics, botany, entomology, vegetable pathology, chemistry, divisions of soils, divisions of forestry, experimental gardens, museum, library, salaries in connexion with the animal bureau, collection of agricultural statistics, botanical investigations and experiments, forestry investigations, soil investigations, grasses, agricultural experimental stations, irrigation investigations, and various other matters appertaining to agriculture.

Mr Barton

- From what is the honorable member quoting ?

Mr SYDNEY SMITH

- I am quoting from an Act of Parliament - really from the Estimates - which received the assent on March 1, 1899. It is information which, I think, will be valuable to the Federal Government in considering this question.

Mr Barton

- What is the title of the volume 1

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Mr SYDNEY SMITH

- The United States Statutes. It is an Act of Parliament setting forth the lines of investigation followed by the Department of Agriculture in the United States, and appropriating a large sum of money - I think about 3,000,000 dollars - in order to assist the various divisions of agriculture, and in other ways to improve the condition of affairs in that country. The American people realize the importance of paying attention to this question, and of securing the markets of other parts of the world. In nearly every country where it is likely that there is business to be done, American agents will be found obtaining information for the benefit of the producers in the various States. It may be asked- - - "Is there any difficulty whatever in working this plan, in view of the action taken by the various States?" I understand that they experience no difficulty whatever, that the States work hand in hand with the Federal Government - as they ought to do, and as I believe our States will do and ought to do - in endeavouring to assist in every possible way the producers of the States. If honorable members will take the trouble to look up some of the work which is being carried out by the United States in connexion with experiments, and with distributing advice to her people, [I feel sure they will be satisfied that the time has arrived when something ought to be done by the Federal Government of Australia towards helping our agricultural industry. The honorable and learned member for Bendigo has asked us to follow the lines of agricultural education in the United States. While, as I said before, I approve of a great deal that is already being done in America in this direction, yet I am sorry to have to say that they pay too little attention there to what, I term practical agriculture. In most of their colleges the examination is too severe, and very frequently it prevents young men from obtaining information which should be open to all who have the desire and the necessary ability to acquire it. The agricultural colleges are, sometimes misunderstood. I find that out of about 34,000 students at the agricultural colleges of the United States, only about 4,407 follow what I call practical agriculture. The remainder follow other branches. All the 132 students in the Massachusetts college take the agricultural course, but of the 1,100 who have passed through that college, I believe that only about one quarter are engaged in agriculture at the present time.

Mr W H GROOM

- The honorable member will find that that is the case in all agricultural colleges.

Mr SYDNEY SMITH

- I mention this to show the difference between the United States and Australia at the present time.

Mr W H GROOM

- All agricultural colleges reveal the same result. Not more than one-fourth of the students who pass through them afterwards engage in agriculture.

Mr SYDNEY SMITH

- I shall be able to show the honorable member that that is not the case. At Michigan College, out of 425 students, only 211 engaged in agriculture. Realizing as I did, as Minister for Agriculture in New South Wales for many years, the importance of getting up-to-date information on all matters appertaining to agriculture, on behalf of the Government of that State, I offered a bursary to the most successful student

in its agricultural colleges. That bursary enabled him to go to the best college in the world for two or three years' training, and was a means of keeping the department informed as to what was being done in a practical way elsewhere.

Mr W H GROOM

- That was the right course to take.

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Mr SYDNEY SMITH

- I believe it was. It cost the Government of our State £500, but I believe it was £500 well spent, because it enabled us to acquire information which has been of immense value to the State of New South Wales. In order to obtain further information as to the work that is being done, I recommended the Government of New South Wales to send one of its best experts to America, and other countries, with a view to seeing what improvement", had been made in the system of production, the different classes of machinery that are being used, the new crops that are being raised, and the new methods of cultivation that are being employed. That officer was for over" two years engaged in visiting those countries to obtain information, which would assist in placing the Department of Agriculture in New South Wales on a more efficient footing. He has recently returned, and I believe that he will be able to give, not only to the State of New South Wales - because we must now look upon this as a federal matter - but to the whole of the States, valuable information bearing upon agriculture, which will be of immense advantage to the Commonwealth Parliament should we decide upon starting a National Department of Agriculture. I know that officer very well. He is a most competent man - I refer to Dr. Cobb - who has given a great deal of attention to different kinds of wheats, which was one of the lines of investigation that he was called upon to prosecute. He was commissioned to ascertain whether there were wheats used in any of those countries which would be more suitable than the wheats we use for our different climates. By that means we may be able to get wheats which will grow better in certain districts than in others. We thought that . possibly he might be able to hit upon a wheat that would resist the rust and be able to stand in some of the dry districts of the States. At all events, I believe that if the Government decide to' start a department of agriculture in connexion with the Commonwealth, the officer in question will be able to give us information which will be of immense value, and thus save us large sums of money in the carrying out of this undertaking. I have been referring to the United States. I think it only right that I should also refer to what is being done in the States of Australia. I have always worked in a very amicable way with the various States of the group. In regard to agriculture, New South Wales always felt- even before federation was accomplished - that that matter was one of federal concern. We felt that what benefited one State would benefit another, and that what damaged one State would damage another. Therefore, every year we had a conference of the various Ministers of Agriculture with the view to thrashing out different questions. Those who have read our reports will admit that much useful information was acquired, which has been of great benefit to the various States. Agricultural education was started in Victoria long before we introduced it in New South Wales. I remember references being frequently made in our Parliament to the fact that Victoria was a long way ahead of us in regard to this matter. I admit that Victoria started before we did, and I give her every credit for having done so, although I do not think she went on the right lines. I have always said that, and I took the opportunity on many occasions, when discussing this matter with Mr. Taverner, when he was Minister for Agriculture - and he always took a great interest in agriculture, and deserves well of the people of Victoria - of pointing out that it would be impossible to make a success of a department of agriculture worked on the lines that were then being followed in Victoria. I took that view because I knew that it was impossible to get the members of the Board of Agricultural Education to take that deep interest in their work that was necessary to insure success. Unless you have enthusiastic officers who will work morning, noon, and night, it will be impossible to make a success of a department of agriculture. Victoria started her department of agriculture before we did, and we have benefited by the failure - if I may so term it - of her system. When I had the honour of being called upon as a member of the late Sir Henry Parkes' Government to form a department of agriculture in New South Wales, I felt it my duty to make myself acquainted not only with the system in force in Victoria, but with what was being done in other States and countries', and I adopted the course that I want the Federal Government to follow if the motion is carried in its present, or in an amended form. I want them to adopt the latest systems, taking just those elements from the different countries and ' the different systems that may be

best adapted to the requirements of our States. If that course is followed, I think that we shall be able, without much difficulty, to bring forward a comprehensive and satisfactory scheme of agricultural education. Instead of adopting the Victorian system of constituting a board of agricultural education, our Government made the Agricultural department - as is now proposed - a part of what may be called the Ministerial policy. We made the Government and the Minister in charge of the administration of the Agricultural department responsible to Parliament and to the people, so that they could be called upon at any moment to answer any charges, or receive any suggestions from the representatives of the people in order to further the interests of agriculture. I say that that is the only satisfactory way of administering any department of agriculture. I hope no amount of inducement will cause the Commonwealth Government to go back to the system which has been in force for so many years in Victoria. I am very glad to say that even in Victoria the Government realize that a mistake was made, and that they are now starting afresh on the lines adopted in New South Wales. I may be pardoned, perhaps, for making some reference to the work we are doing at the present time in New South Wales. I wish to refer to this because, judging from some of the remarks that have been made during the course of the debate, it seems that we are to go to the United States, and the United States alone, to find out what is best suited to the requirements of the Commonwealth in regard to agricultural education. I think, however, that I shall be able to show that nearly everything that is included in the agricultural system of the United States, and a good deal more, has been adopted in New South Wales, with, I am glad to say, very satisfactory results. We formed the department of agriculture in New South Wales in 1891. At that time the total area under crop was 846,353 acres. Last year - I do not say it is altogether due to the system of agricultural education in force there; a good deal is, no doubt, due to the liberal land laws and other inducements that have been held out - our area under crop had increased to 2,240,000 acres. The area under wheat - and that was one of the branches to which we gave special attention in our agricultural department - had increased from 360,000 acres in 1891 to 1,446,000 acres. The product of wheat also increased from 3,963,000 bushels to 13,000,000 bushels, or an increase of nearly 10,000,000 bushels within less than ten years. I could refer also to other evidences of the marked improvement that has taken place in New South Wales, at all events during the last few years, as far as agriculture is concerned. In our State we have a system in force which I think should as far as possible be followed by the Federal Government, if they start a department of agriculture. We have a chemistry division, in which we carry out analyses of soil, and advise agriculturists as to the best modes of treatment of their soil, as to the proper manures to use in order to secure the best results from the land, as to the crops best suited for the land, and the best treatment for those crops, and we do all that free of cost. We take this view in regard to agriculture - that the farmer should start fair, that he should first know what his soil contains, and what his soil is suitable for, and that the only way to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion on this point is to first have the soil analyzed. In the same way that a doctor who is attending a patient should first ascertain the disease from which the patient is suffering before he prescribes, we say that a farmer should first have the fullest information regarding the nature of the soil with which he has to deal. Every bona fide farmer on the soil of New South Wales is in a position to obtain analyses of soil free of cost, and a similar privilege is accorded him with regard to fertilizers. We found that the agents for the sale of fertilizers were charging £12 and £13 per ton for fertilizers, the real value of which was not more than £4. I saw that the people were being robbed in this way - because ignorant people did not know the value of the articles that were being sold to them - and we ordered that all these fertilizers should be sampled and analyzed. On the strength of the analyses then made, we published a work, which should be very glad to hand to honorable members, showing the actual prices put upon the fertilizers by the agents and the actual values to the farmer.

Mr Mauger

- Were they imported fertilizers?

Mr SYDNEY SMITH

- Some were imported and some were locally made, but, of course, we did not discriminate between the local and the imported articles.

Mr W H GROOM

- Was that done under an Act of Parliament?

Mr SYDNEY SMITH

- No ; I took the responsibility of doing it. I was threatened with an action for damages, but still I thought that in the interests of the farmers and agriculturists generally of our State, I was justified in doing what I did to protect them.

Mr W H GROOM

- We passed an Act of Parliament in Queensland.

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Mr SYDNEY SMITH

- And a very good thing, too; but we have been doing what I have described for many years, with excellent results, and we have been carrying out the work free of cost to the manner. Then again, we examined the different water supplies to see whether the water was suitable for irrigation purposes. Further, we also examined free of cost the various descriptions of fodder plants, in order that the farmers might have the best information as to their respective values. Then with regard to wheat and flour, a very important departure has been made, and I am glad to say that South Australia has followed our example, and Queensland, I understand, also has sanctioned the purchase of a mill, in order to carry out investigations similar to those in which we in New South Wales have been engaged. We found that it was important, and the millers also came to the same conclusion, that we should know how wheat would behave in the milling, and that we should also obtain other information with regard to its milling qualities. The matter had been largely overlooked, but we realized that it was just as important to know the milling value of wheat as to ascertain the value of milk by the butter test. We realized that the matter was one of importance to the millers, not only in our own State, but in other parts of the Commonwealth, and we made it a federal matter by inviting the millers in the various States to send samples for treatment, so that our investigations might help them in regard to this important branch of agriculture, as well as ourselves. The result was that samples of wheat were sent from the other States, and we had a small mill put up that was capable of treating wheat, even in small quantities of 1 lb. weight, in such a way as to enable the chemists to ascertain its value for breadmaking and its nourishing qualities. We have also been enabled to obtain information which has guided us in the selection of wheat for cross-fertilization, so that we may secure for further cultivation those wheats which are the best for milling purposes. This work was specially associated with the investigations that were referred to by the honorable member for Indi, as conducted by Mr. Farrer, at one or two of our experimental stations. The agricultural societies in the various parts of the State, also found it of great advantage to enlist our assistance in allotting prizes for the best kinds of wheat. We gave them an opportunity of having the various wheats tested, and in this way have afforded them information which I think in many cases has proved of immense value, not only to the agricultural societies but also to the farmers themselves, because it is important that the\* farmers should know exactly the qualities of the wheats they are planting. Then, again, bakers have found this department of ours of great benefit, because they have been enabled through it to obtain information as to the qualities of wheat for bread-making purposes. I mention these facts to show what is being done in the neighbouring State of New South Wales in order to advance agriculture in its various branches, and I have no hesitation in saying that in that particular department, which I have referred to as the chemistry division, the work done in dealing with manures, wheat, soils, and fodder plants, and in ascertaining the value of different products, has been of immense advantage to the farmers in our State.

It is very difficult to estimate the advantages which our farmers have derived, and will derive in the future, from this important branch of agricultural education. In addition, we felt it our duty to issue, free of cost, to every bona fide farmer in the States, our Agricultural Gazette. That is a work of which, if honorable members have ever had an opportunity of reading it, they will admit we have no reason to be ashamed ; in fact, we are very proud of it. It is a work that has been favorably referred to in America, England, and other countries which have long given close attention to agricultural questions. We have reason to be gratified that a work of this kind is received with much favour, not only in these States, but almost throughout the length and breadth of the world. We have given bursaries such as those I referred to just now, and I would recommend the Federal Government to adopt the same course if a federal department of agriculture is started. The system ought to be carried out in order that every year one of our best students may be sent to a college in France, Germany, America, or some other part of the world, and in order that by this means we may get information that will be of immense benefit to Australia. It seems to me that we are too slow. We introduce new machinery which we consider to be modern, but in some

cases it is out of date. Modern machinery is of great advantage in enabling farmers to compete in the markets of the world. But sometimes machinery, supposed to be most useful, is brought out here three or four years after it has been invented, and in the meantime new implements have taken its place in agriculture. Because of the want of a proper system of obtaining information of value to our farmers, we are not making that progress, I am sorry to say, in connexion with the export trade that we ought to do. We also give in our colleges bursaries to sons of farmers and other deserving persons who are unable to pay even the small fee charged at our agricultural colleges. Some people say that we ought to make the experimental stations pay their way; but while I believe that our experimental station at Wagga does pay its way, that is not what I look to altogether. I look to the importance of the information acquired and given to our farmer as of infinitely more value to the agriculture of Australia than the small amount we spend in assisting agricultural education. We look at this matter in a business way, and carry out perhaps thousands of experiments at the various experimental stations. Some of these experiments are most useful. They show that proposals which have been made, are of no value whatever, thus preventing hundreds of farmers failing in a similar direction. The Government, by having a properly equipped agricultural college or experimental station, is enabled to have the very best advice and information bearing on the various experiments, whereas a farmer, through want of means perhaps, can only carry out experiments in an incomplete way. The Government carry out the investigations in a perfect way, and show whether proposals made are failures or successes, and thus save our farmers and producers from in many cases spending thousands of pounds in useless experiments, which very often mean their ruin. Therefore in our agricultural colleges we give bursaries - not many, I am sorry to say, but as many as are required - to deserving sons of poor people who are unable to pay the required fees, and we educate those boys free of cost for two years and support them into the bargain. I have no hesitation in saying that this system has been of immense benefit to many deserving lads in our State. There is another question in connexion with which I have been the subject of a good deal of ridicule, and possibly it may appear a small matter to people who do not understand agriculture in all its branches. I refer now to the improvement of our herds.

Mr A McLEAN

- Surely that is not a small matter.

Mr SYDNEY SMITH

- It has been considered a small matter by many people, but I realized that it was not a small matter. Notwithstanding all the ridicule to which I was subject, I went on because I knew that underlying it was an important principle which, if acted upon, would ultimately be of immense benefit to our dairy farmers and others. We sent to the old country and obtained the very best herd that could be obtained, in order to improve the breed of dairy cattle in our State, and I have no hesitation in saying that, before ten years are passed, the people of that State, and I believe the other States, will realize the immense importance of this new branch of agricultural education.

Mr W H GROOM

- That has been done in Queensland. I

Mr SYDNEY SMITH

- I am glad Queensland is following the example of New South Wales.

Mr Kingston

- South Australia imported a bull long ago.

Mr SYDNEY SMITH

- South Australia may have imported one or two, but how long ago was that ?

Mr Kingston

- Six or seven years ago.

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Mr SYDNEY SMITH

- I consider that this was one of the best things we ever did in New South Wales to assist agricultural education. I know that in our State, in some of the dairies two cows were being kept where one of the proper breed would have been sufficient, and would have given better results. Unless steps of this kind are taken, how can we expect to secure that remunerative trade with Great Britain - the butter trade - and place ourselves in as good a position as Denmark, as we ought to do, because our natural resources are

greater than those of that country ? In many ways we are in a better position than Denmark to compete for the butter trade, but we cannot expect to compete unless we improve our herds and improve our methods in every way, not only in regard to the herds, but also in regard to the system of export and the handling of goods at home. As I said, I was subject to a great deal of criticism by many people who do not understand anything about agriculture, and who look on a matter of this kind as of very small importance. I dare say that some great men look on matters of this kind as of no moment, but to the bone and sinew of the country they are of great concern. More than 50 per cent, of the whole population of the world are engaged in agriculture. That shows the necessity of the Federal Government giving consideration to this important question. We have also established experimental farms and agricultural colleges, or at least one agricultural college on a large scale in our State. When this college was started, some narrow - minded people, as I would call them, objected to students coming from the other States, but the Government decided to open the college to all, being anxious to benefit the whole of the States. I am glad to say that we have had a number of students from both Queensland and Victoria. The late Minister for Agriculture in Queensland, Mr. Thynne, and Mr. McCulloch, an ex-Victorian Minister, sent their sons to this college, and we have had students from England, Japan, and South Africa.

Mr O'Malley

- And from America 1

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Mr SYDNEY SMITH

- I do not think we have had any students yet from America. I am glad to say our agricultural college has proved a great success. I mentioned a while ago that in some of the agricultural colleges in the United States, no more than about 15 per cent of those who took the agricultural course followed agricultural callings. In our State, I am pleased to say, 75 per cent of the students are following agricultural pursuits at the present time. That is a result which has not been achieved in any country I know of - and it is a result that is very satisfactory to us. I may be pardoned for referring to what other people think of us in regard to agriculture. I do so because of the reference made in the debate to the system in force in America. I have endeavoured to show that in many of the colleges in America the examination is too high for the ordinary farmer's son, and that in consequence a number of youths who ought to be admitted are excluded. In New South "Wales we prevent that by admitting any boy who has gone through the school system, is well behaved, and desires to follow agriculture. We "have not the high educational test which is required in America and which I do not believe in. In our own State about three or four years ago, when we started the Public Service Board, it was thought that we ought to adopt the American system in connexion with our colleges. That is to say, that we ought to have a professor - a man versed in various languages, and who could receive visitors - as the principal of the college. When I suggested Mr. Valder, who is a practical agriculturist, and who had proved his worth as a practical man, as a suitable man to take charge of the college, in view of the promotion of Mr. Thompson to the position of travelling expert, the Public Service Board at first declined to carry out the recommendation. The Public Service Board thought that we ought to have a professor who, as I said, was versed in languages, could receive visitors, and was a scientific man. My opinion of scientific men is very high, and in their own particular calling they are all right ; but take them away from their own investigations, and they may be altogether wrong, from a business point of view. To have appointed such a man would, in my opinion, have been a great mistake, and I am glad to say my recommendation met with success. I told my under-secretary that rather than appoint a professional man, such as I have described as the head of the Hawkesbury College, I would close the college in 24 hours, knowing that such an appointment would be a failure. While the Public Service Board has the right to nominate officers of a certain standard and with certain qualifications, I as Minister had the right to determine the policy of the Government, and the policy of the Government was to carry on a system of practical agriculture, so far as it could be taught in agricultural colleges. Mr. Valder was appointed, and I am glad to say that the chairman of the board admitted that the Government were right in the course they took, as the result has proved, in insisting on a practical man being placed in charge of the college. I may be pardoned for pointing out what other people think of our system. It is only right that honorable members should know what is being done, and should obtain such information as will help them in dealing with this very important matter. I have a copy of a letter which was sent to the Agent General of New South Wales by Dr. Morris, lecturer at the Botanical Gardens, in regard to the system of



agricultural education in that State. He says -

The energy with which agricultural affairs are being pushed forward in New South Wales is a striking object lesson to all parts of the Empire.

That is a very good reference to our work, but I shall come nearer home. Not long ago, the Government of Victoria, with a praiseworthy desire to remove the old system of agricultural education here, seeing that it was not a success, rightly appointed a Royal commission to inquire into this very important question. That commission went to New South Wales, and visited our various agricultural colleges and experimental stations. In looking through its report, I found this passage, which I may be pardoned for reading -

Summing up the results of our inspection and inquiries at Hawkesbury College and Farm, we are unanimous in the opinion that the system of education adopted, - together with the general organization of the institution, both in regard to class-room and farm work, are excellent. The institution is most certainly an object lesson for all the Australian colonies, and reflects credit upon the Department of Agriculture, the principal of the College, and the teaching staff. Our inquiries at the College extended over two days, and during this period we were able to thoroughly appreciate the fact that the institution has become highly popular with the agriculturists of New South Wales. Not the least important part of the work of the College is, in our opinion, the facilities afforded to growers all over the colony of taking advantage of the expert knowledge of the principal and his staff by means of inquiries by letter and by personal visits.

It is certain that the liberal and progressive policy of the New South Wales Department of Agriculture, not only in relation to the maintenance of educational establishments, but in the provision of instruction through the agency of expert officers, and suitable publications, has a marked influence upon the improvement and extension of the rural industries of the colony.

A well-known expert from India, writing the other day to the Department of Agriculture there, said - There is no doubt, in my opinion, that Mr. Farrer's work in New South Wales has already secured a large amount of success, and gives promise of much greater results in the future.

He closes his report by speaking in a very complimentary manner of the work undertaken in New South Wales on these lines, and urges his own Government to take up somewhat similar work. I admit that even our system is faulty. I think we ought to start earlier. Agriculture should be part of the curriculum of the public schools. So strongly was I impressed with this view, that I felt it my duty to strongly urge my colleague, the Minister for Public Instruction, to take steps to give the boys in our schools instruction in agricultural matters, and offered to start the system in districts. That is the proper way to begin if the work is to be carried out as it ought to be. It will take some time before the system can be perfected, because possibly many of the teachers do not know much about agriculture. Facilities ought to be given by the State departments of agriculture at their experimental colleges and farms for the schoolmasters in the various districts to get a training in agricultural pursuits. I invited the Department of Public Instruction in New South Wales to send two or three schoolmasters from an agricultural district, say, the New England district, to an agricultural college, and let them remain there from three to six months to acquire the groundwork of an agricultural education. By that means, and by the aid of experimental plots at various schools, they could obtain a lot of valuable information which, I think, would considerably help the work of the Agricultural department when it took the students at the age of sixteen years.

Mr O'Malley

- A good idea.

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Mr SYDNEY SMITH

- I am sorry to say that view was not taken. I regret it is taken in very few countries, but it ought to be taken. I trust that if a federal department of agriculture be formed, it will endeavour to induce the States to move in this direction. I admit that it would not come under our jurisdiction; but I have no doubt that the States, having regard to the importance of the subject, would receive kindly any suggestions made by the Federal Government. It is a question which ought to be considered from every point of view, and I trust that an addition will be made to the work carried out in the various States if a federal department of agriculture be formed. One of the most important things which could be done by a department of agriculture is the bringing about of uniformity in experiments. While we have six State departments of agriculture, with six different systems of experimental work, all engaged in trying to bring about the same

results, but employing six different agencies, we have a loss of energy as well as of money. If we could bring about uniformity in regard to many of the investigations, and arrange that they should be carried out in, say, one State, and for the Federal Government to assist all proper investigations, then I think much good would result. The Federal Government could insure uniformity in regard to experiments, and carry out the work of inspection. There is no doubt that with six departments carrying on six different systems, with one not knowing what was being carried on by the other, there must be a loss of energy and of money. The Federal Government exists to prevent the occurrence of this loss, and to endeavour to bring about uniformity in this respect, to save the States and the people of the Commonwealth from a useless expenditure. I believe that much of the work carried out in the various States could be concentrated, say at one college for one particular experiment, and at another for another ; and let the Federal Government, like the Federal Government in the United States, give to each State a certain sum to carry out certain investigations. At the same time it should insist upon knowing exactly what is being done by the State colleges, and should require information as to the work carried out. In the United States the Government also insist that each State Government shall send to the other full information on the different work which is carried out in order that what is done at one place shall be used for the benefit of all. There is another very important matter which, largely affects our trade. Some persons say that quarantine does not come under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government except in regard to human beings. But I think it embraces the quarantine of stock, fruit trees, fruits, and everything else. Let us consider the losses which have occurred in Queensland from the tick fever. Up to 1899 the losses from tick fever in that State amounted to about 334,000 head of cattle. In the Townsville district alone the stock-owners lost 232,000 head of cattle. At the present time there is a want of uniformity with regard to quarantine regulations, and in view of those great losses it is important that the States which have not been infected with tick fever should protect their farmers and stock-owners from an invasion. Take our dairy herds in the Richmond River district. If the fever came there, what would it mean ? It would mean ruination to all the dairy farmers. And if it came over to Victoria, the effect would be the same. We know very well that when the matter is left to one State, for fear of damaging its interests it very often conceals diseases which exist. To avoid that danger quarantine ought to be made a federal matter, because we are interested in protecting the whole of the States. If a State relaxes its quarantine regulations by allowing diseased cattle to come over its border, that may mean, as it has meant in Queensland, a serious loss to the dairy farmers and pastoralists. The quarantine regulations should be uniform, and the Federal Government should have supervision in order to protect the States against tick fever or any other disease. Again, take the case of pigs. In New South Wales we are extra careful. We prescribe that pigs shall be in quarantine for 60 days, whereas in Victoria and in Western Australia the period is 30 days. j After very complete inquiry the Government of New South Wales came to the conclusion that 60 days' quarantine should be prescribed for pigs. Supposing that through the want of uniformity, through carelessness, or through pigs not having sufficient time at the quarantine ground, the swine fever was introduced into our States, what might happen ? What happened in Denmark when the swine fever was introduced ? The Danes had a large and growing trade with Germany and other States, but immediately swine fever was known to exist in Denmark, the whole of the trade ceased, because the importation of pork from that country was prohibited. Again, take cattle. In New South Wales, the period of quarantine is 40 days, and in Western Australia 30 days. For sheep the period of quarantine is 30 days in our State from the United Kingdom, and from other countries 60 days ; whereas in Tasmania it is 30 days, and in Western Australia 14 days. We all know the great danger there is of scab being introduced among our sheep. In view of the importance of the industry, it is to our interest to see that proper regulations are enforced in order to prevent the possibility of any disease coming in. Again, take the importation of dogs. In New South Wales the period of quarantine is six months, and here I may say that I took the trouble to interview one of Pasteur's leading men, and asked what period was necessary to prevent the possibility of hydrophobia coming into our State. He advised me that a period of not less than six months was necessary ; and yet in Queensland they are agitating for a period of three months.

Mr Chapman

- There has been no case.

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Mr SYDNEY SMITH

- There has been no case because we have been very particular, and that is a reason why we ought to have uniform quarantine regulations. In Victoria they have introduced a system which I do not believe in, private quarantine. We all know the dangers of introducing a system of that kind. We know how it can be abused. At all events I hope that the Federal Government will be able to see their way clear to establish a department which will have supervision over the quarantine regulations. The same remark is 'applicable to our fruits. We know that diseases in fruits occur in different States. We must have a uniform law in regard to the prevention of the spread of those diseases, because if New South Wales permits infected fruit trees to remain on her borders, it is only a question of time when those diseases will find admission to Victoria and go right through the various States. I feel that- these are questions which ought to be taken up by the Federal

Government. I have already referred to the importance of paying more attention to the export trade. In view of the great possibilities before Australia, I think that we should take active steps to ascertain the movements of trade, the state of the markets of the world, the best places to which to ship, new methods of cultivation which are being employed, new products and new machinery, the condition of our produce upon arrival at its destination and when it is placed in the hands of the consumers. We should note defects, ascertain their causes, and see that, our products do not suffer through misrepresentation or jealousy, as they undoubtedly do at the present time. We must also keep a watchful eye over the "get up" and quality of our exports, ascertain whether our system of distribution is faulty, and if so, how it can be improved, and compare the facilities offered to us with those of our successful competitors. In these and many other ways the returns from our products could be augmented. Only the other day one exporter told me that he was getting -£d. per lb. more for his leather now on account of the improved system which had been adopted to bring the users of the leather in closer touch with those exporting it to the old country. He said that when he went to England he found that his leather was going into two or three different hands. Two or three different people were getting a profit, but by placing his leather directly with the manufacturer; he was able to get -Jd. per lb. more for it. That additional sum was of great importance to the producer. The same thing may be said with regard to our other products. In view of the great effort which is being made by all countries to improve the condition of agriculture in their midst, it behoves us to make our farmers acquainted with the latest methods of cultivation, to induce them to acquire information with regard to the "get up" of their products and the lessening of the cost of production, in order to enable them to capture the markets of the world. It behoves us to be alive, and to see whether- we cannot in some way improve our conditions. We have a very large and growing increase in our agricultural production and in other directions. I feel sure that it\* our Government will only take steps to appoint a representative - or a number of representatives, if it be necessary - in various parts of the world, to advise them as to the various improvements in agriculture, the latest machinery, the new products, and the best way to put them on the markets of the world, the result will be of incalculable benefit to the producers of our States. I hope that our Parliament will see fit to adopt a resolution to form a department of agriculture. I do not like the motion in its present form, because in my opinion it will only enable us to look to one country for information bearing on agricultural education. I think that we could with advantage follow many of the systems practised in France, Germany, and other countries. It is tying our hands too much to say that we shall only adopt a system on the lines laid down by the United States. Let us adopt what we think is suitable in their scheme to our conditions, and look round to see whether we cannot improve on the methods of dealing with these matters followed by other countries. I feel sure that we can do so.

Mr O'malley

- That is only in the phraseology.

Mr SYDNEY SMITH

- It is part of the motion which I think ought to be amended by striking out the words "on the same lines as those of the United States of America." In view of the fact that other honorable members desire to speak upon this question, it would not be fair of me to take up further time.

Mr Manifold

- Hear, hear.

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Mr SYDNEY SMITH

- My honorable friend may be desirous of speaking. I do not trouble the House very often, but I have ventured to trouble it upon this occasion, because if any man can claim to have given attention to the subject of agriculture it is myself. I have had to work myself, and I know what it is to live by agriculture. I know what the farmers require, and what ought to be done for them by a department of agriculture. I speak warmly upon this matter, because to a very large extent, I think that the prosperity of our agriculturists depends upon the system adopted by the States and by the Commonwealth Parliament. Whilst I know that some of our States may take exception to the action of this Parliament in making any proposals bearing upon agricultural education, I feel that if they are approached - as they no doubt will be approached - in a fair and conciliatory way, they will not place any obstructions whatever in the way of the Federal Government, but will assist them to perfect their scheme. If we all work unitedly together - as I hope we shall - we will place agriculture on the highest pedestal as regards its teaching and improvement, and I feel sure that a great work will be achieved, and splendid results will accrue to the people of United Australia.

Mr SKENE

- I understand that an arrangement has been made to adjourn this debate at half -past three o'clock. It is now within five minutes of that time, and I am quite sure that I could not put any portion of the remarks which I desire to make before honorable members in that time. I therefore move -

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to ; debate adjourned.

#### LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Resolved(on motion by Mr. Chapman) -

That leave of absence for one fortnight be granted to the honorable member for Brisbane (Mr. Macdonald-Paterson) on the ground of ill-health.

#### KANAKAS IN QUEENSLAND

Ordered(on motion by Mr. Pi esse) -

That there be laid before this House a return showing - 1. The number of crimes committed by kanakas in Queensland during the last ten years ; serious offences to be placed in a separate class and the name of each such offence given ; also a statement of the percentage which each class of such crimes bears to the number of kanakas in Queensland. The same information for male adults of white race in Queensland. 2. The number of serious crimes during the same period the perpetrators of which have remained undiscovered. 3. The number of kanakas resident in Queensland who have continuously resided there for more than six years.

#### SELECT COMMITTEE ON COINAGE

Resolved-(on motion by Mr. G. B. Edwards) -

That a message be sent to the Senate requesting that leave be given to Senator J. T. Walker to attend and be examined by the Select Committee on Coinage appointed by this House.

#### ABORIGINAL INHABITANTS OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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Mr MAHON

- I move -

That, with a view to determine the expediency or otherwise of amending section 51, sub-section (26), of the Constitution Act by the omission of the words " other than the aboriginal races of any State," it is, in the opinion of this House, desirable that a Royal Commission should be appointed to investigate and report -

On the condition of the aboriginal inhabitants of Western "Australia north of the 30th parallel of latitude.

On the system by which aboriginal natives are assigned and indentured to white employers.

On the administration" of justice in the lower courts of Western Australian so far as the aboriginal inhabitants of that State are or have been affected thereby.

That the foregoing resolution be conveyed by address to His Excellency the Governor-General.

At this late hour, I shall endeavour to be as brief and concise as possible in submitting this motion to the consideration of honorable members. I take it at the outset that the principal objection which can be urged against the motion is that the Commonwealth has no right to interfere in any matter in which it is excluded from interference by the Constitution. But I should like to point out that the motion is simply for an inquiry

to ascertain whether or not it is desirable that the Constitution should be amended so as to allow the Commonwealth to deal with the aboriginal race of any State. I am induced to take this action principally by reason of the fact that at none of the Conventions at which the Constitution was fashioned - and I have gone through the debates very carefully - was the question of the control of the aboriginal races by the Commonwealth ever discussed. Therefore I consider that possibly the exclusion of this question from our control is simply due to the idea of some draftsman, and that it is a fair question for this Parliament to consider whether we should not now amend the Constitution, or, at any rate, make an inquiry with a view to bringing under our Parliament the management of the aboriginal races. I believe that the Prime Minister in speaking a few days ago, expressed himself as disinclined to admit that the Commonwealth Parliament should have anything to do with this question. But I would point out that this Parliament at times may have duties to discharge much higher than mere bread and butter questions. In this particular matter the reputation of the whole people of Australia is at stake. It is not a pleasant thing that the newspapers of the world should repeatedly contain references to slavery under the British flag in Western Australia. I have here an extract from the

London Truth of the 20th June last, in which the following occurs : -

Correspondence in the Melbourne press is indicative of a healthier opinion on the subject of the ill-treatment of the aborigines in Western Australia. Writer after writer has testified from personal observation to the ruthless oppression of the black population. The natives "indented" or "assigned" to squatters are in the position of slaves, and in the sparsely inhabited bush their taskmasters can use the knout practically unhindered. . . . The Age expresses the belief that many outrages upon the aborigines are allowed to pass unpunished and unexposed, and calls upon the new Commonwealth Parliament, as a duty which it owes to itself and to civilization at large, to institute a searching inquiry into the whole question. Assuredly the Commonwealth cannot better begin its career than by improving the lot of the dwindling native race.

Then, again, the London Daily News in March of the present year published a letter from a correspondent who drew attention to the flogging to death of three natives at Bendhu, and gave a lurid picture of the cruelty inflicted on the victims, specially quoting the remarks of the Chief Justice of Western Australia, before whom the case was tried, and who said that the crime was one of the most ferocious, cowardly, and brutal ever brought under his notice. I think that as these reports have got into the papers of the world and the matter has been discussed outside of Australia, it is eminently the duty of the Commonwealth Parliament to take the matter up. It may be objected that this is a duty which should be remitted to the Parliament of Western Australia. But I would point out that the Parliament of Western Australia is unfortunately not even yet a representative Parliament, inasmuch as one electorate - to take a particular instance, that of East Kimberley - having only 107 electors, returns a member to the Assembly, whereas in the electorate of Kalgoorlie it takes about 5,000 persons to return a member. I have no wish to say anything disparaging or disrespectful of any other Parliament, but we are not here to gloss over any facts, and I take it that the Western Australian Legislature does not truly represent the people. Then, again, if the Western Australian Parliament did appoint a commission to inquire into this question, I believe that the verdict, whatever it might be, would not command that universal respect which the verdict of an independent Legislature, such as this, would secure from the outside world. It was pointed out many years ago by the Chief

Justice of Western Australia, who was then acting as Administrator of the Government; that an inquiry should be held into this matter by some independent body. I have here a despatch from Sir Alexander Onslow, addressed to the Secretary of State for the Colonies on 18th October, 1895, A dispute had arisen between the Aborigines Board and the Government, and the Administrator made the following statement for the information of the Secretary of State for the Colonies : -

The objects which the members of the Board have had in view in framing their memorandum is again to draw attention to their previously expressed opinion to the effect that it is necessary to "hold an inquiry into the working of the Board and of the distribution of the fund at its disposal" for the purpose of "ascertaining accurately the status of the aborigines of the colony, and their relations to the settlers from an external point of view ....

Further the language of the memorandum . . . would seem to show that the Board would wish the inquiry to be held by persons not connected with the colony ....

I would direct the special attention of honorable members to this statement -

There can, I think, be no doubt that a thoroughly independent and impartial investigation into the condition of the aboriginal natives of the colony, followed by an authoritative report thereon, would be of very great value at the present crisis of the history of this question.

Now that was the opinion of the Administrator of the Government in 1895.- I may say that the Imperial Government all through has shown a disinclination to hand over to the Western Australian Parliament the absolute control of the natives. Furthermore the Imperial Government has consistently shown very great consideration for the natives, and I can hardly understand why, in founding this Constitution, this question was never considered, because if the honorable gentlemen who are responsible for the Constitution had looked at the instructions which Her Majesty gave Sir John Young, as far back as 1861, when he was Governor of New South Wales, they would have seen the following, among other instructions : -

And it is our further will and pleasure that you do to the utmost of your power promote religion and education amongst the native inhabitants of our said colony (Sew South Wales), and of the lands and islands thereto adjoining ; and that you do especially take care to protect them in their persons and in the free enjoyment of their possessions ; and that you do by all lawful means prevent and restrain all violence and injustice which may in any manner be practised or ' attempted against them, and that you take such measures as may appear to be necessary to further their conversion to the Christian faith and their advancement in civilization."

As I have stated, all through, the Imperial Government has shown great anxiety for the welfare of the aboriginal natives, in proof of which I refer to legislation passed by the Imperial authorities before Western Australia became an independent colony. Every one of the Acts assented to by the Governor, as representing the Queen, show that disposition. If we go back to the first law passed in 1841, when Mr. John Hutt was Governor, we see that the preamble declares that British law is inapplicable to aboriginals, since they are ignorant of any future state of rewards and punishments. Then it goes on to dispense with the usual form of oath, and allows aboriginals to make an affirmation of truth, &c. The next Act simply extended that law, but later on certain enactments were assented to by the Governor to protect aboriginal girls against anything in the way of seduction or attack. Furthermore, the first comprehensive Act that was passed in connexion with the aboriginals was assented to by Governor Weld, and is dated 1873. That marked the beginning of the system of hiring out natives for pearling and other industries, and the agreements provided for were hedged round with all kinds of restrictions and safeguards for the unfortunate natives. That Act provides that the agreements shall be witnessed by a justice of the peace or other person appointed by the Governor, that the natives shall understand and assent to the agreement, that they shall be perfectly free and under no sort of fear, coercion, or constraint, that they shall not be engaged for more than twelve months' service, that they must be males and physically fit for the work, and that the last person engaging a native must return him to his district. The penalties for any breach of the agreement are very severe. Several other Acts were subsequently passed, and all show the same solicitude for the natives. Later on it became necessary to distinctly provide by legislation that no justice of the peace interested in any matter of complaint should sit on the bench for the hearing of such complaint. This unique provision is found in an Act passed in 1883,, when Sir Napier Broome was Governor.

Mr Crouch

- Surely there was no necessity for a statute to provide for that.

Mr MAHON

- Yes. Section 4 of the Act 47 Vict. No. 8 provides that a resident magistrate and one justice of the peace may try a native for misdemeanour and give him two years. Section 5 excludes cases of murder, wounding with intent, rape, burglary with assault and intent to murder, these being remitted to the Supreme Court; section 6 allows any resident magistrate or two justices of the peace to give a native one year's imprisonment for offences under section 4, and section 7 allows one justice of the peace to do what is provided for in section 6 if there is no other justice of the peace within 20 miles.

Mr Barton

- If a magistrate trying such a case were interested, the Supreme Court would stop the whole proceedings at once.

Mr MAHON

- But the Prime Minister scarcely realizes the difficulty of remitting cases, say, from Roeburne down to

Perth ; it is practically impossible.

Mr Barton

- No doubt.

Mr MAHON

- The next Act that I wish to quote was passed in 1892, two years after responsible government came into force, distinctly omitted the provision that justices of the peace must not try cases in which they are interested. As soon as the colony became a self-governing colony it proceeded to make that enactment. This was the first time that the law provided for the whipping of natives. It not only allows natives to be whipped, but alters the principal Act by giving any single magistrate power to imprison a native for two years. Previously to that it required a resident magistrate and an honorary justice to deal with such cases. Under this Act of 1892 one justice may imprison a native for two years ; and, in the case of males, order a whipping up to 25 strokes.

Mr KING O'MALLEY

- And they did it too.

Mr MAHON

- If the offender is apparently not more than sixteen years of age, the court can order him to be whipped to the extent of not more than twelve strokes.

Mr Barton

- Did the honorable member say there was power to inflict strokes on a female ?

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Mr MAHON

- There is no power to inflict strokes on a female. In the case of males the punishment was to be imprisonment with 25 lashes, but if the offender were apparently under 16 years he was to get no more than twelve strokes. The whipping was to be inflicted before a justice of the peace, and might take place, I presume, in the presence of the individual justice who tried the offence.

This House need scarcely be told that in a sparsely-populated country like Western Australia justices of the peace are not found under every bush. Honorable members will see the attitude of the Imperial Government if they will give their attention for a moment to the legislation which was passed in 1886, when Sir Napier Broome was Governor of the colony. Under that Act was established the Aborigines Protection Board. The extraordinary provision was put in the Act that the board was to be appointed and the money expended solely under the control of the Governor of the colony ; that is to say, the Governor's responsible advisers were excluded from any power either in the appointment of the board or the administration of the funds. The duties of the board were to apply the public money in distributing clothes, medicine, rations, and so on. From that dates the period during which natives, males and females, have been indentured or assigned to squatters. The system of contracts established by that Act provided that the natives so assigned must be over fourteen years of age, and must understand the language of the contract. The contract must be free and voluntary, and be for a period of not over twelve months. The employer on his part had to provide substantial, good, and sufficient rations, clothing, medicine, and attendance when practicable - "when practicable" it will be observed - and must give the native 30 days' leave in each year. The Act also gave power to a resident magistrate to take the children, either aboriginals or half-castes, and apprentice them until the age of 21 years under the usual penalties. A single justice of the peace was allowed latitude to imprison for one month any aborigine not decently clothed from neck to knee, and found in a town which he refused to quit forthwith. In 1892, immediately after the adoption of responsible government, legislation against these unfortunate natives began to wear an aspect of severity. By another Act passed on the 18th March, 1892, any aborigine refusing or neglecting to work, or absenting himself from work, or deserting -without leave, or for any other breach of the contract, was guilty of a criminal offence, punishable by three months' imprisonment with or without hard labour. The employer for breach of the contract was not to be imprisoned, but might be fined up to £20.

Mr Higgins

- Imprisonment for breaking a contract ?

Mr MAHON

- There was imprisonment for the native who broke the contract, but not for the employer. That is to say,

the employer was to be allowed to break a contract and pay a monetary penalty ; but if a native broke the contract, he not being worth anything, was sent to gaol. In January, 1893, also after the establishment of responsible government, and when Sir William Robinson was Governor of the colony, another Act was passed. Up to that time the word "court," whenever used in these Acts, meant a resident magistrate and another magistrate ; but by the Act of 1893 " court "was defined to mean any single magistrate sitting alone. The Act omitted to provide that a justice of the peace interested in the subject-matter of the complaint should be ineligible to sit and adjudicate. The power originally given to a resident magistrate and another magistrate was to imprison a native for one year; that was enlarged to two years, and then -by the Act of 1893 the power was still further extended to enable a single magistrate to imprison for three years. If there was a previous conviction against the native, the magistrate might extend the term of imprisonment even to five years, with or without a whipping.

Mr Kingston

- No judgment by an interested man would hold good.

Mr MAHON

- If the Minister for Trade and Customs had been here a few minutes ago he would have heard me say, in reply to a similar observation by the Prime Minister, that it would be practically impossible to appeal to the Supreme Court against a magistrate's decision, in the case of a native tried at Roeburne Derby, or any of the places away up north.

Mr Kingston

- An interested man should be struck off the rolls for sitting.

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Mr MAHON

- Before I finish I think the right honorable gentleman will be satisfied that a lot of the magistrates over there ought to have been struck off the rolls. Section 4 of the Act of 1893 provides that a " copy of any previous conviction purporting to be signed by a justice of the peace or police officer not under the rank of sergeant " shall " upon proof of identity of offender" - legal members of the House will be able to appreciate this - be sufficient evidence of such conviction " without proof of signature or official character of person appearing to have signed the same." That is to say, a native convicted at Derby, or presumed to be convicted at Derby, can on a certificate purporting to be signed by a justice of the peace or sergeant of police be treated in Perth as a person who has already been convicted. It may be objected that the people concerned do not wish for this proposed Royal commission. I would like to say here that I have a perfectly open mind in regard to these charges which have been made against settlers. These men have had a very hard time. They have gone out into the wilderness and faced privation and death in a great many forms, and are deserving of every sympathy. I feel perfectly sure that the natives have been generously and fairly treated by a great many of them. I should be very sorry indeed if this House were to get an impression from my speech that I believe all the charges that have been levelled against the squatters in . the north-western portion of Western Australia. On the contrary, I may inform honorable members that I was talking some time ago to a gentleman who was stationed for some thirteen years in Wyndham, and who knows the country in which the wild natives are particularly dangerous and troublesome, namely, the Kimberley country. He told me privately - he is a Government officer who has no interest one way or the other in misrepresenting the matter - that the cases of cruelty were very rare so far as he could make out, and that on the whole the natives were very fairly treated. That I put on the other side. But at the same time, before I touch on the charges made, I would like to read a statement in regard to this demand for a Royal commission made by Mr. Frank Connor, who represents East Kimberley in the Western Australian Parliament, and who intimately knows the district where a good many of these troubles take place with the natives. Mr. Connor is not opposed in any shape or form to the appointment of a Royal commission. Speaking to a reporter of the West Australian on 24th June, 1901, he said : -

Some of these writers (on aboriginal questions) have urged that a Royal commission should be appointed to inquire into the condition of the blacks up in the north. No one more than I would welcome the appointment of such a commission, for its investigations would undoubtedly prove that the East Kimberley settlers have been maligned. There may be a few exceptions, but I am speaking of the majority.

That being the opinion of the parliamentary representative of the people concerned, I do not think any



person could say that it would be unfair from the point of view of the settlers to appoint this commission. I think I may now refer to charges which have been made, not by idle or irresponsible people, but by people in very high positions in Western Australia, in regard to the cruelties practised on these natives. First of all, I would like to read the opinion of the Anglican Bishop of Perth, Dr. Riley, who paid a visit to the north some years ago. When he returned he was asked by the Governor of the colony, Sir Gerard Smith, to give a report on his trip ; and on the 21st July, 1899, this is what Bishop Riley said, amongst other things : -

One cause, perhaps the greatest cause in my opinion, of the cruelty is the system by which natives are indentured to settlers. This is only a form of slavery, as the natives, for the most part, do not know what it means, and for the rest, do not dare not to sign the agreement. As soon as a man is indentured he is absolutely under the power of his master. ... I think that unless a policeman is really attacked he should not be allowed to shoot at natives.

The last sentence, of course, has reference to the dispersal of natives by the police. It will be noticed that Bishop Riley uses very strong language, saying that the indenture system " is only a form of slavery." I may say that within the present year, since Bishop Riley used that expression, statements have been published, and are not denied, that the slavery goes further than the mere fact that the aborigines work for the squatters for nothing. I have here a statement, published in Perth not very long ago. I do not wish to give names, but this statement refers to squatters having employed their natives for the benefit of others, and to have charged the latter for their services. The extract reads -

The item referred to above is an extract from a formidable contra account furnished to the saddle firm, and runs as follows : - 13 days' work of native women at 2s. 6d..... £1 12 6 2 days' work of native & boy, at 2s. 6d..... £0 5 0

Let it be understood that the blacks who did the work are simply commandeered by the squatter. The only recompense they receive is the usual starvation allowance. If they attempt to run away the squatters, who are all justices of the peace, act in concert - or rather by -conspiracy. They assign the blacks to one another as freely as if they were beasts of burden, and if they attempt to escape from their illegally appointed masters, they are mercilessly flogged.

Mr Higgins

- Who says that ?

Mr MAHON

- That is published in a Perth paper called the Sunday Times.

Mr Kingston

- Does the paper give the name of the authority?

Mr MAHON

- The newspaper is the authority.

Mr Higgins

- Was that Mr. Vosper's paper ?

Mr MAHON

- It was published about two months ago.

Mr E SOLOMON

- Mr. Vosper has been dead some time.

Mr MAHON

- The newspaper extract goes on -

The blacks in the north-west rarely receive any money whatever. They are forced to work for any person to whom the squatter chooses to let them, and the latter pockets the result of their labours, as in this case, and slings them a morsel of food to starve on. If this be not slavery pure and simple, we must admit we are ignorant of the meaning of the word.

But I do not want to read newspaper extracts, when I have matter of equal import from people high in position. Dr. Riley, in the present year, when visiting Melbourne, wrote, as follows to a gentleman, who has placed the letter, which is dated 17th May, at my disposal : -

You will be glad to hear that I am always fighting the battle of the natives with those in authority. . . .

It is still necessary, apparently, to fight the battle of the poor natives with those in authority. Bishop Riley goes on -

Things are much better in the West now. No one dare boast of his evil deeds. Six years ago, when I came, it was quite common to hear it.

What I am now about to read is not the irresponsible attack of a newspaper, but occurs in a long communication from the Governor, Sir Gerard Smith, to the Secretary of State for the Colonies on 19th May, 1896 :-

There can be no doubt in the mind of any reasonable and humane man that we are bound to do all we can for the 15,000 or more natives among us, whose means of livelihood will be destroyed, whom day by day we are driving back further and further into remote spots, to whom we deny the privilege of sharing in paid labour on the - mine fields, whose well and water soakages are exhausted by the incursion of large parties of explorers with horses and camels, and whom we Dog and imprison with a severity out of all proportion to the nature of the offence committed when they yield to a temptation, induced by starvation or thirst.

Mr Watson

- May 1 be allowed, sir,' as we have reached the hour at which the House usually adjourns on a Friday, to suggest that the honorable member, with concurrence, might be allowed to continue. his speech on a date to be fixed.

Mr.SPEAKER.- If the honorable member for Coolgardie desires to continue his speech on a later day, it will be competent for him to ask leave and for the House to grant it.

Mr MAHON

- I feel deeply obliged to the honorable member for Bland and to yourself, sir, because I could not begin until after half-past three o'clock, and I have hardly had time to introduce the matter. I ask leave to be allowed to continue my speech on the 6th September.

Leave granted.

Debate adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT

Friday Sitting : Order of Business: Parliamentary Library

Motion (by Mr. Barton) proposed -

That the House do now adjourn.

Mr THOMAS

- May I ask the Prime Minister whether he will make some arrangement to meet earlier on a Friday or to abolish the Friday sitting. For the House to meet at two o'clock and adjourn at four, seems to me rather a farce. We ought either to meet at ten o'clock or to abolish the sitting, so. as to enable us to go back to Sydney on Thursday.

Mr SYDNEY SMITH

- I wish to bring under the notice of the head of . the Government a paragraph in the press this morning respecting a dispute between the State Government and the Federal Government over the control of our Library. I understand that we are paying the officers of the Library, and that there is an objection raised to the Federal Government having any control-

Minister for External Affairs

Mr BARTON

. - I can give the honorable member an explanation which will save him from the necessity of going on.

Mr SYDNEY SMITH

- Verywell.

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Mr BARTON

- The paragraph referring to the dispute does not cover the ground. There is an arrangement made, verbally between the Premier of Victoria and myself that the whole of this matter shall be inquired into, at a conference between the Speakers and the Presidents of the two Parliaments. Unfortunately, while there has been an informal conversation, the necessary authorities to the Speaker and President of the State Parliament have not yet reached their hands, but when they do the whole of these matters will be taken into consideration together, and I have no doubt with a satisfactory result.

Mr. SYDNEYSMITH (Macquarie). - I do not desire to continue the debate but only to suggest, the advisableness of having the matter settled as soon as possible, because the present state of affairs only

tends to create feeling where none should exist.' In the interests of both Members of Parliament and of the officers of the Library an agreement should be come to without delay.

Mr Barton

- I am doing my best in that direction.

Mr A McLEAN

- I would like to draw the attention of the Prime Minister to the great importance of many of the measures on the business-paper. It is desirable that the fullest opportunity should be afforded to honorable members to read and consider the provisions of the measures to be proceeded with from time to time. If, at the adjournment of the House each night, the Government could see their way to inform honorable members of the business to be taken next, I am sure that they would come here much better prepared to deal with it than they do. That practice was followed in the Victorian Parliament, and I think it is a very good one.

Mr BARTON

- On most occasions at the close of the evening on the motion for adjournment I have indicated what the business would be for the next sitting. On one or two occasions I have been prompted by a question, and on other occasions I have done it voluntarily. Next Tuesday we propose to take the consideration in committee of the Governor-General's message, which should be only a matter of a minute, and next the third reading of the State Laws and . Records Recognition Bill, which is a formal matter. Then my honorable colleague, the Minister for Trade and Customs, wishes to finish the consideration of the Customs Bill in committee, and after that, my honorable friend, Sir Philip Fysh, proposes to move the second reading of the Post and Telegraph Bills, so as to give honorable members an opportunity to consider its scope, but not to continue the debate. It will, of course, be open to honorable members to have a reasonable adjournment so as to make themselves well informed on the Bill. Then we propose to take the second reading of the Beer Excise Bill, which is a measure of much less difficulty, and may, I fancy, be proceeded with from second reading at once. As to the Friday sitting, I would ask the honorable member for the Barrier - I do not think he was here at the time - to look at the reply I gave to a question on that subject one day this week. I think he will find that I explained the whole position so far as it affects the Government. Nevertheless, I shall give every consideration to the representation- he has made.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

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16:10:00

House adjourned at 4.10 p.m.