

did hope that honorable members would recognise that questions of this nature should not—unless the emergency was pressing, and the information was absolutely authoritative—be brought before the House and in that way given publicity to.

Mr. DUFFY observed that he could not quite agree with the honorable member for Normanby. If there were rumours abroad, it was much better that they should be stated on the floor of the House, so that an authoritative answer might be given to them. There were various rumours afloat now. They might or might not be true—the public could not tell whether they were true or not—but if an honorable member took the responsibility of calling attention to them on the floor of the House, the Minister could make inquiries. If there was a complete answer the honorable gentleman could give it, and the country would be satisfied.

PROCLAMATION OF THE COMMONWEALTH.

Mr. METHVEN observed that the proclamation of the Commonwealth was to take place in Sydney on the 1st of January next, and was to be made the occasion of a great national celebration. There were a large number of gentlemen who rendered valuable service to the public without fee or reward—he alluded to the members of the municipal councils—and some of them might feel disposed to go to Sydney to be present at the celebrations. He desired to ask the honorable gentlemen representing the Government if they would be disposed to recommend to their colleagues that free passes should be granted to municipal councillors who desired to visit Sydney on the occasion of the proclamation of the Commonwealth? If such action were taken by the Government of Victoria, he had no doubt that the Government of New South Wales would be prepared to meet them and to grant similar facilities. As honorable members knew, visitors to Sydney were, as a rule, much better treated than visitors to Melbourne.

Mr. MCGREGOR.—I shall have pleasure in consulting my colleagues with regard to the matter to which the honorable member has alluded, and giving him an answer on some subsequent occasion.

The House adjourned at five minutes to five o'clock, until Tuesday, December 4.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

Tuesday, December 4, 1900.

The PRESIDENT took the chair at fifteen minutes to five o'clock p.m., and read the prayer.

CENSUS ACT 1900 AMENDMENT BILL.

The Hon. W. H. EMBLING, by leave, moved, without notice, for leave to introduce a Bill to amend the Census Act 1900.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was then brought in, and read a first time.

REPRESENTATION OF GIPPSLAND AND WESTERN PROVINCES.

The PRESIDENT announced that since the House last adjourned he had issued writs for the election of members to serve for the Gippsland Province and the Western Province respectively, in the place of the Honorable W. McCulloch and the Honorable A. Wynne, who had severally accepted offices of profit under the Crown.

ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE.

The Hon. E. J. CROOKE said that, as the re-election of the Solicitor-General and the Minister of Defence was being opposed, and the polling would not take place until Wednesday next, and the writs would not be returnable until Tuesday week, he begged to move—

That the House, at its rising, adjourn until this day fortnight, at half-past four o'clock p.m.

The Hon. J. M. DAVIES stated that he would like to proceed with the Insolvency Law Amendment Bill, the first reading of which he moved on the 14th ult., before the late Government was defeated. He understood that the present Government did not intend to take up the measure, and he would therefore like to go on with it. He believed that it would not take the Council long to deal with the Bill.

The PRESIDENT.—I may point out to the honorable member that it is not usual for business to be proceeded with in the absence of responsible Ministers of the Crown. Of course, it is entirely a matter for the House, if the members representing the Government have no objection.

The Hon. J. M. DAVIES said he remembered that when Sir Frederick Sargood and he joined the Munro Government, the Legislative Council appointed a member of the Railways Standing Committee before they were re-elected. As the measure would be a private member's Bill, and there were two members of the Government present, Ministers ought to have no objection to his going on with the Bill. It was a measure that had previously passed the Council, and if it was not proceeded with now there would be no chance of putting it through, because the House would have very little time to sit after the writs for the Gippsland and Western Provinces were returned.

The PRESIDENT.—Of course, it is a matter entirely for the members representing the Government to determine; but I would point out, in reply to the honorable member, that there is a difference between the election of a member of the Railways Standing Committee and the passing of a Bill to amend an existing law. The appointment of a member of the Railways Standing Committee merely carried out an existing Act of Parliament, whereas the Bill the honorable member desires to proceed with is to amend an Act already on the statute-book. The honorable member will see the difference. However, if the Ministers present do not object to the Bill being dealt with, the House will probably not object.

The Hon. E. J. CROOKE remarked that, as far as he was concerned, he would leave the matter entirely in the hands of the House. Of course, he could not take any responsibility whatever in regard to it, but he would point out that if the Bill passed the Council he did not think there was the slightest possibility of its being dealt with in another place this session. As the Council would not meet again until the 18th inst., there would be only three or four sitting days left before the end of the session, and he therefore understood and sympathized with the honorable member's desire to proceed with the Bill immediately.

Sir HENRY CUTHBERT asked if it would not be advisable to pass the standing orders at the present sitting?

The Hon. E. J. CROOKE said he thought it would be better to postpone the passing of the standing orders until the Solicitor-General and the Minister of Defence were re-elected.

The Hon. J. M. DAVIES said he presumed that the standing orders would provide for precedence being given to private members' business on Wednesdays. If the members representing the Government desired him not to proceed with the Insolvency Bill until the first Wednesday sitting, he would not object.

Sir FREDERICK SARGOOD observed that the Bill Mr. Davies now desired to proceed with was a measure which the Council passed last session, and he did not suppose there would be the slightest difficulty in putting it through all its stages within a very few minutes. But, as it was a legal measure, it appeared to him that it would probably be wiser for the Council not to proceed with the Bill in the absence of the present Solicitor-General. If it were a measure of a different class he would be prepared to support Mr. Davies' suggestion that the House should put it through at once, but, under the circumstances, he thought it would be only fair to the Solicitor-General if Mr. Davies did not press the House to deal with it at the present sitting.

The motion was agreed to.

The House adjourned at six minutes to five o'clock, until Tuesday, December 18.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

Tuesday, December 4, 1900.

The SPEAKER took the chair at half-past four o'clock p.m.

NEW MEMBERS.

The SPEAKER informed the House that since the adjournment of the Assembly, on the 20th ult., he had issued writs for the election of members to serve for the following electoral districts:—St. Kilda, in the place of Sir George Turner; Bogong, in the place of Mr. I. A. Isaacs; Clunes and Allandale, in the place of Mr. Peacock; Richmond, in the place of Mr. Trenwith; Rodney, in the place of Mr. Morrissey; Dunolly, in the place of Mr. Duggan; Stawell, in the place of Mr. Burton; and Geelong, in the place of Mr. Gurr; who had severally accepted offices of profit under the Crown. He had received returns showing that Sir George Turner had been elected for St. Kilda, Mr. Peacock for Clunes and Allandale, Mr. Trenwith for

Richmond, Mr. Morrissey for Rodney, Mr. Duggan for Dunolly, Mr. Burton for Stawell, and Mr. Gurr for Geelong. He had not yet received the return to the writ issued for the election of a member for Bogong, but he had received a telegram from the returning officer informing him that Mr. I. A. Isaacs had been duly elected.

Sir George Turner, Mr. I. A. Isaacs, Mr. Peacock, Mr. Trenwith, Mr. Morrissey, Mr. Duggan, Mr. Burton, and Mr. Gurr were then introduced and sworn.

ADJOURNMENT.

Sir GEORGE TURNER.—In view of the demonstration which has taken place to-day, and the fact that, in any case, we should have to adjourn very shortly, I think it would meet the wishes and convenience of honorable members if I did not attempt to proceed with business to-day. Under these circumstances, I beg to move—

That the House, at its rising, adjourn until to-morrow, at four o'clock p.m.

The motion was agreed to.

The House adjourned at twenty-four minutes to five o'clock.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

Wednesday, December 5, 1900.

The SPEAKER took the chair at half-past four o'clock p.m.

REPRESENTATION OF BOGONG.

The SPEAKER announced the receipt of a return to the writ issued by him for the election of a member to serve for the electoral district of Bogong, showing that Mr. I. A. Isaacs had been elected.

BUILDING STONE AT BAIRNSDALE.

Mr. FOSTER asked the Minister of Public Works if, in view of the deposit of splendid building stone near Bairnsdale, he would take steps, by constructing a tramway, to make the stone available for general trade purposes, even if it were necessary to charge a small royalty that should equal the interest on the cost of the work?

Mr. TRENWITH.—I shall probably be able to answer this question more fully at a future date. At present we have not sufficient information as to the extent and character of the stone deposit to enable

us to say whether it would be desirable to make a tramway as suggested. In any case, we shall, I think, have to obtain parliamentary sanction.

WOOMELANG TO MILDURA RAILWAY.

Mr. LANGDON asked the Minister of Railways the following questions:—

1. Whether it is a fact that the route originally proposed through which the first part of the Woomelang to Mildura line was to run, and which was reported as first-class land, has since proved to be a series of impassable white sandhills, and, in order to save the prospective line to Mildura from being buried in drift sand, the departmental surveyors have been compelled to deviate several miles in a north-westerly direction towards Tiega, thus making the distance much longer?

2. Is it now considered an impossibility to construct this line at a cost of £2,000 per mile?

Mr. TRENWITH.—With regard to the first question, the Engineer-in-Chief informs me that the route is being tested by a trial survey. So far, the survey has only extended about 30 miles. In that distance the surveyors have discovered no necessity for any considerable deviation, but it will be impossible to say definitely what deviation will be required until the whole 70 miles has been traversed. Question No. 2 will also depend for a final answer upon the more complete survey. At present, the Engineer-in-Chief is unable to say whether it will be impossible to construct the line at a cost of £2,000 per mile.

POST-OFFICE EMPLOYÉS.

Mr. McKENZIE asked the Postmaster-General if he intended to give effect to the recommendation of the Anomalies Board in respect to temporary employes by providing that in future they should be employed from half-year to half-year, without limitation, should their services be required? He said that a number of men were employed temporarily in the General Post-office for three periods of three months each in succession. After that they had to stand out for a time. Those men were in an unfortunate position in view of the approach of federation, and they were anxious to know what action the Postmaster-General intended to take in regard to them. Was it the intention of the Government to carry out the recommendation of the Anomalies Board?

Mr. GURR.—The matter is now under the consideration of the Cabinet.

THE RETURN OF AUSTRALIAN TROOPS.

USE OF PARLIAMENT HOUSE STEPS.

Mr. BENNETT said he desired to bring under the notice of the Premier the system that was adopted with reference to the sending out of invitations to Members of Parliament for the ceremony that took place on the previous day, on the occasion of the return of members of the Australian contingents from South Africa. It would be admitted that every Member of Parliament should receive equal treatment, but whilst some honorable members were point-blank refused extra tickets, they were given to others. Each honorable member received a ticket, for which he did not think they need thank the Government, inviting him to attend with two ladies on Parliament House steps, for the purpose of witnessing the procession. It appeared that in many cases extra tickets were granted. He saw gentlemen on the Parliament House steps who had nothing whatever to do with Parliament, and who were accompanied by as many as four or five ladies. He had noticed during his twelve years' experience in Parliament that certain members always got privileges which were refused to others, and his point was that in connexion with such matters all honorable members should be treated alike. He acted in accordance with the invitation which was given to him, and sent one of his daughters elsewhere to witness the procession; but, as he had said, others brought with them as many as five or six ladies. One of the new members spoke to him on the subject, and he told him that if nobody else brought the matter under the notice of the Government, he, as an old member, would do so.

Sir GEORGE TURNER.—When the arrangements were being made for yesterday's celebration I was, unfortunately, otherwise engaged. I myself received the usual invitation, and I refused to give extra tickets to persons who applied for them. The arrangements were, however, carried out by the Chief Secretary, and I will ask him to explain what was done.

Mr. PEACOCK.—I made arrangements with the Serjeant-at-Arms that all members of both Houses of Parliament should be invited, and that provision should be made for them, and also, in each case, for two of their lady friends. Invitations

were also sent to ex-Members of Parliament and to heads of departments. Numbers of applications were made to me for extra tickets, but knowing, as I did, from past experience that there would not be accommodation for a very large number, I refused them. With the concurrence of those of my colleagues whom I saw on the subject, the number to be accommodated was limited. I felt that it would be better to have only such a number there as we could properly cater for, than to run the risk of inconvenience and confusion by permitting any indiscriminate issue of tickets. Definite instructions were given accordingly. I am sorry that there was any hitch in the direction indicated by the honorable member. No distinctions were made. I, as Chief Secretary, received numbers of applications for additional tickets, and I refused to grant them. I said that the instructions were that the invitations were to be limited, so that the number present should not exceed 500 or 600. We desired that there should be ample accommodation for everybody, and that no inconvenience or discomfort should occur. I will make inquiries, and ascertain how it was that there was any break-away from the instructions.

Mr. BENNETT.—I did not ask the question for myself, but for others.

Mr. PEACOCK.—So far as the Government are concerned, every Member of Parliament was treated alike. Honorable members made applications to me for extra tickets for their personal friends—mayors of municipalities and others—and I refused them. I said that it was better that the number should be restricted, so that the proceedings might be carried out with some degree of comfort.

Mr. LANGDON.—Who was responsible for the bungle in the streets?

Mr. PEACOCK.—All that I can say is that nothing was responsible for what occurred in the streets but the unbounded enthusiasm and loyalty of the people of Melbourne and suburbs. All the available police were secured to keep the route of the procession clear, and, although there was a little confusion, I think the scene that took place was one that we were all delighted to witness. I was delighted to find that the people of Melbourne were not one whit behind the people of London in the enthusiasm with which they welcomed home the troops returning from South Africa.

Mr. MURRAY stated that he had intended bringing up the question of the use of Parliament House steps by Members of Parliament as a matter of privilege. Was it necessary on the occasion of such a celebration as that which took place on the previous day for honorable members to receive an invitation before they could occupy a position on the steps in the front of Parliament House? Were the Government not trenching on the privileges of Members of Parliament in taking such a course, and in limiting the number of ladies whom any Member of Parliament should be allowed to bring with him? It came quite as a revelation to him that it was necessary at all that he or any Member of Parliament should have to get a direct invitation from the Government before he could be present within the precincts of Parliament House on any public occasion. He had always thought that Members of Parliament had a perfect right to make use of Parliament House at any time without an invitation from the Government or from anybody else.

Mr. LANGDON.—The invitation was to afternoon tea.

Mr. MURRAY said that an invitation was sent by the Government to each Member of Parliament to witness the procession from the steps of Parliament House. It was incidentally mentioned at the bottom of the tickets sent out that afternoon tea was to be provided. That was not the function to which honorable members were invited. He had always considered that honorable members had a right to make use of Parliament House at any time when it was open; and he desired to ask the Speaker whether it was within the province of the Government to limit the rights of honorable members to access to the building? He would not say anything about the procession, of which they were all ashamed.

The SPEAKER.—My attention was called to this matter yesterday by certain honorable members. I have only to say that I received an invitation from the Serjeant-at-Arms, one of my own officers, to be present on the steps of Parliament House, and to bring two ladies with me. I think that the course of procedure adopted was not at all in accordance with what has been the practice in the past. The President of the Legislative Council has consulted me with reference to what took place. I was not spoken to about the matter at all. As

Speaker, I represent the Legislative Assembly, and, in future, before anything of this kind is done, I shall expect to be at least consulted.

Mr. PEACOCK.—I desire to say, Mr. Speaker, that I spoke to the Serjeant-at-Arms and found that you were absent in the country. I then asked the Serjeant-at-Arms to see the President of the Legislative Council in reference to the matter.

The SPEAKER.—I can only say that it was an improper proceeding for the Government to invite Members of Parliament to attend on the steps of Parliament House. I regard Members of Parliament as trustees of the Parliament buildings. I felt that a blunder had been committed, and I may say that I still take that view.

Sir GEORGE TURNER.—There is no doubt that a blunder was committed. If I had been here it would not have occurred. My honorable colleague who took charge of the matter came to me when I was busy, and asked me whether the Government would entertain Members of Parliament and their lady friends on the occasion of the return of the troops from South Africa. I said—"Yes; make the necessary provision." The intention was simply to ask Members of Parliament and their lady friends to afternoon tea, but by a mistake they were invited to attend on Parliament House steps.

Mr. SMITH.—And the wrong people got in.

Sir GEORGE TURNER.—I do not know how they got in. It appears to me to be a great mistake to make any reservation with regard to the use of Parliament House steps. That is my own opinion, and I have expressed it to the Speaker before. The better plan, I think, is to leave the steps entirely open. It would be useless, however, to discuss this matter further. There is no doubt that a blunder was committed, and I promise that, so far as I am concerned, it shall not occur again.

PROCLAMATION OF THE AUSTRALIAN COMMONWEALTH.

Mr. DUFFY remarked that the discussion that had just taken place reminded him of another matter. A number of honorable members would very shortly be proceeding to New South Wales to take part in the celebrations in connexion with the proclamation of the Australian Commonwealth. If those responsible made as

big a mess of things, in proportion, as had been made here in connexion with the return of the troops from South Africa, there would be a very pretty mess indeed. It had occurred to him that before honorable members went to Sydney in their official capacities, some little consideration should be given to their comfort. The Government or the Speaker might let honorable members know what preparations were to be made for receiving Members of Parliament, and generally what the programme of festivities was to be. He would also like to know how long they were to be in Sydney?

MR. SMITH.—And how they are to get there?

MR. DUFFY said that the question of how they were to get back was of much more importance. If some action were taken in time it would, no doubt, conduce to the comfort of honorable members, and to the success of the celebrations.

SIR GEORGE TURNER.—This matter has not been overlooked. I have, almost since I came into office, been in communication with the Premier of New South Wales in regard to what is to be done. As soon as I receive definite information I shall be glad to make it public, so that it may be available to honorable members and others to whom invitations may be sent. I have already received certain information, but if I were to make it public it would simply be confusing.

EMBEZZLEMENT AND THEFT IN THE RAILWAY DEPARTMENT.

MR. TRENWITH, in compliance with an order of the House (dated July 10), presented a return showing the number and nature of cases of embezzlement and theft in the Railway department.

ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN OF COMMITTEES.

SIR GEORGE TURNER said that, by leave, he begged to move—

That the honorable member for Collingwood (Mr. W. D. Beazley) be appointed Chairman of Committees of this House.

MR. BENNETT seconded the motion, which was agreed to.

MR. BEAZLEY.—I desire to thank honorable members for the confidence they have shown in me by re-electing me to the position of Chairman of Committees. I will endeavour during this Parliament to merit that confidence by carrying out the duties of the office to the best of my

ability. I shall need the assistance of honorable members, and if they give it to me as they have done during the last three years, I have no doubt I shall be able to give them satisfaction.

Subsequently, in committee,

MR. McLEAN said—I desire to congratulate the Chairman of Committees on his re-appointment. I take this opportunity of saying that I should have been very pleased to second the motion if the opportunity had been afforded to me. I have hitherto been under the impression that the appointment of the Speaker and the Chairman of Committees were matters for the whole House, and not for one side.

THE CHAIRMAN.—This is a little out of order, but I thank the leader of the Opposition for having so graciously offered his congratulations to me. I have always had the very strongest support from him, and honorable members associated with him, as well as from the other side of the House. It may have been my fault that the seconder of the motion for my re-appointment came from the Government side of the chamber. Honorable members are aware that the honorable member for Richmond (Mr. Bennett) and myself have been close friends during many years, and I was anxious that he should do it.

SIR GEORGE TURNER.—I asked him to propose the motion.

THE CHAIRMAN.—I was anxious that the honorable member for Richmond should propose or second the motion, if no other arrangements were made. I think, therefore, that what the leader of the Opposition has referred to was very likely my fault.

MR. McCOLL.—I am afraid it is another blunder.

SIR GEORGE TURNER.—You made a little blunder last Thursday.

OLD-AGE PENSIONS BILL.

SIR GEORGE TURNER presented a message from His Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor recommending that an appropriation be made out of the consolidated revenue for the purposes of a Bill to provide for the payment of old-age pensions.

The House having gone into committee to consider the message,

SIR GEORGE TURNER moved—

That it is expedient that an appropriation be made from the consolidated revenue for the purposes of a Bill to provide for the payment of old-age pensions.

The motion was agreed to, and the resolution was reported to the House and adopted.

Authority being given to Sir George Turner and Mr. I. A. Isaacs to introduce a Bill to carry out the resolution,

Sir GEORGE TURNER brought up a Bill "to provide for the payment of old-age pensions," and moved that it be read a first time.

The motion was agreed to, and the Bill was read a first time.

Sir GEORGE TURNER moved—

That the second reading be made an order of the day for to-morrow.

Mr. GILLIES.—I hope the Premier does not intend to go on with the second reading to-morrow, although the motion is formally put.

The SPEAKER.—"To-morrow" does not necessarily mean to-morrow; it may mean next week.

Sir JOHN McINTYRE.—The Government are not prepared for to-morrow.

Sir GEORGE TURNER.—We are all ready. The motion was agreed to.

INSCRIBED STOCK JUDGMENTS BILL.

Sir GEORGE TURNER presented a message from His Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor recommending that an appropriation be made from the consolidated revenue for the purposes of a Bill to provide for the payment of judgments, decrees, and orders made in the United Kingdom in respect of Victorian Government stock inscribed in the United Kingdom.

The House having gone into committee to consider the message,

Sir GEORGE TURNER moved—

That it is expedient that an appropriation be made from the consolidated revenue for the purposes of a Bill to provide for the payment of judgments, decrees, and orders made in the United Kingdom in respect of Victorian Government stock inscribed in the United Kingdom.

The motion was agreed to, and the resolution was reported to the House and adopted.

Authority being given to Sir George Turner and Mr. Gillott to introduce a Bill to carry out the resolution,

Sir GEORGE TURNER brought up a Bill "to provide for the payment of judgments, decrees, and orders made in the

United Kingdom in respect of Victorian Government stock inscribed in the United Kingdom," and moved that it be read a first time.

The motion was agreed to, and the Bill was read a first time.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS.

Sir GEORGE TURNER said that, as honorable members would realize, the session would necessarily be a short one, and he desired, by leave, to introduce a number of Bills in order that they might be circulated and placed on the list for to-morrow. Honorable members could rest assured that any contentious matters, or matters which required further time for consideration, would not be attempted to be forced on unduly. There were a number of small Bills of no great importance that might be dealt with on the following day.

Mr. GILLIES.—I think the Government should know whether a Bill is contentious or not.

Sir GEORGE TURNER said there were some Bills which would be formally introduced, and the second reading of which would be adjourned until the following week, but some measures might be put through altogether on the following day.

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE BILL.

Sir GEORGE TURNER moved for leave to introduce a Bill to remove the disqualification of women voting at elections of members of the Legislative Assembly.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was then brought in, and read a first time.

Mr. GILLIES.—When does the Premier propose to take the second reading of the measure?

Sir GEORGE TURNER.—The second reading of this Bill will be taken on Tuesday next. I desire to have a full House for it.

OLD-AGE PENSIONS (REGISTRATION OF CLAIMS) BILL.

Sir GEORGE TURNER moved for leave to introduce a Bill to provide for the registration of claims for old-age pensions.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was then brought in, and read a first time.

PUBLIC SERVICE RECLASSIFICATION BILL.

Sir GEORGE TURNER moved for leave to introduce a Bill to provide for the reclassification of the public service.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was then brought in, and read a first time.

CUSTOMS OFFICERS BILL.

Sir GEORGE TURNER moved for leave to introduce a Bill relating to the execution of certain powers and duties of the Commissioner and officers of the Customs department.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was then brought in, and read a first time.

MELBOURNE AND METROPOLITAN BOARD OF WORKS BORROWING POWERS INCREASE BILL.

Sir GEORGE TURNER moved for leave to introduce a Bill to increase the borrowing powers of the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was then brought in, and read a first time.

YARROWEE CHANNEL WORKS BILL.

Mr. TRENWITH moved for leave to introduce a Bill to provide for the repayment of portion of an amount to be advanced by the State towards the Yarrowee Channel Works, Ballarat.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was then brought in, and read a first time.

VOTING BY POST ACT AMENDMENT BILL.

Mr. PEACOCK moved for leave to introduce a Bill to amend the Voting by Post Act 1900.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was then brought in, and read a first time.

POSTAGE RATE ALTERATION BILL.

Mr. GURR moved for leave to introduce a Bill to alter the rate of postage on letters received in any post-office in Victoria for delivery in Victoria.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was then brought in, and read a first time.

SCRIPTURE LESSONS REFERENDUM BILL.

Mr. GURR moved for leave to introduce a Bill to authorize a referendum to the people on certain questions as to the use in State schools of certain Scripture lessons, prayers, services, and hymns.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was then brought in, and read a first time.

CENSUS QUESTIONS *RE* WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE.

Sir JOHN MCINTYRE moved :—

That the following questions be added to the usual ones upon the census papers to be issued to householders next year :—

1. How many female adults are in favour of woman's suffrage ?
2. How many male adults are in favour of woman's suffrage ?
3. How many adults are in favour of religious instruction, as recommended by the Royal commission, being given in State schools ?

He said—It strikes me, from the immense amount of business which has been put before the House this evening, that it will be impossible for private members to do anything if they do not take advantage of the present opportunity. In the present motion I have been anticipated largely by proposals of the Government. I find that there is to be provision made by one of the Bills introduced to remove the disqualification of women to vote for the election of members of the Legislative Assembly. A Bill has also been introduced by my honorable friend the Minister of Public Instruction relating to the taking of a referendum on the question of religious instruction in State schools. If the motion which I am now moving is carried, there will be no necessity for either of those measures. At all events, it will give this House and the country an opportunity of obtaining a thorough knowledge of what the disposition and desire of the people is in regard to these two questions. I desire to divide the motion, so as to guard against complications which are likely to take place in regard to the Bills mentioned this afternoon, if I may be allowed to do so. The motion will then read :—

That the following questions be added to the usual ones upon the census papers to be issued to householders next year :—

1. How many female adults are in favour of woman's suffrage ?
2. How many male adults are in favour of woman's suffrage ?

Honorable members will understand that census papers are issued to every householder in the country, and that the word "householder" embraces the occupant of every hut, tent, mia-mia, or any other place of abode. If the present proposal is adopted, therefore, honorable members will by this means get a thorough knowledge of the opinion of the whole of the inhabitants of the colony in regard to these particular matters. I want honorable members to view this question as a very important one indeed. If the motion be carried, it will, I think, set aside all desire for a convention to frame a new Constitution for the Parliament of Victoria. The whole desire for the convention is in consequence of the fact that another place has failed to pass the Women's Suffrage Bill. If this House and another place have a full knowledge of the opinion of the people in regard to that measure, I have no doubt it will receive proper consideration. But I maintain that at present neither House has a knowledge of the opinion of the people in regard to the measure. I have no desire to refer this or any other question to the people in the way of a referendum. The way in which the motion proposes to deal with it is altogether different to the taking of a referendum. The referendum, as I understand it, means the decision of the people upon a certain question, and that decision makes it the law of the land. But in this case I am simply going to ask the people, through the means of the census papers, and for the information of the Legislature of this country, what their opinion is with regard to these questions. Now, I think it would be desirable to divide the motion into two. I think it would be better, for many reasons, to avoid mixing up the question of women's suffrage with the question of religious instruction in State schools. The fact that two separate Bills on these subjects have been introduced this afternoon shows me that I perhaps made a mistake in combining the two subjects in one motion. Still, I can fairly move that the opinion of the male and female adults be asked on the question of women's suffrage, and that questions 1 and 2 in my motion should be inserted in the census papers. I am quite sure that the House cannot object to those questions being put in the census papers, because most extraordinary questions are at present asked in the census papers. For instance, every householder is asked

whether he is a Protestant, a Catholic, or a Freethinker, and whether his children are being taught in any religious faith. He is also asked what his education is—whether he can read or write, whether he is a graduate of the University, and so on. Now, if it is right to ask householders such questions, I do not see why we should hesitate to ask what is the opinion of the adult members of each household on the long-debated questions of women's suffrage and religious instruction in State schools. And there can be no possible means of getting the opinion of the country in a more effective manner than this. Moreover, it will cost the country nothing to put these extra questions in the census papers. It may be said that the adoption of this proposal will establish a precedent; but, if so, it is one that can only be exercised once every ten years. It will enable us to assure ourselves whether the male and female adults of the colony really want women's suffrage, and also whether they desire religious instruction to be given in the State schools. If the questions are answered properly and correctly, as no doubt they will be, I am confident that, in both cases, the answer will be "No." At the same time, I do not overlook the fact that other honorable members hold a different opinion. I am told that some 52 members of this House have been returned pledged to support the Women's Suffrage Bill; but I deny that the question of women's suffrage had any effect on their election at all. If women's suffrage had any influence in any constituency it was in Prahran—the centre, so to speak, of the agitation throughout the country. A number of women there have actually got positions on the local State schools board of advice, and the women's suffrage question has been most actively promulgated from Prahran. Therefore, there was a real test on the women's suffrage question at the Prahran election. And what was the result? That an opponent of women's suffrage was returned, defeating the most active member in favour of women's suffrage this House ever had. Consequently, I do not concur in the opinion of honorable members who say that women's suffrage is desired by the majority of the adults of this colony. No doubt some honorable members made use of it to get the influence of the ladies on their side, with a view to securing election to this House; but I feel sure that the

women of the country generally do not desire the franchise. The best way to test the question, however, is the one I now propose. It has been said that the adoption of this course will prevent the granting of the suffrage to women in time for the Federal Parliament elections. But does anybody believe—does the Premier think, for example—that it is possible to pass the Women's Suffrage Bill before the Federal Parliament elections take place? Does the Premier believe that the Legislative Council will pass such a Bill this session?

Mr. MAUGER.—What will persuade the Legislative Council to pass the Women's Suffrage Bill?

Sir JOHN MCINTYRE.—The adoption of the course I now propose will give them a chance of ascertaining the real opinion of the adults of the country on the question of women's suffrage. I am confident that if another place is satisfied that the adult females or the adult males of the colony, or anything like a reasonable percentage of them, desire the extension of the franchise to women, the other Chamber will give way on the question. Honorable members who are in favour of women's suffrage ought surely not to object to this proposal.

Mr. MAUGER.—You forget that the Legislative Council have already refused a referendum.

Sir JOHN MCINTYRE.—But this is not a referendum in any shape or form; it is simply asking for valuable information, which would guide members of this House and members of another place. There can be no possible objection to adding to the census papers the two questions I propose, and a great deal can be said in favour of my proposal. I hold that this is a better system than the referendum. If you adopt the referendum, you must carry out the expressed desire of the people; but my proposal is simply to ask for information which may lead Parliament to legislate in the direction the people desire or not, as Parliament in its wisdom thinks fit. I believe that every member of this House will be prepared to accept the information received, whether it be for or against women's suffrage. Certainly, if the voice of the people is given in this form in favour of women's suffrage, I shall at once, and unhesitatingly, bow to their decision. Suppose we took a referendum to-morrow? The possibilities are that not one-third of

the people would go to vote on the question; but by the means I propose we will secure the opinion of every adult male and female on the questions of women's suffrage and religious instruction in State schools. As to the objection that the census papers may be used in future for ascertaining the opinion of the people on other questions, I would remind the House that that could only be done once in ten years.

Mr. GAIR.—Will you ask for their opinion on the convention, too?

Sir JOHN MCINTYRE.—The honorable member can add that question himself, if he wishes to do so. I shall not object. In the census papers we can get any information we like. The object of taking the census is not merely to ascertain the number of inhabitants, but also such particulars as their occupations, religious convictions, and the number of cocks and hens and goats they have got. If the opinion of the electors on these questions is asked through the medium of the census papers it will be a very good let-off for the Government. Indeed, I think I can claim that my proposal is more in the Ministerial interests than in my own. It offers the Government a grand opportunity to get out of a most difficult position. They are now in a cleft stick, as it were, and they should take advantage of my proposal in their own interests. I ask honorable members to give this matter their very careful consideration. I will separate the two questions of women's suffrage and religious instruction in State schools, and confine my present motion to that of women's suffrage. When I gave notice of motion I thought it desirable to link the two together, but I am afraid that, as two separate measures dealing with the two subjects have been introduced, if my motion was passed as it stands it would lead to difficulty. Therefore, for the present, I will confine it to the question of women's suffrage. I think it is desirable to get to know how many women as well as how many men are in favour of women's suffrage. I am confident that the country will be glad, and members of this House and members of another place will also be glad, to have this question of women's suffrage definitely settled. I observe that it has been proposed in another place to accomplish the same object by amending the Census Act, but I do not think that a Bill to amend the Census Act is necessary,

although the Attorney-General will, perhaps, correct me if I am wrong in that assumption. Something may be said about the secrecy that it is necessary to observe in matters of this kind. Well, I would point out that the collectors of the census papers have to make a declaration that all the information they receive in the schedules will be kept strictly private. Under the circumstances, I ask the House to help me to get the country out of the difficult position it has been in for many years past with regard to this very tantalizing question of women's suffrage, and the equally difficult question of religious instruction in the State schools. I am perfectly sure, from the way in which this proposal was received from the platform in Maldon, that the idea is one that will take on. The course I propose will give the country an opportunity of expressing a definite opinion on these two important subjects, and it is desirable that Parliament should know the real views of the people before legislating on these questions.

Mr. McKENZIE seconded the motion.

Mr. PEACOCK.—I do not know whether the honorable member for Maldon is really serious in making this proposal to the House, but I should hardly think so, judging from my long experience of him in parliamentary matters.

Sir JOHN MCINTYRE.—The Government ought to be glad of the chance to get out of a difficulty.

Mr. PEACOCK.—The honorable member will find that there is no difficulty at all in regard to the two subjects in question. These two matters are to be submitted to the serious consideration of Parliament as the result of the general election, and Bills have already been introduced to ascertain whether Parliament is prepared to concede adult suffrage, and sanction the taking of a referendum on the question of religious instruction in State schools.

Sir JOHN MCINTYRE.—I gave notice of my motion before the Government gave notice of theirs.

Mr. PEACOCK.—Yes; we were not in office then. I gladly welcome both the mover and the seconder of this motion to the fold of those who believe that a referendum should be taken on the question of women's suffrage, although I cannot congratulate them on the manner in which they have submitted this proposal to the Legislative Assembly. I have

always understood that those honorable members belonged to what is called the constitutional party, and, therefore, I am quite surprised at them taking up on these questions an attitude so thoroughly unconstitutional as the one they now assume. If it is right to adopt this proposal to obtain, through the medium of the census papers, the opinion of the adults of this colony on the questions of women's suffrage and religious instruction in State schools, why should not the people be asked, through the medium of the census papers, whether they are in favour of old-age pensions, Sunday trading, and the reform of the Upper House? Why not carry the proposal very much further, if it is right to carry it so far?

Sir JOHN MCINTYRE.—Of course, you could reduce it to an absurdity.

Mr. PEACOCK.—Carried out to its logical conclusion, the same system could be applied to all questions that are a little bit difficult, and, if so, Parliament might as well close up for seven or eight years and let the electors be asked to express their opinions with regard to all vexed questions through the medium of the census papers once every ten years. It is all very well for honorable members, who have been all along stout opponents of adult suffrage, which they honestly believe would be detrimental to the interests of the country, to submit such a proposal as this, but why they should object to Parliament dealing with women's suffrage in a regular manner, instead of putting questions in the census papers, passes my comprehension.

Sir JOHN MCINTYRE.—We know the country is dead against women's suffrage.

Mr. PEACOCK.—Of course, it is well known what this is done for. The real object is to try to postpone the Women's Suffrage Bill. Every one knows full well that nearly twelve months must elapse before the earliest returns with regard to our population can be published after taking the census. Moreover, section 6 of the Census Act prescribes the questions that are to be put to householders in the census papers. I ask the honorable member for Maldon if he really believes that it would be wise to wait for possibly two years before getting the views of the people on the question of women's suffrage through the medium of the census papers? Does he really think that his proposal is a practicable one? Even if it is seriously made, which I doubt very much, the

honorable member knows full well how the information contained in the census papers is collated.

Mr. SALMON.—He knows how the census papers are filled up.

Mr. PEACOCK.—Yes, I thank the honorable member for the correction. I should like to see the honorable member for Maldon acting as manager of a large hotel—say the Grand Hotel—on the night that the census is taken. I should like to see the honorable member calling on all the lodgers and asking them the necessary questions with a view to elicit the information that has to be given in the census papers, because it is not the individual lodger, but the occupier of the household, who is responsible for inserting in the census papers all the requisite information with regard to the persons under his roof on the night the census is taken. I would like to be present when the honorable member, as manager of the Grand Hotel, was calling on all the lodgers, and interviewing all the ladies, to ask them, amongst other things, whether they were in favour of adult suffrage or not. However, it is no use debating the question, because the proposal has only got to be examined to see how absurd it is. I am confident that the House generally will scout the proposal as being absolutely unworthy of serious consideration.

Mr. McKENZIE.—In reply to the Chief Secretary, I will simply point out that the manager of an hotel, under the circumstances he has alluded to, has to interview all his lodgers, male and female, and put to them other questions very much more pertinent or impertinent, as the case may be, than the questions contained in the motion now before the House. I think it would be a very simple thing for the manager of such an hotel to ask the lodgers, in addition to the other questions he has to put to them—"Are you in favour of adult suffrage or not?"

Mr. PEACOCK.—Some of them might not be electors, or even residents, of Victoria—they might be visitors to the colony.

Mr. McKENZIE.—A few strangers would not materially affect the average one way or the other. This proposal is an attempt to get a reliable indication of the opinion of the people of the colony. Legal effect would have to be given to it afterwards, so that even if some of the hotel lodgers were not electors no harm would be done, because their number

would not be very great, and the expression of opinion would not be binding. I think the adoption of this proposal would give a far better test of public opinion than any other plan that has been suggested.

Mr. PEACOCK.—And yet you opposed the Women's Suffrage Referendum Bill.

Mr. McKENZIE.—I am quite consistent. I advocated this very course of procedure when the question of women's suffrage was before the House on a previous occasion. I suggested that a special question should be put in the census papers asking each woman to say whether she was in favour of women's suffrage or not. I am opposed to the referendum on principle; but if ever one could justify a departure from principle, it is on an occasion of this sort, where the course proposed would not be, in the ordinary sense of the term, a referendum, but merely a means of obtaining the opinions of the people of the country, both male and female, on the question of women's suffrage. It is a departure that would be justified by the circumstances of the case. Whenever it has been proposed in this House to refer this question to the women themselves, the objection has always been raised that there is no roll of adult women. That difficulty could be very easily overcome. If it were made known that electors' rights would be issued to women who applied for them, and that if a certain number voted in favour of this proposition, it would be granted, the desired result would be secured by a very simple process. Of course, objections can always be found to any suggestion of this nature. In this instance, no roll of women voters is required. An opportunity is offered to us of ascertaining the opinions, not only of the women, but also of the men, in a fuller and more complete way than would otherwise be possible. The result would be a guide to Parliament. It would determine the question of whether the people of the country really desire women's suffrage or not. This is not a matter that can be laughed out of court. There is a great deal more substance in it than the Chief Secretary appears to imagine. As to the delay, if the honorable gentleman thinks that the Government can pass the Women's Suffrage Bill into law next week he is mistaken. They will not be able to pass it next week or the week after.

Mr. PEACOCK.—Then the honorable member knows the feeling of another place.

Mr. McKENZIE.—I believe I know the feeling of the people of the colony on this subject.

Mr. PEACOCK.—You thought you knew the feeling of the people of the colony on Monday, but you didn't.

Mr. McKENZIE.—I was not very much surprised at the result of the two elections which then took place.

Mr. PEACOCK.—Yes, you were.

Mr. McKENZIE.—I dare say that the Premier himself was surprised.

Sir GEORGE TURNER.—I was gratified.

Mr. McKENZIE.—The right honorable gentleman was gratified, and no doubt also pleasantly surprised.

Sir GEORGE TURNER.—I was surprised that the gentleman who opposed me should have been left in the mud by his supporters.

Mr. McKENZIE.—I did not leave him in the mud.

Mr. PEACOCK.—He told me different this morning.

Mr. McKENZIE.—Mr. Densham did?

Mr. PEACOCK.—Yes.

Mr. McKENZIE.—He could not say that of me.

Mr. PEACOCK.—He said that you were the most generous of his supporters. But that was not saying much.

Mr. McKENZIE.—I do not know what that has to do with women's suffrage. I do not think that the Attorney-General, who has just come back from his constituency, can say to the House that in every instance his electors cheered his advocacy of women's suffrage. I was in the honorable gentleman's electorate, as well as in the Premier's electorate.

Mr. I. A. ISAACS.—If the honorable member had stayed in my electorate another week my opponent would have lost his deposit.

Mr. McKENZIE.—The honorable gentleman knows that that is not true. I treat him fairly, and I do not think he has a right to say anything that is untrue.

Mr. I. A. ISAACS.—We can have our joke?

Mr. McKENZIE.—Yes; but the honorable gentleman knows what use is made of such jokes. I say that he was accepted by his constituents, not because of his advocacy of women's suffrage, but in spite of it.

Mr. I. A. ISAACS.—I am sure that the majority of my electors are in favour of it.

Mr. McKENZIE.—Were you not challenged at Wodonga to take a show of

hands? The honorable gentleman was excusably deaf on that occasion.

Mr. I. A. ISAACS.—You are quite wrong.

Mr. McKENZIE.—The honorable gentleman was certainly challenged to take a show of hands, and he declined to do so. After all, in discussing this question we always come back to the one point, and that is—Are the women of the colony in favour of women's suffrage? There is now a very convenient and effective way open to us of testing that question, and why should we not take advantage of it?

The motion was negatived.

LANDLORD AND TENANT ACT AMENDMENT BILL.

Mr. BAILES moved for leave to bring in a Bill to amend the Landlord and Tenant Act.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was then brought in, and read a first time.

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS BILL.

Mr. FOSTER (in the absence of Mr. BEST) moved for leave to introduce a Bill relating to parliamentary elections.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was then brought in, and read a first time.

MINES ACT 1897 AMENDMENT BILL.

Mr. BAILES moved for leave to introduce a Bill to amend the Mines Act 1897.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was then brought in, and read a first time.

GIPPSLAND EAST EDUCATION ENDOWMENT RESERVES RELEASE BILL.

Mr. FOSTER moved for leave to introduce a Bill to release certain lands in the electorate of Gippsland East from permanent reservation, made for the purposes of education endowment.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was then brought in, and read a first time.

LAND ACT 1898 AMENDMENT BILL.

Mr. BAILES moved for leave to introduce a Bill to amend the Land Act 1898.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was then brought in, and read a first time.

**LICENSING ACT AMENDMENT
BILL.**

Mr. O'NEILL moved for leave to introduce a Bill to amend the Licensing Act.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was then brought in, and read a first time.

**HOUSE, ESTATE, AND FINANCIAL
AGENTS LICENSING BILL.**

Mr. O'NEILL moved for leave to introduce a Bill to license house and estate and financial agents and money lenders.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was then brought in, and read a first time.

**HACKNEY CARRIAGES LAW
AMENDMENT BILL.**

Mr. BROMLEY moved for leave to introduce a Bill to amend the law relating to hackney carriages.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was then brought in, and read a first time.

JURORS EXEMPTION BILL.

Mr. BROWN moved for leave to introduce a Bill providing for the exemption of commercial travellers and country auctioneers from service on juries.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was then brought in, and read a first time.

WILLS ACT AMENDMENT BILL.

Mr. BAILES moved for leave to introduce a Bill to amend the Wills Act.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was then brought in, and read a first time.

**STOCK AND SHARE BROKERS
LICENSING BILL.**

Mr. O'NEILL moved for leave to introduce a Bill to license stock and share brokers.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was then brought in, and read a first time.

BRANDS REGISTRATION BILL.

Mr. CRAVEN (in the absence of Mr. KENNEDY) moved for leave to introduce a Bill for the registration of brands on stock.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was then brought in, and read a first time.

UNUSED ROADS LICENSING BILL.

Mr. O'NEILL moved for leave to introduce a Bill to deal with the licensing of public roads occupied by land-owners and not required for public traffic.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was then brought in, and read a first time.

**JUVENILE STREET VENDORS
REGULATION BILL.**

Mr. SALMON moved for leave to introduce a Bill to regulate and control juvenile street vendors and traders.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was then brought in, and read a first time.

**TRAMWAYS ACT (ST. KILDA)
EXTENSION BILL.**

Mr. BENT moved for leave to introduce a Bill to extend the provisions of the Tramways Act to the municipality of St. Kilda.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was then brought in, and read a first time.

**NON-COMPULSORY VACCINATION
BILL.**

Mr. BAILES moved for leave to introduce a Bill to abolish compulsory vaccination.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was then brought in, and read a first time.

**HEALTH ACT FURTHER
AMENDMENT BILL.**

Mr. MURRAY moved for leave to introduce a Bill to further amend the Health Act.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was then brought in, and read a first time.

**FORTNIGHTLY PAYMENTS IN THE
PUBLIC SERVICE.**

Mr. BROMLEY asked whether he would be in order in moving the motion standing in the name of the honorable member for Melbourne North, with regard to fortnightly payments of wages in the public service? The honorable member was not in his place when the motion was called on in its order, having been required to leave the chamber.

The SPEAKER.—I am very sorry, but the House has already directed the notice

of motion to be postponed, and we cannot proceed with it now. I am unable to call it on, as the House has given a direction in regard to it.

ADJOURNMENT.

Sir GEORGE TURNER moved—

That the House, at its rising, adjourn until to-morrow, at four o'clock.

The motion was agreed to.

The House adjourned at eight minutes to six o'clock.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

Thursday, December 6, 1900.

The SPEAKER took the chair at half-past four o'clock p.m.

INTERCOLONIAL RIFLE COMPETITION.

Mr. ROBINSON asked the Chief Secretary (for the Minister of Defence) whether the usual railway privileges would be granted to members of rifle clubs in Victoria who desired to take part in the intercolonial rifle competition that was to be held in New South Wales in connexion with the Commonwealth inauguration celebrations?

Mr. PEACOCK.—I understand that several members of rifle clubs throughout the colony intend to take part in the competition to which the honorable member has alluded, and that they are naturally anxious to know as early as possible what railway facilities will be afforded them, in order that they may make arrangements. I will look into the matter to-morrow, and meanwhile I can assure the honorable member that the Government will give very favorable consideration to the request.

SESSIONAL ARRANGEMENTS.

Sir GEORGE TURNER moved—

That Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday in each week during the present session be the days on which this House shall meet for the despatch of business, and that four o'clock be the hour of meeting on each day except Friday, when the hour of meeting shall be two o'clock; that Government business shall take precedence of all other business; and that no fresh business, except the postponement of business on the notice-paper, shall be called on after half-past ten o'clock.

He said—I propose to ask the House to sit on Fridays if necessary, but, as I said

yesterday, if we despatch the business quickly there will be no need to sit on Fridays. We certainly will not sit on Friday this week, and possibly not next week. The following Friday it will be necessary to sit in order to clear up messages between the two Houses. Honorable members will see that it will be utterly impossible for private members to pass any measures this session, because the other Chamber can only sit four days. Still, if it is at all possible, the Government will give honorable members facilities for getting the second reading of their Bills, if they can do so, so that they may be able to take up the measures at the same stage when we meet next session.

Mr. MURRAY.—I rise for the purpose of asking the Premier whether it is the intention of the Government not to allow any time for private members' business this session? I would like to know if private members are or are not to have an opportunity of dealing with the business of which they have already given notice?

Sir GEORGE TURNER.—The ordinary way would be to devote Wednesday evenings to private members' business. That would give private members only one Wednesday, or two at the outside, because we usually give private members one Wednesday for Bill business, and the next Wednesday for motions. Of course, that would be useless. But, as I have just said, if the Government can get their own business through rapidly, we will give private members an opportunity of advancing their measures to the second-reading stage. I may point out that if any private members' Bills were passed by this House they would have very little hope of being dealt with by another place, because that Chamber can only sit for four days at the outside. However, while the other Chamber is dealing with the Government business we have sent to them, we may be able to devote some time in the Assembly to private members' Bills, so that they may be taken up next session at the same stage as they reach this session.

Mr. MURRAY.—My object in asking the question is a personal one, because I have given notice of a Bill for the amendment of the Health Act. It is a Bill to which there is no objection, and I think the Government might make it one of their measures. It has the approval of Dr. Gresswell. It takes no power from

the shire councils, but will enable them to adopt a sliding scale of fees for the inspection of dairies.

Sir GEORGE TURNER.—I will be very glad to consider the measure if the honorable member will see me about it. Probably the Government will be willing to take up the Bill.

Mr. SALMON.—I would suggest that the Premier should give up to-morrow week to private members' business. I have given notice of a Bill which, in a somewhat different form, was passed by another place six or eight years ago, but which, for some reason or other, was never brought before this Chamber. I allude to the Bill for controlling juvenile street traders. From investigations I have made, I think that such a measure is urgently needed, and it will materially assist the Education department in dealing with the truancy question. I do not think it would take a quarter of an hour to pass the Bill through this House, and I believe it would receive a sympathetic reception in another place. The practice in another colony is to give a whole day to private members' business, and I think it would be well to adopt the same practice here. Those honorable members who are interested in getting business through would make it convenient to attend on Friday week if the Premier would give up that day to private members' business.

Sir GEORGE TURNER.—I will consider the suggestion, if honorable members generally desire me to do so.

Mr. SALMON.—I should like to submit my Bill to the Premier, who might see his way to adopt it as a Government measure.

Mr. BAILES.—Why didn't you bring it up last session?

Mr. SALMON.—I had not the conduct of business last session.

Mr. McLEAN.—We did very good business last session. If we do as well this session, there will be no reason to complain.

Mr. SALMON.—If the honorable member for Sandhurst (Mr. Bailes) had read the programme submitted by the late Premier at Bairnsdale, he would have observed that this very matter was included; and probably it might have altered his attitude towards the late Government if he had known that fact.

The motion was agreed to.

PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS COMMITTEE.

Sir GEORGE TURNER moved—

That the following members form the Parliament Buildings Committee of the Legislative Assembly during the present session, with power to confer with the committee of the Legislative Council:—Mr. Speaker, Mr. Anderson, Mr. Graham, Mr. Taverner, and Mr. Trenwith.

Mr. McLEAN.—My attention has just been drawn to a matter in connexion with this motion. I believe that the usual practice, when a vacancy occurs on one of the committees, is to fill it up by the election of some member sitting on the same side of the House as the member who vacated the seat on the committee. I think it is hardly fair that three members should be selected from the Ministerial side of the House to go on this important committee and only one from the opposition side of the chamber. I have no doubt my right honorable friend's sense of justice will induce him to admit that.

Sir GEORGE TURNER.—I tried to divide them as fairly as possible.

Mr. SALMON.—Do you say that three to one is a fair division?

Sir GEORGE TURNER.—On the Standing Orders Committee there are several more members of the Opposition than members from the Ministerial side of the House.

Mr. McLEAN.—I would point out that the place vacated by Mr. Moule is proposed to be filled up by a member from the Ministerial side of the House. I think it would be better, and more conducive to harmony and good feeling, if we were to follow the usual course in selecting the members of the standing committees.

Sir GEORGE TURNER.—Mr. Trenwith is proposed as Minister of Public Works, and Mr. Anderson is in place of Mr. T. Smith.

Mr. McLEAN.—But you have not chosen a member of the Opposition in place of Mr. Moule.

Sir GEORGE TURNER.—If my honorable friend will look over the names of the honorable members it is proposed to appoint on these committees, I think he will find that I have endeavoured to select them as fairly as possible, so as to represent both sides of the House.

Mr. McLEAN.—I do not think there was any intention to do anything unfair.

Sir GEORGE TURNER.—The usual practice would have been to leave out Mr. Graham and appoint Mr. Trenwith as

Minister of Public Works in his place ; but I did not like to leave out Mr. Graham.

Mr. GILLIES.—You are bound to put the Minister of Public Works on the Parliament Buildings Committee.

Mr. McLEAN.—But why not put a member from the opposition side of the House in Mr. Moule's place ?

Sir GEORGE TURNER.—To get over the difficulty, I will substitute the name of Mr. Craven for that of Mr. Taverner. Mr. Craven would be a useful member of the Parliament Buildings Committee.

Mr. McLEAN.—I am quite willing to agree to Mr. Craven's appointment. I think he is a very suitable man for the position.

Mr. PEACOCK.—Yes ; he is an architect.

Mr. MAUGER.—I should like to know if the recommendation of the late Parliament Buildings Committee, with regard to the removal of the wooden buildings behind Parliament House, is to be carried out ?

Mr. SMITH.—The late committee did its duty last session by recommending that the wooden buildings should be sold, pulled down, and removed.

The SPEAKER.—The desire of the late Parliament Buildings Committee was that the basement offices should be completed, with a view to providing accommodation for the officers now occupying the weatherboard buildings, and that the wooden buildings should be immediately afterwards removed.

Sir GEORGE TURNER.—That was what was to be done when I completed the other portion of the basement offices ; that was the only condition on which I agreed to spend the money on the work ; but no sooner were the rooms prepared than they were taken possession of by honorable members instead of being made available for the officers now occupying the weatherboard buildings.

The SPEAKER.—I do not know who has any better right to those rooms than honorable members.

The motion, amended by substituting the name of Mr. Craven for that of Mr. Taverner, was then agreed to.

STANDING COMMITTEES.

On the motion of Sir GEORGE TURNER, the following standing committees for the session were constituted, as under :—

STANDING ORDERS COMMITTEE. — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Bent, Mr. Bromley, Mr.

Gair, Mr. Gillies, Mr. Levien, Sir John McIntyre, Mr. McLean, Mr. Staughton, Mr. Trenwith, Sir George Turner, and Mr. Vale ; five to be the quorum.

LIBRARY COMMITTEE (JOINT). — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Best, Mr. Duffy, Mr. Madden, and Mr. Shiels.

PRINTING COMMITTEE. — Mr. Speaker, Mr. Bromley, Mr. Bowser, Mr. Downward, Mr. Dyer, Mr. Grose, Mr. Kirton, Mr. Langdon, Mr. Mauger, Mr. McKenzie, Mr. Outtrim, and Mr. Sterry ; three to be the quorum.

REFRESHMENT-ROOMS COMMITTEE (JOINT). — Mr. Anderson, Mr. Bennett, Mr. Brown, Mr. McBride, and Mr. Wilkins.

COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS.—Mr. Beazley, Mr. Fink, Mr. Kennedy, Sir John McIntyre, Mr. Smith, Mr. E. D. Williams, and Mr. H. R. Williams ; three to be the quorum.

PUBLIC SERVICE APPOINTMENTS FOR MEMBERS OF SOUTH AFRICAN CONTINGENTS.

Mr. McCOLL moved—

That positions in the public service shall be open to members of the contingents who return from South Africa, provided they are competent to perform the duties in a satisfactory manner.

He said—Not many words are required to commend this motion to the best consideration of the House.

Sir GEORGE TURNER.—I am going to provide for this in the Public Service Bill.

Mr. McCOLL.—During this year we have made a call on our young men which has been responded to in the most magnificent manner. Many of these men have left their positions, and have no chance, at the present time, of getting back to them. We have been giving them a very enthusiastic welcome home—a welcome which is, no doubt, highly gratifying to them and to their friends—but, at the same time, we have to look beyond the present and see what we are going to do for these men in the future. We are engaging in the public service from 300 to 400 men yearly. Now, these men have all passed the medical examinations, and are physically fit, as no doubt many of them are fit from a clerical point of view, to occupy those positions. I need not state what they have done for Australia. No money, no reward—nothing that we could do for them—would be too great a return for what they have done for Australia. They have put us

half a century further ahead than we would have been but for the war in South Africa, and in doing for them what is proposed in this motion we shall not be offering them any charity, but merely a just acknowledgment of the services they have rendered, not only to this country, but also to the empire. No doubt a large number, probably the great bulk of them, will not require Government billets. At the same time, I think this is a fair proposal, and I desire to commend it to the acceptance of the House.

Mr. SALMON.—I have very much pleasure in seconding the motion. I feel it is one that the House may pass with perfect confidence, and I hope it will be carried unanimously. I had opportunities, during the time that the three contingents were being sent away, of interviewing a very large number of the men, and I can safely say that loyalty for the empire was the ruling sentiment that actuated their enrolment as defenders of the integrity of the empire. But, at the same time, as they have come back, group by group, many of them permanently disabled and prevented from carrying on their occupations, which have mainly been of a laborious character, these men have found it very hard indeed to get employment. The ordinary private employer demands something more from a man than mere loyalty, or even being prepared to lay down his life. He wants a full 10s. worth of work for every half-sovereign he pays. But I think the State can well afford to look at the matter from a very broad stand-point, and I feel perfectly certain that those crowds which we saw in the streets the other day, filled as they were with enthusiasm—enthusiasm which has been testified to by no less an authority than the Chief Secretary—will realize that something more tangible than a mere shouting of welcome, or “shouting” in a public-house, is required in order to fitly reward the returned Victorian troops for the services they have rendered to this country. I was very much struck on the day of the arrival of the troops to see two of them going down Bourke-street, one carrying what was evidently an axe handle carefully wrapped up in paper. This man had come back from the war in South Africa, and he was apparently on his way home prepared to follow his usual calling in the country. Those are the sort of men whom we are glad to

see back. Although a number of our soldiers are unable to return to the work in which they were engaged before they left for South Africa, many of them are, as the honorable member for Gunbower said, perfectly fitted by their education and training to undertake clerical duties for which they might be remunerated by the State. We know that clerks are a drug in the labour market. I suppose that there is no work that is more difficult to find in the city of Melbourne to-day than clerical work. Owing to our system of education we have large numbers of young people in our midst who prefer, as a member of another place said, to drive a quill and wear a black coat rather than to go into the country to seek a livelihood for themselves. Under the circumstances, I think it fitting that the State should recognise that those who obeyed so willingly and enthusiastically the call that was made upon them, should not be allowed now to drift into the ranks of the unemployed if they are able—and a majority of them are, I believe, able—to perform the work which the State is in a position to offer them in a satisfactory manner. We may be told that the Public Service Act will prevent the employment of these men, but there is nothing to prevent Parliament from making the necessary amendment in that Act. By doing so we shall, I am sure, be giving effect to the desire of the people of this colony. When these men went away, it was said that many of them would return unfitted to perform the duties incidental to good citizenship, but I feel satisfied that the experience they have gained in South Africa will be invaluable to the country in future. We should make it our endeavour to keep these men in our midst, and not allow them to drift away to other colonies, where labour may be more plentiful.

Mr. MCGREGOR.—I desire to say, that in the last session of the last Parliament I moved for leave to introduce a Bill for this specific purpose. I thought that there would be very little time available for private members during the first short session of this Parliament, and I did not take any further action.

Mr. MURRAY.—You are no longer a private member.

Mr. MCGREGOR.—I was a private member when I introduced the Bill.

Mr. MURRAY.—You are a member of the Government now, and you could bring it in as a Government measure. You were

not sincere last session; it was an electioneering dodge.

Mr. MCGREGOR.—The honorable member has no right to cast any such reflection upon me. He may know his own motives, but it is impossible for him to know the motives of other honorable members. I have consulted with the Premier in reference to this question, and I may inform the House that in the Public Service Bill which is under consideration the matter will be provided for.

Mr. MURRAY.—That is all right. I withdraw what I said.

The motion was agreed to.

SIXPENNY TELEGRAMS.

Mr. MURRAY called attention to the following motion of which he had given notice:—

That, in the opinion of this House, it is desirable when the penny postage comes into operation that the charge for telegrams of nine words should be reduced to sixpence.

He said he did not know exactly what the Government proposals were in regard to the penny post, but the honorable member for Brighton had given notice of a question in which he had raised the point of the legality of any action that might be taken by the Victorian Government in the direction of reducing the postage, after the date on which the Victorian Postal department was to be taken over by the Federal Government. He had no doubt that the House would recognise the merits of his motion, but he thought that it would be better, under the circumstances, to postpone it until the question of the reduction of the rate of postage had been dealt with.

The motion was postponed.

GOVERNOR'S SALARY REDUCTION BILL.

Sir GEORGE TURNER moved for leave to introduce a Bill to reduce the sum appropriated for the payment of the Governor's salary.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was then brought in, and read a first time.

CUSTOMS OFFICERS BILL.

Sir GEORGE TURNER moved the second reading of this Bill. He said—The coming into operation of the Commonwealth Constitution necessitates certain alterations in some of our Acts. The object of this Bill is to meet a difficulty

which will arise in consequence of the Commissionership of Customs in Victoria ceasing to be an office on the 1st January next. In many of our statutes—including the Marine Act, the Licensing Act, the Trade Marks Act, the Explosives Act, and others—reference is made to the Commissioner of Customs, who is empowered to do certain things. This Bill will enable the Governor in Council to appoint some other Minister or officer, as the case may be, to carry out the duties prescribed to be carried out by the Commissioner of Customs. It is a purely formal measure.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was then read a second time, and committed.

On clause 2, relating to the performance of certain duties and powers of the Commissioner and officers of Customs,

Mr. TUCKER said that there were certain officers in the Customs department who had been doing clerical work for a number of years, but were not classified as clerical officers. He was referring to the weighers. Would they be provided for?

Sir GEORGE TURNER said that the case of the weighers would be dealt with in the Public Service Reclassification Bill.

The Bill, having been gone through, was reported to the House without amendment.

On the motion of Sir GEORGE TURNER, the Bill was then read a third time.

INSCRIBED STOCK JUDGMENTS BILL.

Sir GEORGE TURNER moved the second reading of this Bill. He said—Honorable members will know that for many years the colonies have been endeavouring to get colonial stock made one in which trustees could invest. Within the last few months that power has been granted, and it is now necessary for us to carry out the condition laid down by the Imperial authorities, that we should provide that the consolidated revenue shall be appropriated for the purpose of meeting any judgment or order made at any time in connexion with any of that stock. Honorable members will recognise that there is very little probability of any such contingency arising, but should such an order be made against the Registrar in England, the colony concerned would have to meet it. The Imperial authorities think that a Bill should be passed specially appropriating the consolidated

revenue for the purpose. A similar measure is in existence in Canada, New Zealand, and other colonies. If we pass this Bill, it will enable us, on floating our next loan, to get permission granted to trustees to invest in our stock.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was then read a second time, and was afterwards passed through its remaining stages.

VOTING BY POST ACT AMENDMENT BILL.

Mr. PEACOCK moved the second reading of this Bill. He said—This is a Bill to amend the Voting by Post Act, which was passed in the last session of the last Parliament. The most important amendment is that contained in clause 3. Section 13 of the original Act casts on the returning officer the duty of asking certain questions, and it is provided that those questions shall be put to all electors after the expiration or dissolution of the Legislative Assembly in existence “at the commencement of this Act.” In the passage of the measure through Parliament it was not noticed that section 24 brought it into operation on the 1st of December. The position of affairs now is that the Act cannot come into operation until after the expiration or dissolution of the present Legislative Assembly. Certainly the desire of both Houses of Parliament was that it should come into operation forthwith, and that it should apply to any by-elections that might take place in connexion with the present Parliament, and also to the elections for the Commonwealth Parliament. The object of clause 3 is to cure this defect. There are two other small amendments which are not so important. Sub-section (2) of section 9 casts on the returning officer the duty of sending out the necessary forms to “such postmaster or officer.” It is proposed to repeal the words “furnished to such postmaster or officer by the returning officer for the purpose.” The reason of that is that in elections such as those now being held for the Legislative Council, and in the elections for the Federal Senate, the returning officer is the returning officer for the whole colony. Under this provision he would have to send out all the forms. He could not do so until the writ was issued. If there was only a short period of time available the forms would arrive too late. The Government take

advantage of this opportunity to cure that defect by striking out the words which I have quoted. The effect will be to cast the duty of sending out the forms on the Chief Secretary's department, which is the course followed generally. It is proposed also to insert certain words in the 1st schedule. In the passage of the measure through Parliament these words were struck out of the schedule, but they were not struck out of the section in the Act. The amendment is a formal one.

The motion was agreed to.

The Bill was then read a second time, and was afterwards passed through its remaining stages.

INCOME TAX.

The House having resolved itself into Committee of Ways and Means,

Sir GEORGE TURNER moved—

That the rates of duties of income tax which shall, subject and pursuant to the Income Tax Acts, be charged, levied, collected, and paid for the use of Her Majesty in aid of the consolidated revenue for the year ending on the 31st day of December, 1901, are hereby declared to be as follows (that is to say) :—

(a) On all income derived by any person from personal exertion—

for every pound sterling of the taxable amount thereof up to £1,200, 4d.;

for every pound sterling of the taxable amount thereof over £1,200, and up to £2,200, 6d.;

and for every pound sterling of the taxable amount thereof over £2,200, 8d.;

(b) On all income derived by any person from the produce of property—

for every pound sterling of the taxable amount thereof up to £1,200, 8d.;

for every pound sterling of the taxable amount thereof over £1,200, and up to £2,200, 1s.;

and for every pound sterling of the taxable amount thereof over £2,200, 1s. 4d.

He said—This is a resolution which it is necessary for us to pass to enable us to introduce and pass the Income Tax Bill. It is based on exactly the same rates as in previous years. My predecessor (Mr. Shiels), in preparing his estimates of receipt's and expenditure, after investigating the matter fully, thought we should require to obtain the same amount of money from the income tax this year as in previous years; and I think there is no doubt he was right in that estimate, and that we shall require that amount.

The motion was agreed to, and the resolution was reported to the House and adopted.

INCOME TAX BILL.

Authority being given to Sir George Turner and Mr. I. A. Isaacs to introduce a Bill to carry out the resolution,

Sir GEORGE TURNER brought up a Bill "to declare the rates of income tax for the year ending on the 31st day of December, 1901," and moved that it be read a first time.

The motion was agreed to, and the Bill was read a first time.

On the motion of Sir GEORGE TURNER, the Bill was then read a second time, and committed.

On clause 1,

Mr. GILLIES said that, as honorable members had not seen the Bill, he presumed that it was exactly a copy of the existing law?

Sir GEORGE TURNER.—Certainly.

The Bill was reported to the House without amendment, and the report was adopted.

On the motion of Sir GEORGE TURNER, the Bill was then read a third time.

OLD-AGE PENSIONS BILL.

Sir GEORGE TURNER moved the second reading of this Bill. He said—I desire to say that, as this is an important Bill, I propose to move the second reading to-night, and then, if the House so desires, to allow the debate to stand over till Tuesday next, in order that honorable members may have an opportunity of thoroughly thinking out this important matter. That it is an important matter we must all admit. I think that if there was one question which at the last general election was not in doubt, it was this particular question of making some proper provision for our old and destitute people. I do not propose to attempt to show reasons why that should be done. I think it is absolutely unnecessary to do so. The vast majority of honorable members—I believe all of them—will admit that some scheme is absolutely necessary, and the only question we should debate is whether it would be wise to attempt to deal exhaustively with the whole subject in the few days at our disposal, or whether we should endeavour to pass some measure which would be of only temporary effect. It is absolutely impossible, in my opinion, to properly deal with this very large subject unless we have a considerable amount of time to debate all the terms and conditions on which a permanent scheme should rest. When we have in view that the new

century commences on the 1st of next month; that we shall have celebrations here with regard to the visit of Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of York; and that we are to have the inauguration of the Commonwealth on the 1st January next, I say there is no more effective time for making a commencement with this great scheme than that date. We cannot, of course, deal with all cases. I can quite realize that honorable members, in looking at the declaration which it is proposed that the applicant shall make, will say that there are a great many cases which ought to be provided for. But if we are to attempt to go into all those cases it will take us a considerable time—more time than we really have available, even for this important measure. We have endeavoured to meet the vast majority of the hard cases in the present scheme; and, that being so, I do trust that honorable members will not attempt to go too far when we are making a start in legislation on this question. Because, under the working of this Act, we shall be able to gain a considerable amount of experience. I look upon it as a very valuable experiment. It will mean the expenditure of a sum of £50,000 during the first six months of the new century, from January to June, and by means of this Bill we shall be able to relieve the necessities of 5,000 persons. It will mean more than that, because we know there are many persons over 65 years of age who are receiving relief from the existing ladies' benevolent societies. That takes a considerable amount of their funds. If by means of this scheme those poor people are taken off the ladies' benevolent societies' lists, and the same funds are available, the societies would be able to give larger amounts to those who remain, or to provide the same amounts for a larger number of persons. One matter the Government have considered is, whether under this scheme we should provide for persons who have been residing, not only in Victoria, but in any of the other Australian colonies. That is a subject which will demand a good deal of consideration, and would require that we should have some sort of reciprocity with the other colonies. It is, therefore, a point that I ask the House not to deal with at the present time, but to defer for a few months when the scheme to provide for permanent old-age pensions is brought before us. Because here we have to deal as quickly as we possibly can with

a number of cases we know of, where the persons have been residing in our own colony. If inquiries had to be made as to their residence in Australia it would probably prevent the subject being dealt with under this scheme as rapidly as it should be dealt with. We have made the provisions of the Bill as elastic as possible. We have thought it wise to leave some of the machinery to be carried into effect by the Governor in Council, who will carry out what would be regarded as the wish of the House—that we should assist, as far as we can, in relieving as many persons as possible. The scheme is that a sum of £50,000 shall be appropriated out of the consolidated revenue, from which the Treasurer will have power to pay those who are deserving of pensions a sum not exceeding 7s. per week. The pensions will be payable to persons who have attained the age of 65 years, and also to persons who are in permanent ill-health, caused by having been engaged in mining or in unhealthy occupations. The question arises: How is this £50,000 to be dealt with under the scheme? How is the scheme to be administered? It will be impracticable to bring into existence either officers or a board for the purpose of dealing with this temporary measure. That will have to be done when we are dealing with a permanent scheme next session. It will then be a question as to whether we should have some officer, to be called a registrar, to deal with the matter, or appoint a board of public officers or outsiders to undertake the management of the scheme. That will be a matter to be considered. What we propose to do is to frame regulations similar to those under which we have been working in dealing with destitute persons who were formerly sent to gaol. The system is that if any person is in destitute circumstances he goes before a police magistrate if possible, or, if that is not possible, or is inconvenient, before a local justice of the peace. The magistrate, or the justice of the peace, as the case may be, directs that for a period of four weeks provision shall be made for the person interested to the extent of 10s. a week. During the four weeks full inquiries are made as to the *bona fides* of the applicant, and, if it is found that the case is one deserving of consideration, then provision is made for the person in one of our institutions. That is the mode

by which we propose to administer this Act as a temporary measure. I want to impress upon honorable members that they must look upon this as only a temporary scheme to bridge over the time between now and the introduction of a measure to give permanent relief.

Mr. MURRAY.—Whom have you employed to make the inquiries hitherto?

Sir GEORGE TURNER.—We propose to endeavour to bridge over the period between now and early next session, when a permanent scheme can be dealt with. The scheme having been carried on from January to June, we shall then have to carry a permanent scheme—a larger scheme—which, I hope, will be proposed to Parliament in July or August next.

Mr. KIRTON.—Do you intend to ask Parliament to deal with a larger and permanent scheme next year?

Sir GEORGE TURNER.—Undoubtedly. The honorable member surely cannot dream that we are bringing in this temporary measure without intending to go into an important subject like this more fully and elaborately when we have an opportunity. It will be impossible, however, to deal with a full scheme at present, and this is the only means, it appears to us, of bridging over the time between now and when Parliament will have an opportunity of fully dealing with the matter, and when the House will have a knowledge of the deserving cases that will have to be provided for. With regard to the administration of the measure, we propose to deal with it on similar lines to the practice we have already pursued. A person who desires to obtain an old-age pension will make application to the clerk of the court in the locality in which he resides, who will arrange for a police magistrate, if possible, or, if that is not possible, for a local justice of the peace, to investigate the matter. If the magistrate is satisfied, after his preliminary investigation, that it is on the face of it a deserving case, then the pension will be ordered to be paid. In the meantime, in order to prevent imposition, the police magistrate will have to fully investigate each case that is brought before him. He will require to ascertain that the facts as they were put before him are correct and are fully substantiated, and will see that the man is not attempting to perpetrate a fraud. Because we all realize that, while deserving cases will come forward, there will also be cases that will be

undeserving, and should not be favorably dealt with. But, in the first instance, the inquiry will only be one to see if the case is a *bona fide* one. These inquiries need not be made in public; they can be made in the magistrate's room after a court has been held.

MR. TUCKER.—Would it not be better to provide that the inquiries should also always be made in private?

SIR GEORGE TURNER.—So far as this temporary measure is concerned, I do not know that there is any objection to that. Nor do I see that there is any objection to asking for the inquiry to be made in public. A man who applies for an old-age pension is not asking for charity. We are not proposing to give these pensions by way of charity. The only grounds on which old-age pensions can legitimately be given are that the persons who apply for them have rendered such services to the State in the past that the State ought to be prepared to give assistance to them now they have attained to old age; and I say that a man who has to take that assistance takes it as a right, and that no taint of charity attaches to it. If honorable members will look at the Bill they will see that this scheme provides that, in order to expedite the carrying out of the work, we shall be in a position to ask some of the retired police magistrates for their services in connexion with the investigations that will have to be made. We shall do this in order that the inquiries may be made with as little delay as possible. But there is bound to be some delay about the inquiries, and therefore we provide that the pensions shall be paid during the period that the cases are being investigated. As to the machinery for the payment of the pensions, we intend to carry out the scheme through the medium of the post-offices, and the payments will be made by the postmasters, as was the case in the scheme which I last laid before the House. Now, we have laid down what we think is a fair basis on which an application should be made. First of all, we require that the person who is to receive a pension shall be resident in the colony at the time the application is made, and shall have resided in the colony at least twenty years before that time. But the word "resided" is rather a wide term. There may be "residence" without actual personal residence. That is to say, if the man's home, his real place of residence, is in the

colony, the mere fact that he has been temporarily absent from the colony searching for work, or for any other purpose, would not, under this measure, mean that he was not resident in the colony during that period. He would be regarded as having been resident in the colony for the time being. Then, as I have said, the person must have been resident in the colony for twenty years, and he must not have been absent from Victoria, continuously or not—that is, for a broken period—for more than five years. We say that if he has been absent over five years during the twenty we are not prepared, in this temporary scheme, at all events, to make provision for him. Then we say that he must have resided for the five years immediately preceding in the colony; but he may have been temporarily absent to look for work or for similar purposes. Then, if the applicant can be regarded as a drunkard, we think that the pension should not be given to him. The amount available cannot be sufficient to afford a pension to every person, and we say that if, for the previous ten years, the applicant has been convicted five times of drunkenness, or if he has been in prison for a period of six months for any offence, he will be debarred. We also say that if, during the twenty years, he has been in gaol for periods amounting to five years, he shall be debarred from receiving a pension. We do not feel called upon to make provision for him under those circumstances. Then, where a husband has been a wife deserter, or has deserted his children, or where a wife has deserted her husband or children, we say that in such cases we are not called upon to make provision—at all events, under this temporary scheme. We also demand that the applicant shall have been living for five years previously a sober and reputable life. Then we require to ascertain the amount of income that the person is earning. It may be that the applicant is earning regularly two or three shillings a week. It will be for the police magistrate to say whether he thinks the applicant is earning such an amount as makes him deserving of receiving the whole amount of 7s. a week that we are prepared to pay. The applicant may be getting 5s. or 3s. per week, and the police magistrate may grant a pension of between the amount earned and the 7s. a week. We leave that point as flexible as possible. We give a discretion to the

police magistrate to say that if a man is earning a few shillings he may get the full 7s.; but if the police magistrate thinks that he is earning 5s. or 6s. he may order a pension to be paid only for the amount of the difference. We must leave that matter to the judgment and discretion of the police magistrate. Then it has to be ascertained whether the applicant has any accumulated property, because we are not to provide for people who have property. If a man has £150 we need not make any provision for him in this temporary scheme, at all events, whatever we may do for him later on. The applicant for an old-age pension has also to state that he has not, directly or indirectly, deprived himself of property or income in order to qualify for a pension. If he is a husband, living with his wife, he has to state that his wife is unable to provide for or maintain him, and if the applicant is a wife, living with her husband, she has to declare that her husband is unable to provide for or maintain her. The applicant has also to state that he is unable to maintain himself. He has to swear that he has not at any time been refused a pension, payable by virtue of the Old-age Pensions Act 1900, and that he has attained the age of 65 years, or that he is in permanent ill-health, caused by having been engaged in mining or any unhealthy occupation. That is the basis of the scheme we now propose. I again desire to impress on honorable members the fact that we are not dealing with a permanent scheme, but only with a scheme which we think will carry us on for a time until we can deal more fully, and in a better way, with the very large question we have to decide. It will, perhaps, be said that by passing this Bill we are affirming the principle of old-age pensions. Well, that may be so. No doubt it is so; but unquestionably the country has affirmed the principle, and the only difficulty is as to how we can best carry it out. The great trouble is to provide the requisite funds. Fortunately, our revenue is increasing, and if we do not give up too many sources of revenue, and do not incur too much expenditure, it is possible that the revenue may be able to bear the strain. I hope that will be the case, but if, unfortunately, it is otherwise, Parliament in its wisdom will have to devise some scheme for providing the necessary means for these old-age pensions. I am quite certain that Parliament will bring its best

energies to bear on the consideration of the question. It is not a party question, and I am sure that every honorable member of this House and every honorable member of another place, will do his best to give this much-required and much-deserved relief to our aged poor. Under the circumstances, I hope that the Bill will pass through as rapidly as possible, and I earnestly trust that it will become law before the end of the century. Ample funds are available for the first six months. The late Government provided £25,000, and the surplus last year was £30,000 more than the Treasurer anticipated, so that the £50,000 required is already provided. It may be said that this Bill practically proposes to place that £50,000 at the disposal of the Treasurer of the day. That may be so; but honorable members must be prepared to trust the Treasurer to do what is right in the matter, and I am certain that the House will say that the Treasurer shall have that £50,000 for this benevolent purpose.

MR. KIRTON.—While I agree with the Treasurer that this Bill should be passed as speedily as possible, I recognise that there is a general desire for the adjournment of the debate, and I am very glad to know that the Premier has expressed his willingness to consent to its adjournment. I therefore beg to move—

That the debate be now adjourned.

The motion for the adjournment of the debate was agreed to, and the debate was adjourned until Tuesday, December 11.

OLD-AGE PENSIONS (REGISTRATION OF CLAIMS) BILL.

SIR GEORGE TURNER moved the second reading of this Bill. He said—This may be regarded as a kindred measure to the one we have just been discussing. Many disputes have arisen as to the number of persons who will claim old-age pensions under any scheme which may be put forward. We are told that in New Zealand, out of a population of 22,000 over the age of 65 no fewer than 11,000 claimed pensions, but I do not know that that would be a fair guide to us. There are many differences between the circumstances of the two colonies in regard to old-age pensions. In New Zealand they allow persons to claim old-age pensions to a far greater extent than we could possibly hope to do here, with the more limited amount that we are to have at our disposal at the commencement of any such

scheme. But even in our own colony there are grave differences of opinion as to the number of persons who can possibly claim old-age pensions. The Royal commission, which sat for a considerable time, did valuable work, and gave us a very useful report, estimated that a certain number would apply for old-age pensions, but my inquiries from charitable institutions and other sources led me to believe that that number was an under-estimate. I think it is probable that we shall have to provide for 10,000 persons. The late Government thought that the total number would not exceed 3,500.

Mr. McLEAN.—That was the number of cases we thought would have to be dealt with during the current half-year. We said that the number would go up to 7,000 or 8,000 eventually?

Sir GEORGE TURNER.—Yes; that it would increase year by year. There is very great doubt as to the number of persons who will apply for old-age pensions, and what we desire by means of this Bill is to obtain information on that point. We propose to ask persons who consider that they are entitled to old-age pensions to send in claims in a form which will be provided for them. Only those persons who are over 65 years of age, or others who, not being 65 years, have been engaged in mining or some such hazardous occupation, and are in permanent ill-health, have the right to apply. They will have to give certain information. In the schedule to the Bill we furnish an example, which, of course, will be varied in detail according to the different circumstances of each particular case. The applicant has to give his full name, occupation, and address, to state where he was born, and the date he first arrived in Victoria, by what ship he came, how often he has been out of the colony since his arrival, and for what periods he was absent from Victoria. Then he has to show what his present means of support consist of, what it amounts to per week, and what his income was during the year ending the 31st inst. He has also to state what property he possesses in Victoria or elsewhere, and the value thereof. Having got this information, which is to be sent in by the 1st April, or such extended period as the Governor in Council may think fit to fix, we will be able to tabulate it, and have all the claims investigated by competent officers, and also classified according to the length of time applicants have been

in the colony and the various other particulars. We do not propose to ask applicants any questions with regard to whether they have been guilty of offences which would debar them from obtaining old-age pensions, because perhaps that is not a right thing to ask them when they are merely sending in their claims. When we have got this information we can deal with the matter properly, because we will then know the full extent we will be required to go, and of course we can discount the total claims by a fair margin in respect of applicants who will be disqualified in one way or another. This is, of course, a mere machinery Bill, and, whether we pass the other measure or not, we certainly ought to pass this Bill. Sooner or later we must deal with the question thoroughly, and, without the information sought to be obtained by means of this Bill, we would be dealing with it in the dark, and entering upon an unknown liability. Of course, every person who thinks he has a claim to an old-age pension will send in his application, so that we will have the necessary information and the full facts to place before Parliament when we ask Parliament to deal with the question in a permanent form. That information will prove very useful to both Houses of Parliament when the subject is under discussion.

On the motion of Mr. SALMON, the debate was adjourned until Tuesday, December 11.

POSTAGE RATE ALTERATION BILL.

Mr. GURR moved the second reading of this Bill. He said—This is a measure to alter the rate of postage on letters received at any post-office in Victoria for delivery within the colony. The Bill is a very short measure, containing only two clauses, but one of those provisions is very important to all sections of the community. The luxury of the penny post was enjoyed in Victoria for only about two and a half years, and ever since the rate of 2d. was reverted to, in 1892, there has been a great agitation to have the penny rate re-imposed. Numbers of leading articles have been published in the newspapers advocating the penny post, and many large and influential deputations have waited upon the Postmaster-General and the Treasurer of the colony, from time to time, for the same purpose. But the one answer has

always been that the colony could not afford the penny post. Now that federation is about to be consummated, however, it is considered advisable that the postage rate in Victoria for inland letters should be 1d. per $\frac{1}{2}$ oz. This proposal means an advance on the postal rates of all the other colonies, because in none of the colonies is there more than a partial penny postage rate. That is to say, there is a penny post for cities and towns, while for letters posted to the country from cities and towns the rate is 2d. The loss that may accrue from the institution of the penny post in Victoria is really an unknown amount. Various estimates have been made, but I do not think I need to put any statistics of the kind before the House. I will content myself by simply saying that I believe we shall make a very good start with this scheme. Honorable members will observe that it is to come into force on the 1st April. I do not say that we will make a good start with the penny post because it is to come into operation on the 1st April, but because about that period we shall have a very large influx of visitors into Victoria in connexion with the visit of the Duke and Duchess of York, and the opening of the Federal Parliament in Melbourne. That will induce a great increase in the number of letters posted within the colony, and there will consequently be an augmentation of the revenue, which will make the loss on the penny post much less than it otherwise would be. I would like to mention that the adoption of the penny postage rate will not interfere in the slightest degree with the present facilities which the country districts possess for the distribution of letters. There will not be a single loose bag less in Victoria through the penny postage rate coming into force, nor will it interfere at all with the extension of postal facilities to the very remote parts of the colony as they are needed. I mention this fact because it has been said in some quarters that the country people are going to suffer through this reduction of the postage rate. That, however, is not the case. The country people will retain all the facilities they at present enjoy, and, as further facilities are required in country districts, they will be given.

Mr. SALMON.—Will this aid in restoring the postal facilities that were taken away from country districts during the last six years?

Mr. GURR.—The country districts will have all the facilities they require. Letters addressed to persons in the country will be delivered without undue delay, even though it may cost 5s. for the delivery of a letter bearing a penny postage stamp.

Mr. WILKINS.—Will it make any difference to those employes of the Postal department who are now working for starvation wages?

Mr. GURR.—That matter is having the fullest consideration at the present time. The lowest-paid officers are to have reasonable pay for the work they do. No doubt their interests have been neglected in the past, and certainly they have not received adequate remuneration for the hard and sometimes important work they do. I may say that I shall devote the whole of to-morrow to the work of dealing with the case of some of the lowest-paid officers in the Postal department. The Government would have been very glad if the provisions of this Bill could have been brought into operation on the 1st January, but in view of the large sum of money that will be required to provide for old-age pensions, it is not considered advisable to bring this measure into operation until the 1st April. That is the only reason why it will not be brought into operation on the 1st January. The bringing of the penny post into operation will not be interfered with, as some people have supposed, through the postal arrangements going over to the Commonwealth at an earlier date. That matter has been thoroughly gone into, and it has been clearly shown that there will not be the slightest difficulty on account of the penny postage in Victoria not coming into operation on the same date as the Postal department is transferred to the Commonwealth. I believe that this important measure will meet with the approval of the House and the country, and I trust honorable members will see their way to pass the Bill at once.

Mr. BENT.—Will what you have just said be the answer to the question I have put on the notice-paper?

Mr. GURR.—Yes. The honorable member for Brighton has given notice of his intention to ask if it would be legal for the Victorian Parliament to reduce the postal charge on letters to 1d. from the 1st of April next, seeing that the Postal department will have passed to the Commonwealth prior to that date. That point was not overlooked when this Bill

was being prepared, and what I have said will be the answer to the honorable member's question.

Mr. BENT.—When does the Postal department go over to the Commonwealth?

Sir GEORGE TURNER.—The Governor-General in Council will fix the date. It does not necessarily go over on the 1st January next.

Mr. GURR.—There is not the slightest possible danger on that score. I hope that this Bill will meet with the ready acceptance of the House.

Mr. McLEAN.—I do not intend to debate the provisions of this Bill, but I would like to point out that it was proposed by the late Government to bring the penny postage into operation on the 1st January next. A distinct promise was made by the late Treasurer that it would be brought into operation on the 1st January, 1901, if the revenue continued to come in satisfactorily. The revenue came in much better than we ever anticipated. I see no cause, therefore, why this concession should not be granted on the 1st of January. The Postmaster-General said that the question of bringing the reduction into operation on the 1st of April had been fully considered, and that there was no danger whatever of the provisions of the Bill being rendered nugatory by the possible passing over to the Commonwealth of the Postal department prior to that date. I should like to have some clearer explanation, because there is nothing to prevent the department from passing over to the Commonwealth on any date after the 1st of January. The authority of the Federal Parliament will not be required; all that will be necessary will be an order of the Governor-General in Council. It is quite possible, therefore, that the department may be transferred to the Commonwealth Government long before the 1st of April. I should like to have some stronger assurance than has yet been given that this Bill will take effect even if the department does pass over to the Commonwealth prior to the date at which it is proposed to bring it into operation.

Mr. I. A. ISAACS.—The Commonwealth Constitution comes into force on the 1st of January. There are certain matters that are to be within the exclusive legislative authority of the Commonwealth Parliament. Amongst those

will undoubtedly be the post-office, telegraphs, and telephones. The Postal department will not be transferred by the mere act of the Commonwealth Constitution coming into operation. There will have to be a proclamation. In the meanwhile, we have authority to pass any laws we please regarding the Postal department, and if we pass this Bill it will be a perfectly good law. There will be nothing, so far as I can see, to invalidate it. If we passed a Customs Bill providing that until the 31st December the rates on certain goods should be so much per cent., and that after that time they should be so much less or so much more, that would be a perfectly good law. We should not then be assuming legislative functions after the period when the exclusive authority to pass laws had gone to the Federal Parliament. We should have passed our law, and exercised our legislative authority at a time when we had full power to do so. That has been recognised in New South Wales. The Parliament of New South Wales have gone even further than we now propose. They have passed a Bill relating to the Customs department, which goes over at once to the Commonwealth Government, and that Bill gives power to the Government, at any time before the imposition by the Commonwealth of uniform duties of customs and excise, to reduce the excise duties on tobacco, cigars, cigarettes, spirits, and beer.

Mr. GILLIES.—It is quite within their power to do that.

Mr. I. A. ISAACS.—Then it is certainly within our power to pass the Bill which is now before the House. That Bill will be an Act from the time it is assented to by the Governor. It merely says, in effect, that our postal rate for inland letters shall be 2d. for every ounce up to the 31st of March, and that after that date it shall be 1d. for every half-ounce. I should like to point out—regarding the matter from a practical point of view—that it is our own revenue we are dealing with, and that nobody can therefore complain.

Mr. SHIELS.—I agree with the view presented to us by the Attorney-General. The Government are quite within their powers in introducing a Bill to provide that the reduction of the rate of postage shall take effect from the 1st of April, and not from the 1st of January. The Commonwealth

Government could not by an administrative act interfere with any arrangements made by a state Parliament. With regard to the other point, I want to say that it was the intention of the late Government to have proposed that this alteration should take place on the 1st of January, but that was from our view of the finances. The present Government have had an opportunity of determining the question of whether the finances of the colony will bear the strain of the reduction of the postage rate to 1d. from the 1st of January. They are making engagements of their own; they are increasing the amount to be paid in old-age pensions; and it may be that they purpose proposing to the House some further imposition or deduction which would lessen their power to grant this concession from the 1st of January. I shall not, therefore, press the view which the late Premier has put. The question is one of finance, and I hold strongly that the credit of the colony, and its solvency, ought to be too precious to honorable members for them to allow any feeling of political partisanship to predominate in connexion with matters of this kind. If the Treasurer thinks that it is only consistent with safe finance to postpone the inauguration of this reform until the 1st of April, I shall not raise my voice in dissent.

Mr. BENT.—Before I placed the question which appears in my name on the notice-paper, I consulted one or two legal gentlemen in regard to this subject. Their contention is, that on the 1st of January next, at any rate, a portion of the Postal department will be transferred to the Commonwealth. We know full well that the gentlemen who it is said are to constitute the first Commonwealth Government will very soon put their hands on whatever sources of revenue exist. The Attorney-General has told us to-night that there is a possibility that this department may be handed over at any time after the 1st of January to the Commonwealth Government. In my opinion, the Commonwealth Government will not wait three months before taking it over. I was at the General Post-office the other day asking about some postal matters, and I heard it said in the office, that the members of the state Parliament would have nothing whatever to do with postal matters after the 1st of January. That is no doubt the general opinion. After the 1st of January the members of this

House will find when they go to the Post-office that they will be simply shown the door.

Mr. GILLIES.—There must be an order of the Governor-General in Council.

Mr. BENT.—That would not take three months.

Mr. SHIELDS.—The Commonwealth Parliament will have to pass an Act.

Mr. BENT.—I know full well what has to be done. I am strongly in favour of the penny post; but, as honorable members know, the late Treasurer would have postponed the introduction of the reform for another twelve months. Sitting, as I do, on the Ministerial side of the House, I am not going to oppose this Bill; but I think the safest course to adopt would be to introduce the reform as from the 1st of January. I may say, also, that I take the view that if the proposal of the honorable member for Warnambool were adopted, and sixpenny telegrams introduced, that would be a step in the right direction. Why is it that the officers of the Postal department are so anxious to have the Anomalies Board's report dealt with as soon as possible? Is it not because they believe that on the 1st of January the department will be transferred to the Commonwealth Government?

Mr. SALMON.—I certainly am disappointed that the Government have not seen fit to carry out the promise that was made by the late Government with regard to this matter. I feel perfectly satisfied that, had there not been an impression in the minds of some honorable members that not much business was to be transacted to-night, they would have remained, and would have pressed on the Government the urgency of introducing this reform at the earliest possible date.

Mr. SMITH.—Your Treasurer was always against it.

Mr. SALMON.—The honorable member knows that I am not now responsible for any of the opinions of the honorable member for Normanby. Without divulging Cabinet secrets, I may tell the House that this question received the most careful consideration at the hands of the late Government. It was only recently that we made up our minds that it was expedient, and that it would be perfectly safe also, having regard to the state of the finances, to introduce the reform as from the 1st of January. Of course, the Postmaster-General has opportunities of obtaining information which are not

available to other honorable members. He has consulted with the Premier, who, we are informed on very good authority, is to be one of the members of the first Commonwealth Government.

Sir GEORGE TURNER.—I should like to know what the good authority is. I have not heard anything of it yet.

Mr. SALMON.—I recognise that the Premier is not yet at liberty to either contradict or affirm the report.

Sir GEORGE TURNER.—I assure you that I have not heard a word of it on one side or the other. I do not want these rumours to be circulated.

Mr. SALMON.—There is no doubt that the right honorable gentleman will be communicated with within a very few hours. Perhaps an assurance has been obtained from the gentlemen who are to form the nucleus of the first Commonwealth Government that the Postal department will not be interfered with before the 1st of April. Unless we are assured that that is a fact, we should hesitate to pass this Bill. The desire was very strongly and fervently expressed from this (the opposition) side of the House last session that the postage rate should be reduced at once; and, unless the change of seats has resulted in a change of opinion, the majority of honorable members should be in favour of the alteration being made as soon as possible. Having regard to my inexperience, I am not going to attempt to lecture honorable members, or to refer to the practice which is usually adopted. I will only say that I have always understood—and the point was strongly impressed on me when I took office—that it was the duty of a Government to carry out the promises that were made by its predecessors, unless there were some very strong reasons to the contrary. A promise was made to the House and to the country that if the state of the finances permitted of it a reduction of the rate of postage would take place on the 1st of January. It has not been shown that there is any financial reason why the reform should be postponed for three months. I am one of those who desire that this colony shall enter into the Federation on the best possible terms. I do not complain at all of the action taken by the Premier of New South Wales in regard to the excise duties. It was recognised at once that it would be necessary to protect the people of the country. We

in this colony should not enter the Federation under more unfavorable conditions than New South Wales, but we shall certainly do so if the introduction of this reform is postponed until the 1st of April. Unless the Government are disposed to reconsider the matter, I think that it would be better to adjourn the debate, so that those honorable members who are absent and who take an interest in the question may have an opportunity of discussing it. If, however, the Government proceed with the Bill, I shall move in committee that the 1st of January be substituted for the 1st of April.

Mr. GILLOTT.—I would point out to the honorable member that the promise that was made by the late Government was coupled with the condition that the state of the finances permitted of the change taking place from the 1st of January. We never had a definite promise from them that the change would be made absolutely as from that date.

Mr. SHIELDS.—We put it in the Governor's speech.

Mr. GILLOTT.—I am speaking of the last session of Parliament. The honorable member for Talbot simply puts it that the reform should be introduced as from the 1st of January. I am sure that honorable members on all sides of the House would agree with him if the circumstances would permit of it, but it must be borne in mind that the Treasurer is setting apart £50,000 instead of £25,000 for the purpose of old-age pensions for the next six months.

Mr. McLEAN.—You will not be able to investigate the 3,500 cases in six months.

Mr. GILLOTT.—The point that has been raised by the honorable member for Brighton received the most careful consideration of the Cabinet. We hold that there is nothing to prevent the state Parliament, on or before the 1st of January, or on or before the proclamation, from making any alteration in the postage rate.

Mr. GILLIES.—You could pass the Bill at any time prior to the Federal Parliament coming into existence.

Mr. GILLOTT.—It is certainly within our power to pass a Bill providing that the reduction in the rate of postage shall take place on the 1st of April. That is my view, and it is the view also of the Attorney-General, who has given the matter his careful consideration. I hope, therefore, that the second reading of the

Bill will be passed. We all agree that the change should be made. We should be pleased if it could be made on the 1st of January, but, still, I think the commercial community, and, in fact, the whole of the people of the colony, will be satisfied if it is made on the 1st of April.

Mr. BEAZLEY.—I desire to say, in support of the suggestion of the honorable member for Talbot that the debate should be adjourned, that I, together with my colleague, disagree with the proposed reduction of the postage rate, and that we expressed our view repeatedly when before the electors. Personally, I have no desire to urge arguments against this Bill. I do not know that I could urge very strong arguments, as probably I have not put myself in possession of all the facts, but a strong case can be made out against the re-inauguration of the penny postage in Victoria. On the ground that there are many honorable members present and many others who are not here who would like to urge their views, I think the Government might accede to the request of the honorable member for Talbot and postpone the second reading until Tuesday.

The motion was agreed to without a division.

The Bill was then read a second time, and committed.

On clause 2, which was as follows :—

In the 2nd schedule to the Post Office Act 1890, as re-enacted in the 2nd schedule to the Post Office Act 1897, for the words "Inland letters, for every ounce, or fraction thereof, 2d.," occurring under the heading of "Letters and Post-cards," there shall, from and after the 1st day of April, 1901, be substituted the words "Inland letters, for every half-ounce, or fraction thereof, 1d."

Mr. SALMON said that he had already indicated that he thought that the further consideration of the measure should be postponed until the following week.

Mr. GURR.—It has been thoroughly well considered.

Mr. SALMON said that for the reason that many honorable members had not expected the Bill to come on, and had left for the country, he begged to move—

That progress be reported.

The motion to report progress was negatived.

Mr. SALMON moved—

That the word "April" (line 7) be omitted, and the word "January" substituted.

He stated that his desire in moving this amendment was to express the opinion of the committee that the penny postage

should come into operation on the 1st January next. He regretted that the Government had not seen their way to grant a postponement of the subject. He knew of certain honorable members who desired to speak upon the question, if they had had an opportunity of doing so. An intimation, he believed, had been made by the Premier previous to the sitting commencing that it was the intention of the Government not to ask the House to sit after half-past six o'clock.

Sir GEORGE TURNER.—That is, I said, if I could get through my work, I should be glad to consent to the House rising at half-past six o'clock.

Mr. SALMON said that an honorable member had told him that the Premier gave an assurance that the House would adjourn at half-past six.

Sir GEORGE TURNER.—I told him if I could get the Postage Rate Alteration Bill through I would consent to the House rising at half-past six o'clock.

Mr. SALMON said that the result of that interview with the Premier was that the honorable member he referred to had left for the country. He knew of a number of other honorable members who desired to take part in the discussion, and to give their votes upon the Bill. He had already brought the subject of his amendment before the Minister in charge of the Bill, and he was very loath indeed to offer further opposition, but, at the same time, he felt that it was unfair that honorable members should be taken at what he looked upon as a disadvantage. The honorable member for Melbourne East (Mr. Gillott) had mentioned that one of the reasons why the inauguration of the penny postage was postponed for three months was because the Government had provided an extra £25,000 out of the possible surplus for the purpose of old-age pensions. When the late Treasurer made his Budget speech he estimated that the surplus at the end of the financial year would be £1,087. That surplus had gone up by leaps and bounds since that time.

Mr. MAUGER.—And we have had no hot weather yet to speak of.

Mr. SALMON said that the honorable member for Footscray had his eye upon the weather-glass, which his predilection in favour of temperance led him to watch carefully for fear a few hot days should lead to an extra consumption of liquor. But it appeared that the increase of the prospective surplus was due to solid and

substantial reasons. It was due to the prosperity of the country.

Mr. SANGSTER.—Not to liquid reasons.

Mr. SALMON said that the prospective surplus was not due to liquid reasons as the honorable member for Port Melbourne had rightly observed. The revenue was going up, and had been going up, by leaps and bounds, and it appeared probable that the surplus would be something like £500,000.

Mr. WILKINS.—I hope you are not misleading us.

Mr. MURRAY.—It is the estimate of the "man in the street."

Mr. SALMON said that it was the estimate of a Member of Parliament who had carefully watched the returns, and believed that, at any rate, he was in a position to judge.

Mr. MURRAY.—May I ask whether the gentleman is a weather prophet? There are hot days in January and February.

Mr. SALMON said that he thought that under the circumstances the objection which had been made by the honorable member for Melbourne East did not hold good. With regard to the extra £25,000 which was to be appropriated for old-age pensions, he did not wish to attempt to discourage those who took such a great interest in that subject, but he was very doubtful indeed as to whether any of the money would be spent before the end of the financial year.

Mr. SANGSTER.—Oh, yes, it will.

Mr. SALMON said that, of course, if the honorable member for Port Melbourne had his way all of it would be spent, and five times the amount if necessary.

Mr. SANGSTER.—Hear, hear.

Mr. SALMON said that he did not wish to refer again to the promise made by the late Government, but he would point out that it was a distinct promise made in the Lieutenant-Governor's speech, and made absolutely without any reservation or condition whatever. The first promise made by the late Government was by the Treasurer, in the Assembly chamber, that, if the revenue justified it, the alteration of the postage rate would be made. The second and final promise was made in the Lieutenant-Governor's speech, where it was announced that the revenue had come in in such a satisfactory fashion that the Government definitely promised to introduce this reform of penny postage. Under these circumstances, the argument urged

by the honorable member for Melbourne East should not carry much weight with the committee. Those who desired to see penny postage brought about as quickly as possible ought to vote for the amendment.

Sir GEORGE TURNER said that he extremely regretted that his honorable friend the member for Talbot had taken the step of moving an amendment upon the clause. The Treasurer ought to be the judge as to whether the finances would bear the strain or not of any increased burden upon the revenue. With the knowledge in his possession, he fixed the 1st of April as the date for the coming into operation of the penny postage. If, in the meantime, the Government found that they had more revenue than they knew what to do with, they could spend it upon much-needed repairs to the State schools and so forth. Who would grumble if the inauguration of the penny post was postponed for three months? So long as there was a certainty of penny postage being conceded, the commercial community would be perfectly satisfied. If the 1st of July was fixed, they would be satisfied, so long as they knew that the colony would enter the Federation with the understanding that the postage rate would be reduced to 1d. on a definite day. The honorable member for Talbot had referred to a number of promises made by the late Government in the Government programme. The matter was not referred to in the Government programme, but when the late Treasurer was pressed by the House to concede penny postage, he (Sir George Turner) came to the honorable gentleman's assistance, and stated that it was for the Treasurer to say, with his knowledge of the revenue, whether such an alteration could be made or not. Looking into the state of the finances as well as he had been able to do during the short period at his disposal, he had come to the conclusion that it would not be wise to institute the penny postage earlier than the 1st April. It must entail a loss of £15,000. It was better to postpone it for a few months than run the risk of having a deficit. It was all very well to say that the revenue was increasing; but the honorable member for Normanby had told honorable members that he had Supplementary Estimates to the amount of £200,000. Under all the circumstances, looking into the matter as carefully as he possibly could, he had no hesitation in

saying to the committee that the amendment ought not to be agreed to, and that the proposal of the Government was a very fair one.

Mr. KIRTON observed that he sincerely hoped that the amendment of the honorable member for Talbot would not be agreed to. The Ministry had met the House very fairly. If honorable members desired to imperil the proposal for the reduction of the postage rate to 1d., they would support the amendment. So far as he could judge, there were a very large number of honorable members who were not satisfied that the postage rate should be reduced at all, and there was likely to be a contest on that point. Consideration should be given to the Ministry in view of the fact that they were making very satisfactory provision for old-age pensions. He was entitled to say this in view of the fact that members of the late Ministry could not make up their minds until the last moment to reduce the postage rate at all. The commercial community would be perfectly satisfied to have the reduction made from the 1st April next. This should not be made a party question in any way.

Mr. SALMON.—Who is making it a party question?

Mr. KIRTON said that he thought the Government had made a very fair compromise, and one that should be accepted.

The amendment was negatived.

The Bill was reported without amendment, and the report was adopted.

On the motion of Sir GEORGE TURNER, the Bill was then read a third time.

ADJOURNMENT.

Sir GEORGE TURNER moved, by leave—

That the House, at its rising, adjourn until Tuesday next.

The motion was agreed to.

The House adjourned at twenty-seven minutes past six o'clock, until Tuesday, December 11.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

Tuesday, December 11, 1900.

The SPEAKER took the chair at half-past four o'clock p.m.

CHAIRMEN OF COMMITTEES.

The SPEAKER laid on the table his warrant nominating Mr. Bennett, Mr.

Second Session 1900.—[10]

Bowser, Mr. Bromley, Mr. Kirton, and Mr. Murray to act as Temporary Chairmen of Committees whenever requested to do so by the Chairman of Committees, as provided by the standing orders.

COOL STORAGE AND WINE COMMISSION.

Mr. BOWSER asked the Minister of Agriculture if, in view of the approach of federation, he would state if the Government intended to deal with the recommendations of the Cool Storage and Wine Commission to strengthen the district wineries and establish a central cellar; if not this session, would it be possible to carry out the recommendations of the commission next session?

Mr. MORRISSEY.—The answer to the honorable member's question is as follows:—

The report of the Cool Storage and Wine Commission, which was completed on August 9, 1900, contains recommendations of a very important character, and involving considerable outlay. The present Government have not yet had any opportunity of considering these recommendations, but will do so at an early date. It seems just as possible to carry out the recommendations of the commission next session as at the present time.

SOUTH GLENFINE LODE.

Mr. KERR asked the Minister of Mines if he would cause a geological survey to be made during the recess of the South Glenfine lode north as far as Smythesdale; and, if so, would permanent marks be placed on the surface at stated distances as a guide to prospectors? He said that it was a matter of great importance to the mining district in question that the geological survey asked for should be made. During the past three years, developments in mining in the district had paid dividends, and it would be a matter of importance, not only to the district, but also to the country, if other mining operations there could be opened up and made reproductive.

Mr. BURTON.—Steps will be taken to have the survey asked for made at the earliest possible date.

PORTERS AND PERMANENT-WAY MEN.

Mr. MURRAY asked the Minister of Mines (in the absence of the Minister of Railways) what was the reason that the 6d. per day increase voted by Parliament to porters and permanent-way men, making their wages 7s. per day after ten