

Legislative Assembly,

Thursday, 26th February, 1891.

Travelling allowance, Delegates attending Federal Convention—Amendment of Bankruptcy Act—Protection to Married Women—Darling Range Railway and Timber Concession: adjourned debate—Adulteration of Liquors: Report of Select Committee—Prorogation.

THE SPEAKER took the chair at 2:30 p.m.

PRAYERS.

TRAVELLING ALLOWANCE TO DELEGATES ATTENDING FEDERAL CONVENTION.

THE PREMIER (Hon. J. Forrest): As there is no amount voted on the Estimates for the Delegation to the Federal Convention, I may state that it is the intention of the Government to make the same provision for these delegates as has been usually made for our representative at the Federal Council, and the Government very much regret they cannot make a more liberal allowance; but it is hoped that it will almost, if not quite, cover their actual expenses.

AMENDMENT OF THE BANKRUPTCY LAW.

MR. R. F. SHOLL: I wish to ask the Attorney General whether the Government will, at the next session of the Legislature, bring in a bill to repeal or amend the existing Bankruptcy Act? It is well known that the present Act is very much abused; in fact, it is made the medium for fraud and for swindling, instead of being a relief to unfortunate people, who, through no fault of their own, become involved in debt. I believe there is a general feeling amongst business people, amongst honest traders, that something should be done to amend the present law. I think it would be better to be without a Bankruptcy Act at all, than to have an Act under which swindling may be carried on, and dishonest people may get rid of their debts by paying a shilling in the pound. Nearly every case now that comes before the Court is brought there with the intention of swindling creditors. As the Attorney General is not in his place, perhaps the Premier will be able to answer my question.

THE PREMIER (Hon. J. Forrest): I have much pleasure in informing the hon. member that the Government will give the matter their careful consideration, and that they fully intend to deal with the question.

PROTECTION TO MARRIED WOMEN.

MR. TRAYLEN: May I ask, without notice, whether the Government can see their way to introduce an Act that will give greater protection to married women than is afforded them at present? As an illustration: a poor woman who has to earn a livelihood for herself and family had saved and put away £3 some time ago; her husband came home unexpectedly, rose early one Sunday morning, stole her earnings, and spent it in a public house.

THE PREMIER (Hon. J. Forrest): I cannot give the hon. member a pledge, more than this, that I will promise him I will bring the matter under the consideration of my colleagues, and see what we can do in the direction he indicates. I have no doubt there are many cases of hardship such as he represents. The matter has been before the House before, and I believe that on the last occasion the bill was only thrown out, on its third reading, by one vote. But I cannot pledge the Government without consulting with my colleagues.

DARLING RANGE RAILWAY AND TIMBER CONCESSION: MR. KEANE'S CONTRACT.

ADJOURNED DEBATE.

MR. LOTON, resuming the debate on this subject, said: This contract is new to most of us, but it does not come before us as altogether a new matter. It appears on the face of it to be an old concession, otherwise many members I think would be inclined to take up a different position with regard to it from what they will do on this occasion. I should like to say that an important contract like this should on all occasions be placed before members at an earlier stage of the session. It would be unjust to impute any blame to the Government on this occasion; they are newly in office and have had a lot to do, and must have worked very hard to bring up the business to its present stage. At the same

time, I must say I think we should have far more time for the consideration of such questions than a few minutes towards the close of the session. In fact, the greater portion of the real work of the session has been forced through this House during the last week, leaving out the question of the loan policy of the Government; and it would have been well, I think, if the Government had taken a little more time and a little more trouble in putting before us the real business of the country at an earlier stage. I think they might have waited a little longer in placing their loan policy before us. However, it has been forced upon us, and I only hope it may turn out successfully. I presume the original lessee of this timber concession had to pay rent for it?

THE PREMIER (Hon. J. Forrest): Yes; £200 a year at first, then £400, and then £600.

MR. LOTON: I understand the object of the present contract is to give the present holders a greater security of tenure. I think the enterprising gentleman who has put forward this scheme is entitled to the fullest and fairest consideration which this Assembly can give him. No doubt his object in building this railway is to enable him to make use of the timber as soon as possible; and, while his Midland Railway contract is going on, he will no doubt recoup himself by the timber he will be able to use for that work (or very nearly so) for the cost of building this railway. But I do not see that that will do us any harm. I understand that when this area is denuded of the best of the timber it will fall into the hands of the Government for sale; and no doubt there are portions of the land, in the gorges and gullies, that are suitable for the growth of fruit and so on, and will be utilised for that purpose, particularly when it is tapped by a railway. I notice that it is provided that after the end of 1899 the contractor will not be obliged to keep this railway open; and I do not suppose it would be of any use to impose any penalty for his not doing so. It would be no use giving him a concession with one hand and taking away its value with the other. Seeing that the object in view is to place the concessionaire in a position to build a railway in order to develop

this timber industry, I may say that the proposal will have my concurrence.

MR. CANNING: I can only echo what has fallen from the hon. member for the Swan, that it is to be regretted this matter was not brought forward earlier. I acknowledge there are reasons why a Government so recently in office should find it difficult to attend to everything, but I do think that matters of this importance should have been brought forward earlier in the session, so that this contract might have been referred to a select committee. I shall not oppose it at this stage, but I thought it right to make this observation.

Motion put, and agreed to.

ADULTERATION OF LIQUORS, &c.

REPORT OF SELECT COMMITTEE.

MR. TRAYLEN moved that the report of the select committee appointed to inquire into the subject of the adulteration of liquors, etc., be taken into consideration. The committee had taken considerable trouble, so far as the time at their disposal would allow, to enter as fully as possible into the subject committed to them, and had got as far as they could at the true facts of the case. The result of their investigations they had placed in the report in such a manner that it scarcely required a word of explanation on his part. It would be seen that they considered there were three possible consequences or effects which might be looked for from the adulteration of liquors and other beverages,—(1) injury to health; (2) loss of revenue; and (3) loss of business to honest traders. So far as injury to health was concerned, their first course was to ask the opinion of the medical officer of the Local Board of Health as to the deleterious substances most frequently used for purposes of adulteration. The committee had been careful to eliminate from the list those substances employed in what was technically called "doctoring," and also for the purpose of effecting other, what he might call legitimate purposes. Their next duty was to find out whether there was any evidence of these substances being largely used in the colony for adulterating beverages. So far as the committee could learn, there appeared to be no wholesale use of these ingredients on the

part of wholesale dealers in intoxicating liquors; but, owing to the peculiar circumstances of the case, it was impossible to get to know whether retail vendors used these deleterious substances largely or not. It was easy for them to have a small stock on their premises and make up a quantity of liquor when there seemed an occasion for adulteration, and yet render it impossible for the committee to know whether they frequently resorted to such practices or not. It would be seen from the report that the committee discriminated between the two methods of adulteration open to wholesale or retail vendors. The first of these methods was "to add water to the original article, and then to restore the intoxicating quality and general appearance by adding poisonous and medicinal drugs and chemicals." The second method of adulteration was "by adding water as before, and then restoring the intoxicating property by adding cheap and inferior spirits of a fiery nature. This spirit was sometimes charged with fusel oil (amylic alcohol), which was a more dangerous spirit than the usual ethylic alcohol. The necessarily imperfect data obtainable at the Custom House did not allow the committee to state absolutely that no resort was made by wholesale houses to the first-named method, but it seemed fairly certain that poisonous drugs or chemicals were not used by any wholesale house. This, they thought, was very satisfactory in relation to the questions of health and public revenue. With respect to the second method of adulteration, the committee found on comparing Government returns, that the importation of spirits of wine rose from 16 gals. in 1888 to 429 gals. in 1890. More than 300 gals. out of the 429 were imported by one wholesale house. 506 gals. of a very inferior rum were also imported from Mauritius, and a similar article was sometimes obtained from Queensland. Comparison of prices shows that much

lower grade brands could be obtained from the house referred to, than from any other, with one exception. It seemed evident that adulteration by means of adding inferior deleterious spirit to better grades, was largely carried on by at least one wholesale house. The fraud upon the public was in proportion to the quantity of foreign ingredients that this "mixing spirit" contained. The information available to the committee went to show that tobacco, snuff, the plant locally known as "droke," and other objectionable substances were used by unscrupulous publicans; and that these were often used for the purpose of drugging men who had large sums of money in their pockets. The committee did not have much opportunity for inquiring into such adulterations as were made in England, or other sources of supply, but the evidence showed that all cheap brands were necessarily adulterations by one or both of the foregoing methods. The committee, in conclusion, recommended that a public analyst be appointed, and that as soon as possible funds should be provided for the purpose of having analyses made; and, if necessary, the present laws bearing on adulteration should be amended to facilitate such analyses. He begged now to move that the report of the committee be adopted.

Question—put and passed.

PROROGATION.

A Message having been delivered by the Usher of the Black Rod, stating that His Excellency the Governor desired the presence of the members of the Assembly in the Legislative Council Chamber, Mr. Speaker and hon. members proceeded there, when His Excellency having given the Royal Assent to a number of bills, and delivered a Speech (*vide* p. 442 *ante*), prorogued the session until Tuesday, the 30th day of June, 1891.

The session then closed.