

## Legislative Assembly,

Tuesday, 17th February, 1891.

Protection of Kangaroos, and also of Birds—Scab Act, 1885; Amendment Bill: first reading—Excess Bill, 1890: first reading—Colonial Hospital, working of—Introduction of a Police Act—Audit Bill, 1891: third reading—Excess Bill, 1889: second reading—Apportionment Bill: second reading; in committee—Adjournment.

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

PRAYERS.

## PROTECTION OF KANGAROOS, AND ALSO OF BIRDS.

MR. SCOTT, in accordance with notice, asked the Premier, whether the Government had had under consideration the desirability of introducing legislation to prevent the almost complete destruction of the kangaroo, and also to prevent the shooting of birds within the limits of the Perth water?

THE PREMIER (Hon. J. Forrest) replied, as follows:—I have placed upon the table the result of inquiries already made with reference to the destruction of kangaroos. The subject has not been considered by the present Government.

2. It is proposed to consider the question of further protecting birds in Perth and Melville waters, at an early date.

## SCAB ACT, 1885, AMENDMENT BILL.

Read a first time.

## EXCESS BILL, 1890.

Read a first time.

## WORKING OF THE COLONIAL HOSPITAL, PERTH.

MR. A. FORREST, in accordance with notice, moved that a Commission be appointed to inquire into the working of the Colonial Hospital. The hon. member said it was with feelings of regret that he moved the motion standing in his name, as it might appear to reflect upon the management of the hospital. But he had no wish to say anything about those who had charge of this institution; he was induced to move for this Commission because of some letters that had appeared in the public press,

condemning the management of the hospital; and, as the hospital was maintained out of funds provided by that House he thought it was their duty to see whether there was any truth in the charges made, and whether the great trust reposed in those in power was not abused. He held in his hand a letter which appeared in the *Daily News* of the 9th February, about a week ago, signed "Eye-Witness." The gentleman who had brought him this letter asked him to call attention to it in the House; but he said "No, unless you give me the name of the writer." He then gave him (Mr. Forrest) the writer's card, and he should say from his appearance that he was a respectable member of the community. The charges contained in that letter were so grave that he thought the Government ought to take some notice of it. One of the charges was that a child having died and been put in the dead-house at the hospital, the body was left there for nine days, without being removed. There were several other charges about the way the hospital was managed. An answer appeared to this letter a day or two afterwards, but the charges were not generally denied, or at any rate they were not all disputed; and it was evident if you were to believe these letters that gross carelessness had been perpetrated by someone. He could not say whether they were true or not; but he thought it was due to the officials of the hospital that an inquiry should be made. He had brought the matter before the House with great reluctance, and he would not have done so unless he had been assured by the gentleman who wrote that letter —[THE PREMIER: Who is he?] He should be glad to show his card to the Premier, but the writer had told him he did not wish his name brought before the House or the country; but he would be glad to show his card to the Premier or to any independent member. The writer told him these charges were true; and, whether true or not, certainly some notice should be taken of it by the House, not only in the interests of the public but also of those who had the management of the hospital.

MR. QUINLAN said he had much pleasure in seconding the motion. He had read the correspondence referred to in the newspaper, and he had been told

by a patient recently discharged that what was said was true. He thought that in justice to the hospital officials, and to the public generally, there should be an inquiry. It would be a bad thing for the colony if such impressions were allowed to go abroad without contradiction.

THE PREMIER (Hon. J. Forrest) said that so far as the Government were concerned they had no objection to any amount of inquiry, not only into the management of the Colonial Hospital but of any other public institution. But he would ask members whether they had read the reply to some of these charges, and also the papers he had laid on the table the other day with regard to another letter that appeared in the press. He did not know exactly to which case the hon. member referred. Some questions had already been asked in the House, and replied to fully, and, he thought, satisfactorily, and the correspondence had been laid on the table. Of course they all knew that anyone who went into a hospital with a broken limb or any other injury, and who came out not quite so good a man, perhaps, as he was before he was injured, would naturally feel some little resentment, and be inclined to blame the hospital authorities because they did not turn him out as perfect as he was before. But were they going to pay attention to every petulant complaint from every dissatisfied patient? After all, they were anonymous writers. Instead of rushing into print, why did they not come to the Government? Why did they not come with their complaints, if they had any, to him, or to the Colonial Secretary who was the Ministerial head of the department? It would be much better if these people, if they felt aggrieved, should go to the fountain head direct, and not rush into print and write anonymous letters. If the hon. member only asked for this Commission on the strength of these anonymous letters, he thought it would be the duty of the Government to refuse a Commission, or, at all events, to ask members not to accept the hon. member's motion. But if he asked for this Commission on general grounds, of course the Government would have no objection; the more inquiry they had the better they would like it, whether into this or any other department of the public ser-

vice. But, as he had already said, inquiries had already been made with regard to the allegations contained in one letter, purporting to have been signed by the writer, and the answer to those allegations, as shown in the correspondence laid on the table, was complete and satisfactory. If the object in moving for this Commission was to inquire generally into the management of the hospital with a view to its reorganisation, that of course was a big question, and the Commission if appointed would have to sit during the recess. He thought it would be better to let the matter remain in abeyance until the present Government had time to consider this and other questions, and see whether the Government would not be prepared next year with some proposals of their own for placing this institution on a different footing. If the House should not then be satisfied, they could ask for a Commission if it was considered necessary. His own belief was that the officials of the Colonial Hospital were very careful officials, and he believed that people got very good attendance there. That was his opinion, and, if there were any exceptional cases, and the matter was brought to the attention of the Government—not by anonymous writers in the press but by the persons aggrieved—he would promise them that immediate inquiry would be made.

MR. R. F. SHOLL said that to a great extent he agreed with the Premier, that the question of the general management of this hospital was a matter that required consideration, with the view of placing it on a different basis. What that basis should be, he was not prepared at present to say. Still he thought the hon. member for Kimberley had not brought this forward without some grounds. The hon. member had told them he was satisfied as to the respectability and truthfulness of this anonymous writer. In supporting the hon. member's motion for a Commission of inquiry, he did not do so with any intention of reflecting in any way upon those in charge of this institution. He hoped if the Commission was appointed it would go into the whole subject of the management of the Colonial Hospital. The answer to the charges contained in the letter referred to was evidently writ-

ten by someone in authority at the hospital; and, after all, it did not give a flat denial to all the charges. The statement that the dead body of a child had been left in the dead-house for nine days was not contradicted; but he believed it was stated that the hospital authorities were not responsible for the body of this child being left in the dead-house as it was. In any case, it did appear to him that the hospital must be in a state of disorganization when a dead body, whether of a child or of an adult, should be allowed to remain in the dead-house for nine days. He agreed with the Premier to this extent, that members ought not to take up the complaints of anonymous writers in the press. If they did so, their time would be pretty well taken up. But he considered that the charges in this instance, although answered, had not been directly denied, though the answer had evidently been written by someone in authority in the hospital. [The PREMIER: The hon. member cannot say that.] He was quite satisfied enough about it to induce him to vote for this Commission. [The PREMIER: We have no objection to it, mind.] The letter written and published in reply to the charges made by the writer calling himself "Eye-Witness" was quite sufficient to make him support this motion. The Premier told them that inquiries would always be made by the Government if complaints were made to them, direct. No doubt the Government had every desire to make inquiries into these complaints, but who were they to inquire from? Simply from the head of the department or the officials against whom the complaints were made. What satisfaction were they likely to get from such an inquiry as that? In the case of an inquiry by a Commission it was different. A Commission could collect evidence from independent sources, and hear both sides, and judge between them, and be in a much better position to get at the true facts of the case than the Government, who must depend for their information from the officials implicated or the head of the department. He might say this with regard to these hospital officials: he knew they had had great difficulties to contend with, and a very hard task to perform, because of the difficulty of obtaining competent nurses; and, if this

Commission was appointed, they would probably find that those responsible for the management of this institution were not so much to blame as might appear from the letters that had appeared in the press.

MR. PATERSON said that representing, as he did, a district where a great many accidents and casualties occurred—he referred particularly to the saw-mill at Jarrahdale—and which sent a good many patients to be treated in this hospital, he felt it his duty to support the motion. He had heard great complaints from some of these persons when they came out of hospital, and, having read the letters that had appeared in the newspapers, he should certainly vote with the hon. member for the appointment of this Commission.

MR. TRAYLEN said he had been greatly pleased to hear the Premier announce that the Government were only too willing to grant every opportunity for an inquiry into anything alleged to be wrong in the public service. At the same time the hon. gentleman seemed to think that the Government could themselves satisfactorily make these inquiries, and so save the more cumbersome machinery of a select committee or a Commission. He (Mr. Traylen) admitted the machinery was more cumbersome, but at the same time he maintained it was ten times more effective. The hon. member for Gascoyne had so admirably reflected his own views on this subject that he need not recapitulate them. The hon. member pointed out that the Government could only get their information through the officials concerned, and, if those were the very persons in fault, how was it to be expected that the head of the department could learn the true facts of the case? This being so, he should certainly support the motion of the hon. member for West Kimberley.

MR. SCOTT said he also intended to support the motion, for this reason: he supported it in the hope that this Commission, if appointed, would go a step further, towards having this institution placed on a different footing. [The PREMIER: That is not asked.] He could not help thinking but that would be the result, and that the Commission would recommend that this hospital be reorganised, and established on the same

basis as similar institutions in the other colonies, which, he believed, would not only be a good thing for the public, but also for the medical faculty. No doubt the officials of this hospital did all they could with the staff and the accommodation at their command; but the whole institution wanted remodelling. At present the place, to his mind, as regards comfort and accommodation, was more like a workhouse infirmary than a popular well-organised hospital, supported by voluntary contributions. For this reason he hoped the House would see fit to support the appointment of this Commission.

THE ATTORNEY GENERAL (Hon. S. Burt) said he was not aware—he might be in error—whether that House had power to appoint a Commission; it had power to appoint a select committee no doubt, but (subject to the ruling of the Speaker on the point) he should say it had no power at all to appoint a Commission. They could ask the Governor to appoint a Commission, but he thought the House itself had no such power. This motion was made upon certain allegations which had been referred to by the hon. member who brought it forward, based upon a certain anonymous letter that appeared in a newspaper. Perhaps some of them had not read that letter, and it would have been better if the hon. member had read it to them. He understood it was not the letter signed "Patrick Power," because that letter had been answered most conclusively in the papers that were laid on the table a few evenings ago, which went to prove that there was no justification whatever for the complaint made by the writer of that letter. He was far from saying that the complaint was the complaint of Patrick Power, whose name appeared to it; as a matter of fact, it had come to his knowledge that it was not written by Power at all, but by one of those busybodies to be found in every community, and who, under the name of "Patrick Power," made a great deal out of nothing. That complaint, to his mind, was most conclusively answered; and any member could satisfy himself to the same effect by a perusal of the papers, and see that, so far as that complaint was concerned, it was utterly undeserving. What this other complaint might be, he was not able to

say; but the House must not confuse this question of inquiring into some alleged irregularity said to exist in the hospital with the much broader question of inquiring into the whole working of this institution with a view to its complete reorganisation. No doubt some of them might think that the Colonial Hospital should be reformed entirely; but that was not what was asked for here. As to any individual complaint, surely that could be easily inquired into and decided off-hand, without a Commission. As to putting the hospital on an entirely new footing and making it a free institution, as suggested by one hon. member, it must be recollected that if this hospital was no longer to be a Government institution, if it was to be taken altogether out of Government control, then it could not be expected that the Government would maintain it out of public funds. Of course they all knew that hospitals in other countries, in wealthy and largely populated countries like England, were utterly unconnected with the Government, being supported entirely by voluntary contributions. But his experience of the people of this colony as regards voluntary subscriptions was not such as to encourage him to believe that this hospital would gain much by being taken out of the hands of the Government. If people would not support a Church they wouldn't support a hospital. On the other hand, if this institution was going to be supported out of public funds, the Government must retain control over it, and those who practised there must be under Government control also. At the present moment, he thought, the motion before them did not profess to go so far as that; it did not propose to inquire upon what footing this hospital should be worked in future, but simply inquire into the complaints made by some anonymous writer. In any case, he thought it would be found that the House had no authority to appoint a Commission, and that if they wanted a Commission their proper course was to ask the Government to appoint one.

THE SPEAKER: With reference to the question just raised I have no hesitation in saying that this House has no power to appoint a Commission. The only person in this colony who has power

to appoint a Commission is His Excellency the Governor—of course, now, with the advice of his Ministers; and the proper course, if the hon. member wants a Commission, is to move the Government to appoint one.

MR. A. FORREST said he had no wish to press his motion any further. The attention of the House having been drawn to the matter, he trusted the Government would see their way to make this inquiry themselves. He had done his duty, and would now leave the matter in the hands of the Government. He begged to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

#### INTRODUCTION OF A NEW POLICE ACT.

MR. SCOTT, in accordance with notice, moved, "That in the opinion of this House it is highly desirable that the Government should, at as early a time as possible, introduce a Police Act similar to that introduced in 1889." The hon. member said that several sessions ago it had been pointed out to him, in his capacity of Mayor, the necessity which existed for introducing some legislation which would give the police more power than they now had to deal with houses of ill-fame, which in certain parts of the city had become a nuisance to all respectable people living in the neighborhood. Some time ago a new Police Act was introduced by the then Attorney General, dealing with that subject, but owing to the late stage of the session, it was not proceeded with; and he now wished to impress upon the present Government the necessity of introducing a similar Act as soon as they were in a position to do so, which would probably be at the next session of the House.

THE ATTORNEY GENERAL (Hon. S. Burt) said the Government would look through the bill introduced a couple of years ago, and if it was found to answer the purpose in view—as he believed it would, with perhaps some improvements—he had every reason to believe that the Government would be quite ready to introduce it next session.

Motion put and passed.

#### AUDIT BILL, 1891.

Read a third time, and transmitted to the Legislative Council.

#### EXCESS BILL, 1889.

THE TREASURER (Hon. J. Forrest), in moving the second reading of this bill, to confirm the expenditure for 1889 over and above the grants for that year, said he believed all the items had received the approval of the Finance Committee.

Agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

#### APPORTIONMENT BILL.

THE ATTORNEY GENERAL (Hon. S. Burt), in moving the second reading of this bill, said, as members were aware, the bill had come down from the Legislative Council, where it had passed its third reading, for the concurrence of the Legislative Assembly. It was a measure which was the law in England, and had been so for many years; and he might say in one word that the effect of it, broadly, was to allow pensions and rents and other fixed periodical payments that became due on a certain date to be drawn by the administrators of a deceased person *pro rata* up to the time of his death. At present if a person who was entitled to draw a pension half yearly died before the half year expired his administrators would lose the whole of that half year's pension; whereas under this bill his survivors would be able to draw what was due to him up to the time of his death. In other words these fixed payments were deemed to accrue from day to day.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a second time, and passed through committee, *sub silentio*.

The House adjourned at half past 3 o'clock, p.m.