

PARLIAMENTS.

FROM the nature and composition of the population of Australia at and for some time after its first settlement, the government and direction of affairs naturally rested in the hands of the Governor alone, and it was not until the year 1824, during the time of Sir Thomas Brisbane, that any attempt was made to provide the Governor with recognised advisers. In that year the first Legislative Council was appointed, consisting of six gentlemen, of whom five held the principal official positions in the colony, the sixth being Mr. John Macarthur, the founder of the Australian wool industry. The first Act of Parliament ever passed in Australia was a measure dealing with the currency, in 1824. Four more members were added to the Council in the following year, by Governor Darling, and further additions were made from time to time. On the 6th June, 1838, the public were first admitted to hear the debates, for up to that time even the reporters of the Press had been excluded. Thenceforth, however, the proceedings were more or less fully reported.

Until 1843 the members of the Legislative Council were all nominated by the Governor, but in that year the principle of election was introduced, in conjunction with that of nomination. The nominated members were twelve in number, six being official and six non-official. The elected members comprised a number of men whose names have become historic, such as W. C. Wentworth, William Bland, William Lawson, Charles Cowper, Terence Aubrey Murray, W. H. Suttor, Francis Lord, Richard Windeyer, Alexander Macleay, Roger Therry, Charles Nicholson, and John Dunmore Lang, the two last mentioned being among the representatives of the Port Phillip district, now known as Victoria. Mr. Alexander Macleay was the first Speaker of this body, succeeded by Sir Charles Nicholson in 1846.

Partial representation in the Legislature did not altogether satisfy the colonists, for as far back as the year 1845 the question of Responsible Government was publicly discussed. The agitation once awakened was never allowed to slumber, but aided by a vigorous and outspoken Press, as well as by the talented oratory of some of the patriotic members of the Legislature, it continually became more active until in the year 1855 the Imperial Parliament passed a measure to sanction the new Constitution that the colonists sought. On the 22nd May, 1856, the first Australian Parliament under Responsible Government was opened by Sir William Denison in Sydney. It consisted of a nominated Upper House, called the Legislative Council, the number of members of which

was not definitely fixed ; and a Legislative Assembly, consisting of fifty-four elected members, of whom Sir Daniel Cooper was chosen the first Speaker. The first Ministry consisted of Sir Stuart Alexander Donaldson as Colonial Secretary and Premier ; Mr. Thomas Holt, Colonial Treasurer ; Sir William Manning, Attorney-General ; Mr. J. B. Darvall, Solicitor-General ; Mr. G. R. Nichols, Auditor-General ; and Mr. W. C. Mayne as Representative of the Government in the Legislative Council. From that period the principles upon which the government of New South Wales is based have never altered, though there have been some changes in the details. Various amendments of the Electoral Act have taken place from time to time, by which the number of representatives to the Legislative Assembly has been largely increased, and alterations have taken place in the direction of the removal of restrictions, and the extension of the liberties of the people. The Legislative Council now numbers sixty-six members, and the tenure of a seat in that body is for life. The only qualification required of members is that they shall be 21 years of age, and natural-born or naturalised subjects. The qualification for a member of the Assembly is the holding of an elector's right. Members of the Lower House receive a remuneration of £300 a year, but members of the Council are unpaid. Free passes by rail and tram are received by members of both Houses.

A new Electoral Act, assented to on the 13th June, 1893, remodelled the whole electoral system of New South Wales. The number of members of the Assembly is fixed at 125, and the colony is divided into 125 electoral districts. No elector can have more than one vote, or, in other words, the "one man one vote" principle is enforced. Every person entitled to vote must see that his name is inscribed on the electoral roll, and must provide himself with a document called an "elector's right," without the production of which he cannot demand a ballot-paper. The suffrage is manhood, the only conditions being twelve months' residence in the colony in the case of an immigrant, and three months' residence in the electoral district in which the right to vote is claimed. The duration of Parliament is limited to three years. There have been seventeen Parliaments in New South Wales, the average existence of which has been two years three months and fourteen days.

The example of New South Wales was not without effect on the other Australasian colonies. Victoria, after its separation from New South Wales, was legislated for by a Council, some of the members of which were nominated and others elected ; but on the 21st November, 1856, the first Parliament under the new Constitution of the colony was opened. This Constitution differed from that of the parent colony in that the Legislative Council as well as the Assembly was elective ; it consisted of thirty members, while there were fifty-eight in the Lower House. Mr. W. C. Haines was the first Premier. There are now forty-eight members in the Council, and ninety-five in the Assembly.

Members of the Upper House must be of the full age of 30 years, and for one year previous to the election must have possessed a freehold estate to the value of £100 per annum, free of encumbrance. The tenure of office is six years, and there is no remuneration attached to the position. Electors must possess a £10 freehold or a leasehold of £25, or be mortgagors in possession of property rated at not less than £10 per year. Graduates of British or Colonial Universities, legal and medical practitioners, clergymen, certified school-masters, military and naval officers, and matriculated students of the Melbourne University are entitled to the franchise. Members of the Assembly must be 21 years of age, natural-born or naturalised subjects, and have been resident in the colony for two years. The reimbursement is £240 per annum, with a free railway pass. Three years is the limit of the duration of a Parliament. The suffrage is practically manhood, with residence in the colony of twelve months' duration. There have been sixteen Parliaments in Victoria under the present Constitution, the average duration of each being two years six months and seven days.

Tasmania, on its separation from New South Wales at the end of 1825, was provided with a nominated Legislative Council, under which it was governed for some thirty years. Following the lead of their neighbours, the colonists of this island also agitated for a Constitution, which was eventually granted to them, and came into force on the 2nd December, 1856. Tasmania now possesses a Legislative Council and a Legislative Assembly, both of which are elective. The Council consists of eighteen members, who hold their seats for six years, three members, or one-sixth of the whole number, retiring every year. In the case of *ad interim* elections the incoming member holds his seat only as long as his predecessor would have held it. Members must be 30 years of age, and natural-born or naturalised subjects. Judges of the Supreme Court, placemen (except Ministers of the Crown), and Government contractors are disqualified from sitting in either Upper or Lower House. Members of both Houses receive a reimbursement of expenses, which was originally fixed at £100 per annum, but has since been reduced to £50. Electors for the Council must possess a property qualification of £20 per annum freehold or £80 leasehold, beside which there are professional and educational qualifications, coupled with a condition of residence. There are thirty-seven members of the House of Assembly, who must be 21 years of age and natural-born or naturalised subjects. The duration of the Assembly is now limited to three years. Adult males are qualified to be electors if their names are on the assessment roll of the district as owners or occupiers of any property ; or if they are in receipt of income, salary, or wages at the rate of £60 per annum, and have resided in the district for twelve months, rations and house allowance being included in computing wages. The eleventh Parliament will expire by effluxion of time in December, 1896. The actual term of existence of Tasmanian Parliaments has averaged three years eight months and ten days.

South Australia, like most of the other Australian colonies, was at first subject to the nominee system of appointment to the Legislative Council, but in 1848 it obtained the boon of adding elected members to those nominated. Constitutional Government was granted to the colony in 1856, and the first Parliament under the new order of things assembled on the 22nd April in the following year. The South Australian Legislature consists of a Legislative Council of twenty-four members and a House of Assembly of fifty-four. Both Houses are elected by the people. Eight members of the Council retire every three years, but are eligible for re-election. Members are not required to have a property qualification, but they must have resided in the province for three years, and be not less than 30 years of age. An elector must have a freehold of £50 or a leasehold of £20 annual value, or be an occupier of a dwelling of the clear annual value of £25; and he must have been registered six months prior to the election. The principle of "one man one vote" has long been in existence in South Australia, and for some time there has been in force a provision by which sea-faring persons and others temporarily absent from the colony can nevertheless record their votes at a general election. Members of the Assembly, as well as electors, are qualified by being 21 years of age, and having been enrolled for six months before the election. Female suffrage was granted in 1895, and women voted for the first time at the general election held on the 25th April, 1896. Members of each House receive £200 per annum. The duration of a Parliament is limited to three years. There have been fourteen Parliaments, with an average duration of two years and nine months.

Queensland, which formed part of New South Wales until the end of the year 1859, was never under the nominee system as a separate colony, but commenced with Responsible Government, under which its first Parliament was opened on the 29th May, 1860. Its Legislative Council consists of members nominated by the Governor. There are thirty-eight at present, but no limit is fixed to the number. The tenure is for life. The qualification for members is that they must be 21 years of age, and natural-born or naturalised subjects. They receive no remuneration. The Legislative Assembly, of which there are seventy-two members, is elected by the people. Electors are enrolled under what is practically manhood suffrage, the only condition being six months' residence. Persons who possess freehold property of the value of £100 or house property of an annual value of £10, or who hold property on lease at an annual rent of £10, or a pastoral lease or license from the Crown, are entitled to vote in every district within which such property may be. Any person on the electoral roll is qualified to be a member of the Assembly. The duration of Parliament is limited to three years, and members of the Assembly receive £150 a year, with a free railway pass, and travelling expenses in the case of those members who are not in receipt of official salary. There have been eleven Parliaments, the average duration of which has been three years and three months.

In New Zealand, as in the other colonies, the form of government in the early days was of a mixed description, but in the year 1852 an Act was passed by the Imperial Parliament conferring upon the colony a Constitution. New Zealand was divided into six provinces, which were subsequently increased to nine, each governed by a Superintendent and a Provincial Council elected on a franchise which was practically equivalent to household suffrage. The provincial system, however, did not give satisfaction, and was abolished in 1876, when a system of Parliamentary Government for the whole of the colony came into existence. The Legislature now consists of two branches. There is a Legislative Council of forty-four nominees. Prior to 1891 the members held their seats for life, but in that year an Act was passed under which all new appointments to the Council are made for seven years only, though members are eligible for re-appointment. The honorarium is £150 per annum, with a deduction of £1 5s. per sitting in case of absence exceeding five sittings in one session, except from illness or some other unavoidable cause. The qualification for membership is that the person must be 21 years of age, and a natural-born or naturalised British subject. One-fourth of the total number of members is required to form a quorum. The House of Representatives consists of seventy-four members, of whom four are Maoris, elected to represent the natives. The qualification for membership is simply registration as an elector. Persons of either sex who are not less than 21 years of age are entitled to vote, provided they have resided in the colony for one year, and in the electoral district for three months prior to registration, or hold freehold estate of the value of £25, and have held such for six months. Maoris are entitled to be placed on the European roll if they possess the latter qualification; if not, they are entitled to vote in one of the four native electorates, provided they are of age and reside therein. The principle of "one man one vote" has been in existence in the colony for a number of years. The honorarium of a member of the House of Representatives is £240 per annum, with travelling expenses to and from Wellington; and a deduction of £2 per sitting is made for all absences from the House exceeding five days per session, unless due to sickness or other unavoidable cause. The duration of a Parliament is three years. Twenty members are required to form a quorum. There have been seven Parliaments under the present Constitution, the average duration of each being nearly two years ten months and twenty-four days.

Western Australia, which was proclaimed a British colony on the 1st June, 1829, was the last of the group to enjoy the privilege of Responsible Government. At an early stage of its existence the colony possessed a Legislative Council, consisting exclusively of officials nominated by the Governor. Subsequently, elected members were added, representing the principal districts of the colony, and this state of things continued until the end of 1890, when the new Constitution came into existence.

Under it two Houses of Legislature were established, the Upper House consisting of fifteen nominated members, and the Lower House of thirty members, representing the thirty electorates into which the colony was divided. An amended Constitution Act, however, came into force in 1893, when the total population of the colony was found to exceed 60,000 persons. Under the new Act the Legislative Council consists of twenty-one elected members, and the Legislative Assembly of thirty-three members. A member of either House must possess freehold estate to the value of £250, free of encumbrance. An elector for the Upper House must have resided in the colony for twelve months, and for that time have held a freehold estate of the value of £100, or have been a householder occupying a dwelling of the annual value of £25 for the same period; or he must occupy a leasehold estate of the annual value of £25, with eighteen months of the lease to run, or have held a similar leasehold for the past eighteen months or a Crown lease of an annual value of not less than £10; or he must be on the electoral roll of a Municipality or Roads Board district in respect of property of not less than £25 annual value. To qualify a person as an elector for the Assembly, he must have resided in the colony for six months, and for that period have held a freehold estate of not less than £50, or a house of an annual value of not less than £10, or a leasehold estate of similar value, or a pastoral or running lease of not less than £5 per annum, or be inscribed on the roll of a Municipal or Roads Board district within the electorate. Members of the Legislature are not paid for their services, but they travel free over the railway lines of the colony. The first Premier was the Hon. Sir John Forrest, K.C.M.G.

The following table shows the number of members of each of the Houses of Parliament in the various colonies, with the remuneration which they receive in consideration of their services :—

Colony.	Legislative Council.		Legislative Assembly.	
	No. of members.	Remuneration.	No. of members.	Remuneration.
New South Wales	66	None	125	£300 per ann.
Victoria	48	None	95	£240 „
Queensland.....	38	None	72	£150 „
South Australia.....	24	£200 per ann.	54	£200 „
Western Australia	21	None	33	None.
Tasmania	18	£50 per ann.	36	£50 per ann.
New Zealand	44	£150 per ann.	74	£240 „

FEDERATION.

The question of federation having been so prominently brought before the public of Australasia during recent years, this chapter would be incomplete without a brief record of what has been done in the matter.

The subject did not escape the attention of those who drew up the outlines of the first free Constitution for Australia, and who indeed sketched out a fairly comprehensive federation scheme. Unfortunately, however, the proposition was mixed up with others that were unpopular, and was allowed to sink out of sight with them. Still, from time to time the evil of want of union among the Australian colonies was made forcibly apparent, and the idea of federation has gradually become more and more popular. Discussions of the subject took place in the Australian press, and conferences were held, the result of which was that the question came before the Imperial Parliament, which passed a measure permitting the formation of a Federal Council, to which any colony that felt inclined to do so could send delegates. The first meeting of the Federal Council was held at Hobart in January, 1886, the colonies of Victoria, Queensland, Tasmania, Western Australia, and Fiji being represented. New South Wales, South Australia, and New Zealand declined to join, but South Australia sent delegates to a subsequent meeting. The Council has held six meetings, at which various matters of intercolonial interest have been discussed. It is, however, a purely deliberative body, and possesses neither funds nor powers to put its legislation into force.

A more important step towards the federation of the Australasian colonies was taken in February, 1890, when a Conference, consisting of delegates from each of the seven colonies, was held at the Parliament House, Melbourne. The members held seven meetings, the result being the adoption of an Address to the Queen, submitting certain resolutions which affirmed the desirableness of an early union under the Crown of the Australian colonies on principles just to all; suggested that the remoter Australasian colonies should be entitled to admission to the union upon terms to be afterwards agreed upon; and recommended that steps should be taken toward the appointment of delegates to a National Australasian Convention, to consider and report upon an adequate scheme for a Federal Constitution.

In accordance with these resolutions, delegates were appointed by the different Australasian Parliaments, and on the 2nd March, 1891, the National Australasian Convention commenced its sittings in the Legislative Assembly Chambers, Macquarie-street, Sydney. There were forty-five members of the Convention altogether, each colony sending seven, with the exception of New Zealand, which had only three representatives. Sir Henry Parkes was unanimously chosen as President, and Sir Samuel Griffith as Vice-President. Resolutions were adopted affirming the following principles:—

1. The powers and rights of existing colonies to remain intact, except as regards such powers as it may be necessary to hand over to the Federal Government.
2. No alteration to be made in State boundaries without the consent of the Legislatures of such States, as well as of the Federal Parliament.

3. Trade between the federated colonies to be absolutely free.
4. Power to impose Customs and Excise Duties to rest in the Federal Government and Parliament.
5. Military and Naval Defence Forces to be under one command.
6. The Federal Constitution to make provision to enable each State to make amendments in its constitution if necessary for the purposes of Federation.

Further resolutions approved of the framing of a Federal Constitution which should establish a Senate and a House of Representatives—the latter to possess the sole power of originating money bills ; also a Federal Supreme Court of Appeal, and an Executive consisting of a Governor-General and such persons as might be appointed as his advisers. A draft Constitution Bill was adopted by the Convention, but no steps were taken by any of the colonies towards the adoption or rejection of the scheme.

A scheme which promises a more speedy realisation of the hopes of federationists was formulated at a Conference of the Premiers of the Australasian colonies, excepting New Zealand, held at Hobart in the opening months of 1895. It was decided to ask the Parliament of each colony to pass an Enabling Bill permitting the election of ten persons to represent the colony on a Federal Council. The duties of this Council, it was determined, should be the framing of a Federal Constitution, to be submitted to the electors of the various colonies for their approval by means of the referendum. So far excellent results have followed these proposals, the Parliaments of New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, and Tasmania having passed Enabling Acts, while it is expected that the Queensland Legislature will do likewise at an early date.