

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 recognized 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 6 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. Henceforth, however the proceedings were more or less fully reported. Until the year 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, since known as Victoria.

First Legislative Council.

Introduction of the elective principle.

First Speaker.

Mr. Alexander Macleay was the first Speaker of this body, succeeded by Sir Charles Nicholson in 1846. Mere 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 started 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 acquired new strength, until, in the year 1855, the Imperial Parliament passed a measure to sanction the new Constitution that the colonists sought. On 22 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, 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 time 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 improvements have taken place, all in the direction of the removal of restrictions, and the extension of the liberties of the people. The Legislative Council now numbers seventy-one members, and the Assembly 137.

First Parliament under responsible Government.

Victoria.

The example and influence of New South Wales has not been without effect on the other Australasian Colonies. Victoria, after its separation from New South Wales, was legislated for by a Council of partly nominated and partly elected members, but on

21 November, 1856, the first Parliament under the new Constitution of Victoria 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-two members in the Council, and eighty-six in the Assembly.

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 2 December, 1856. Tasmania possesses a Legislative Council and a Legislative Assembly, both of which are elective. Tasmania.

South Australia, like 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 this Colony in 1856, and the first Parliament under the new order of things assembled on 22 April in the following year. The South Australian Legislature consists of a Legislative Council of eighteen members and a House of Assembly of forty-four. Both Houses are elected by the people. South Australia.

Queensland, which separated from New South Wales at the end of the year 1859, was never as a separate colony under the nominee system, but commenced with Responsible Government, under which her first Parliament opened on 29 May, 1860. Her Legislative Council consists of thirty-one members, who are nominated by the Governor. The Legislative Assembly, of which there are fifty-four members, is elected by the people. Queensland.

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 New Zealand.

1862 an Act was passed by the Imperial Parliament conferring upon this Colony a Constitution. New Zealand was divided into six provinces, subsequently increased to nine, each governed by a Superintendent and Provincial Council, elected according to 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, very similar to that of the large Australian Colonies, came into existence. The Legislature now consists of two branches—a Legislative Council of nominees appointed by the Governor for life, and a House of Representatives, chosen on an elective basis similar to that which obtained for the elections to the old Provincial Councils. There are now eighty-eight members of the House of Representatives, among whom are four Maoris, chosen to represent them by their countrymen.

Western
Australia.

Western Australia, which was proclaimed a British Colony on 1 June, 1829, is the only one of the group which does not possess 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 has lasted until the present time. Strenuous efforts have lately been made by the inhabitants to procure the blessings of a free Constitution, and they have received hearty support from all the other Australian Colonies. There is now every reason to hope that before long Western Australia will enjoy the same privileges as her neighbours.