

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

First Legislative Council.

Introduction of the elective principle.

Dunmore Lang, the two last mentioned being among the representatives of the Port Phillip district, since known as Victoria. 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 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, 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, though there is no limit fixed, and the Assembly 141. The tenure of a seat in the Council is for life. The only qualification required of members is that they shall be 21 years of age, and natural-born or naturalized subjects. The qualification

First Speaker.

First Parliament
under Responsible
Government.

for a member of the Assembly is the same as that for the Council in the main. Members of this body receive £300 a year, in addition to free railway passes, but members of the Council are unpaid. The duration of the Assembly is limited to three years. Manhood suffrage prevails, the only condition being six months' residence before the rolls are compiled. Since the inauguration of Responsible Government there have been fifteen appeals to the people, and the fifteenth Parliament is now in its second Session. The average duration of each Parliament has been two years two months and six days.

The example and influence of New South Wales has not been ^{Victoria.} 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-eight members in the Council, and ninety-five in the Assembly. Members of the Council 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 office. Electors must possess a £10 freehold, or a leasehold of £25, or be mortgagors in possession of property rated not less than £10 per year. Graduates of British or Colonial Universities, legal and medical practitioners, ministers, 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 resident in the Colony for two years. The reimbursement is £300 per annum. Three years is the limit of the duration of a Parliament. The suffrage is practically manhood,

with a residence of twelve months. There have been fifteen Parliaments in Victoria under the present Constitution, the average duration of each being two years and four and three-quarter months.

Tasmania.

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. The Council consists of eighteen members, who hold office for six years. They must be 30 years of age, and natural-born or naturalised subjects; their remuneration is £100 per annum. The electors must possess a property qualification of £20 per annum freehold, or £80 leasehold, in addition to which there are professional and educational qualifications, coupled with a condition of residence. There are thirty-six members of the Assembly, whose qualification is the same as that for the Council, except that the minimum age is 21. The duration of the Assembly is limited to five years, and members receive £100 per annum. The tenth Parliament of Tasmania is now in existence. Parliaments have a maximum duration of five years. Their actual term of existence has averaged about three years and eight months.

South Australia.

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 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 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 must have resided in the province for three years. Electors must have a freehold of £50, a leasehold of £20 annual value, or be an occupier of a dwelling of the clear annual value of £25, and must have been registered six months prior to the election. Members receive £200 a year. Members of the Assembly, as well as electors, are qualified by being 21 years of age, and enrolled for six months before the election. Members of the Lower House also receive £200 per annum. The duration of a Parliament is limited to three years.

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 its first Parliament opened on 29 May, 1860. Its Legislative Council consists of members, nominated by the Governor. There are thirty-eight at present, but there is no limit 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 for the Assembly are enrolled under what is practically manhood suffrage, the only condition being six months' residence. Any person on the Electoral Rolls is qualified to be a member. The duration of Parliament is limited to three years, and members of the Assembly receive £300 a year. 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 1852 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 New Zealand.

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. There is a Legislative Council of thirty-five nominees, all of whom have been appointed for life, but by an Act passed in 1891 all future appointments will be made for seven years only, though each Councillor will be eligible for re-appointment. The honorarium is £150 per Session. The qualification for membership is that the person must be 21 years of age, and a natural-born or naturalised subject (in New Zealand) of Her Majesty. The House of Representatives consists of seventy-four members, of whom four are Maoris, chosen to represent them by their countrymen. The qualification for membership is simply registration as an elector. The honorarium is £240 per Session. In both Houses the honorarium is subject to reduction in case of absence. There have been six Parliaments under the present Constitution, the average duration of each being nearly two years and eight months.

Western
Australia.

Western Australia, which was proclaimed a British Colony on 1 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 there are two houses of Legislature; the Upper House consists of fifteen nominated members, and the Lower House of thirty members, representing the thirty electorates into which the Colony is divided. For members of the Council no property qualification is required, but members of the Assembly must possess freehold estate to the value of £250, free of encumbrance, and electors for that body must have possessed freehold to the value of £100, leasehold to the value of £10 per annum, or must have occupied a house or lodgings rented at that amount, for six

months prior to registration. In six years from the first summoning of Parliament, or when the population of the Colony reaches 60,000, the Legislative Council is to become elective, with a property qualification for members the same as that of the Assembly, while electors must be £200 freeholders, or £30 lease or householders. There is no payment of members in Western Australia. The first Premier was the Hon. John Forrest, and the first Representative Parliament is now engaged in its legislative labours.

The following table shows the number of members, and the amount of remuneration in each branch of the Legislature, in the various Australasian Colonies :—

	Legislative Council.		Legislative Assembly.	
	No. of members.	Remuneration.	No. of members.	Remuneration.
New South Wales ...	71	None	141	£300 per ann.
Victoria	48	None	95	£300 „
Queensland.....	38	None	72	£300 „
South Australia.....	24	£200 per ann.	54	£200 „
Western Australia ...	15	None	30	None.
Tasmania	18	£100 per ann.	36	£100 per ann.
New Zealand	35	£150 per sess.	74	£240 per sess.

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, who indeed sketched out a fairly comprehensive federation scheme. Unfortunately, however, the proposition was mixed up with others that were unpopular, and it 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 forcibly apparent, and the idea of federation has gradually become more and more popular. Discussions of the subject took place in the Colonial press, and

conferences were held, the result of which was that the question came before the Imperial Parliament, by whom a measure was passed, permitting the formation of a Federal Council, to which any Colony that felt inclined to join 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 five meetings in all, at which various matters of intercolonial interest were discussed. The Council, however, is purely a deliberative body, and possesses neither funds nor powers to put its legislation into force.

Federal
Conference.

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, enclosing certain resolutions as the result of the Conference, affirming the desirableness of an early union, under the Crown, of the Australian Colonies, on principles just to the several Colonies; that the remoter Australasian Colonies should be entitled to admission upon terms to be afterwards agreed upon; and that steps should be taken for the appointment of delegates to a National Australasian Convention, to consider and report upon an adequate scheme for a Federal Constitution.

National
Australasian
Convention.

In accordance with the resolution just quoted, 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, every 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 Griffiths as Vice-President. Resolutions were adopted affirming the following principles:— Resolutions adopted.

1. That the powers and rights of existing Colonies shall remain intact, except as regards such powers as it might be necessary to hand over to the Federal Government.
2. That no alteration shall be made in States 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 be 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, with such persons as may be appointed as his advisers. Federal Constitution.

A draft Constitution Bill was adopted by the Convention, and it now remains for the several Colonies to adopt or reject the scheme presented to them by the Convention. Constitution Bill.