

Queensland



Parliamentary Debates
[Hansard]

Legislative Council

TUESDAY, 8 OCTOBER 1901

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LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

TUESDAY, 8 OCTOBER, 1901.

The PRESIDENT took the chair at half-past 3 o'clock.

PHARMACY BILL.

FIRST READING.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION (Hon. J. Murray) presented a Bill to amend the laws relating to pharmaceutical chemists, and moved that it be read a first time.

Question put and passed.

The second reading of the Bill was made an Order of the Day for Tuesday next.

ABORIGINALS PROTECTION AND RESTRICTION OF THE SALE OF OPIUM BILL.

RESUMPTION OF COMMITTEE.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION moved that Dr. W. E. Roth, Northern Protector of Aboriginals, be called to the bar, and be examined in relation to the Bill.

Question put and passed.

Dr. Roth was introduced to the Committee by the Usher of the Black Rod, and invited to take a seat at the table while giving his evidence.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION suggested that before Dr. Roth was examined he should give a brief epitome of his duties as inspector of the Northern aboriginals, and of the difficulties he had to contend with in regard to them.

HON. A. NORTON said the witness had been called to answer questions, not to make speeches, and all the information desired by the hon. gentleman could be obtained by asking questions in the usual way.

The CHAIRMAN: The proper course of procedure undoubtedly would be by question and answer, and the object of the Secretary for Public Instruction can be easily gained by putting to him one or two leading questions.

WALTER E. ROTH, B.A., M.R.C.S., examined:—

By the Secretary for Public Instruction: What is the nature of your duties as inspector of aboriginals in the Northern district? By the

regulations passed in 1899, there were two protectors—the Northern and the Southern—specially charged with the administration of the Act. I have the honour of holding the position of Northern Protector; Mr. Meston holds the appointment of Southern Protector. The area over which I hold jurisdiction extends from Mackay northwards as far as Cape York, and westwards as far as the Northern Territory. Both of us are guided by and carry into execution the orders and instructions of the Home Secretary, and in all cases report to him. To assist us in our labours in carrying out the Act, certain local protectors are appointed in the various petty sessions districts comprised in the areas respectively under our control. These local protectors act as our deputies and assistants, receive instructions from us, and in all matters of non-criminal aboriginal interest report to us. I hold myself personally responsible for the general care and welfare of all the aboriginals in the district under my charge. Assisting me are ten local protectors—three civilians and seven police officers. Their duties are to deal with the permits and agreements, to forward me a collective monthly return of all food relief I may have authorised in that particular district, and to furnish me with an annual report. So far as their active responsibility is concerned, the local protectors have nothing more to do than to look after those permits and agreements. I consider that they have a local knowledge of the particular circumstances and of the people, and, therefore, unless I am appealed to, I do not interfere with them. At the same time I have always impressed upon the civilian protectors the necessity of using their powers with discretion, and I believe Mr. Parry-Okeden has impressed the same upon the police officers, as the main object of the Act is not to hamper the legitimate employment of aboriginal labour but rather to put down abuses. I also invariably instruct the protectors who are responsible to me never to take any drastic measures in dealing with non-criminal aboriginal matters without my knowledge and consent. I hold myself responsible for what goes on in my own district. All other aboriginal matters I deal with myself, with the approval, of course, of the Home Secretary. For instance, one of my duties is to go round to the mission stations, report upon their working, give them what assistance and friendly encouragement I can, and, in return, I receive from them monthly reports as to what is going on at those stations, and receive notice of deaths and other information of aboriginal interest. I look after the sending away of children to those mission stations which have been proclaimed reformatories. Two of the mission stations are now proclaimed as industrial schools under the Reformatory Act—Yarrabah and Mapoon. Another of my duties is to inquire into the suitability of the reserves which we at present hold—to see whether they are adapted to the requirements for which they were first proclaimed, to see whether there is proper food on them for the natives, and to keep a careful watch as to who enters or remains upon them. Some of the reserves are useless for the purpose intended. One of them, *ergo*, at Cape Bedford, contains 78 square miles of country, but most of it is composed of sand hills—so much so that the mission station garden has to be manured with seaweed. There is a large reserve at Bluff Downs which is comparatively useless for the aboriginals owing to the barren nature of the country. Then, as to watching undesirable people going on to some of these reserves, I have experienced in some cases great difficulty in getting rid of any such. Just at the present moment I may refer to the cattle duffers on the Cape Bedford Reserve, where I had to get the cattle impounded before we could

obtain redress. We also have had difficulties with timber-getters on the Yarrabah Aboriginal Reserve, and at the same place we had trouble with the fishermen, who were supplying grog and opium to the aboriginals; the fishermen placed their traps below high-water level, and my jurisdiction only extended to high-water level. Another—and what I consider is the most important of my duties—is to see to the removal of half-caste and full-blooded little aboriginal children from their present undesirable environments. I need not enter into details here, for I believe I have vindicated my action in this respect in my last annual report. Another matter to which I have to pay attention—and a very important one—is to see to the distribution of food-relief. In various portions of the peninsula, and elsewhere in different localities where I know aboriginals require food, perhaps owing to stress of weather or other causes, certain distributions take place. On the lower Gulf coast, and eastward of it generally, instead of giving food, which is unnecessary, we try to enter into friendly intercourse with the aboriginals by presenting them with tobacco, tomahawks, and various other things. Another item of the work I have to perform is with regard to the marriages of aboriginal women. So far, I have always exerted my influence in the direction of trying to put a stop to such marriages. In some cases I have considered them desirable, but in most cases not, and they should not, in my opinion, except under proper supervision, be allowed. With regard to aboriginal crime generally, the Commissioner of Police has given instructions to the police officers in the Northern portion of the colony to forward me regular returns, not only of the crimes committed by the blacks upon whites, but of offences committed by whites upon blacks. Some of these returns have proved of very great use indeed. I have gone into the particulars of some of these cases, with the result that it has been considered necessary to deport some of these aboriginal criminals to districts further away. Another use of these records has been that I have been able to draw the attention of the Minister officially to what I consider to be unjust and irrational sentences. I have also to look after the bonds in cases of removals, for it must be remembered that, when a black is taken out of the district on agreement, say up to twelve months, at the end of that time it is my business to see, either that the aboriginal is returned to the country whence he came, or else that the bonds are renewed. Careful watch has to be kept on these bonds, because it has been found by experience that several of these blacks have been left stranded in places far distant from their homes, and in some cases the Government has been put to the expense of bringing them back. A large portion of my time is devoted to the interests of aboriginals on boats. There used to be a great many cruelties and wrongs going on in the *bêche-de-mer* and pearlshelling industries; but, fortunately, with the help of Mr. Bennett, the shipping master at Thursday Island—who also happens to be the local protector for the Somerset district—we have minimised many of the abuses which used to take place. To assist in this work, the Home Secretary has very kindly allowed me the use of a cutter, the “Melbidir,” with which I patrol the whole coast line from Mackay to Burketown. During the present year this has already been patrolled twice between the Wellesley Islands and Cooktown, and I propose continuing it from Mackay northwards next week. Of course my work on the boats is much assisted by my being appointed an inspector under the Pearlshell and *Bêche-de-mer* Fishery Act, as that enables me to bring into court a great many cases which it would be impossible to do as a

protector of aboriginals. The captain of the "Melbidir" is similarly an inspector under the Pearlshell and Bêche-de-mer Fishery Act, and hence the work can go on whether I am on board or not. The remainder of the year I spend on land, mostly travelling about, and getting into personal touch with the various local protectors under my charge. We exchange views, and I find that often they have a better idea than I have concerning a local matter, and in that case I give way and follow their views. I started this year from Cooktown in April, and have already seen personally nine out of the ten protectors who work under my instructions. Another item I have to look after is the expenditure. All the vouchers for expenditure on behalf of the blacks in the Northern portion of the colony have to come to me for my certificate. I thus hold a certain control over everything that is spent, and I think that that is as it should be, as I hold myself responsible. Monthly, I send a progress report to the Minister, giving him a *résumé* of all that has taken place during the month, and at the end of each year I furnish him with an annual report. My strictly professional attainments are also brought into requisition, not only for the amelioration of the aboriginals, but also for the benefit of certain of the whites. In fact, part of my appointment is to furnish professional advice, where my services are available, to the wives and families of members of the police force. In addition to all this, I have my scientific work to do. Such a mass of manuscript has already been collected that I have been forced to publish it in the form of bulletins, and even then, with what continues to be collected, it will take me some years to get through it. Another portion of my work is to collect ethnological specimens for the Government. My collections, of course, are to be considered the property of the nation. In carrying out these duties—or trying to carry them out to the best of my ability—I have come across many abuses and many evils which I have not had the means to remedy, and I may say candidly that this Bill is in a large measure based upon the abuses I have found to be existing, and which I have had no power to redress.

By Hon. W. Allan: Are these ten local protectors appointed by you? Yes and no. Originally my department was under the Commissioner of Police, when I had no voice in any appointments that were made.

For instance, you say you have seven police and three civilian protectors? Yes; the three civilians are Mr. Bennett, the sub-collector at Thursday Island; Mr. Moran, the clerk of petty sessions at Cooktown; and Mr. Shepherd, inspector of Pacific Islanders at Cairns. The seven police officers are the following:—Inspector Meldrum and Sub-inspector Breen, of Townsville; Sub-inspector Martin, of Mackay; Sub-inspector McNamara, of Charters Towers; Sub-inspector Quilter, of Winton; Sergeant O'Connor, of Boulia; and Inspector Galbraith, at Normanton.

They are responsible men, and the heads of the police in their districts? Yes.

Do you nominate them, or is that done by Mr. Parry-Okeden or the Home Secretary? When I was first appointed the police inspectors were appointed shortly after, and some of them are still protectors; but with regard to the new ones—the civilians—I have a say in their appointment, and in future, of course, I expect to have a say with regard to the police protectors. If I am to be held responsible for the administration of the Act, it is only a matter of justice that I be consulted as to those who have to act as my deputies and assistants.

How are they remunerated? Messrs. Moran and Shepherd are paid £25, and Mr. Bennett is paid £50 per annum.

By Hon. B. D. Morehead: Have you ever been in the Cape York Peninsula? Yes.

In what part of it? During the last three years I have been all round the hinterland of Princess Charlotte Bay, and I have been to every telegraph station in the peninsula except McDonnell. I had fever on me, and the gentleman in charge at McDonnell kindly arranged to meet me half way. I have been to the main goldfields on the peninsula, except the newly found Ebagoolah or Hamilton. All along the coast line I have landed wherever blacks are to be found. Then each year I visit Mapoon, on the Batavia River, and Weipa, up on the Embley River. On my last trip, two or three months ago, I went round the Gulf coast and landed in the neighbourhood of the Mitchell and Staaten Rivers. Wherever we saw blacks we landed. I do not trouble myself about going where there is white settlement, because I have my local protectors to give me information, and I have such a large area of country to travel over that it is impossible for me to go everywhere. I generally visit the places where there are most blacks, or where I can learn something scientific from them or do some good, or enter into friendly relations with them.

I think you stated you had to keep careful watch over the cattle-duffers on the reserves? Yes.

What do you call keeping a careful watch? I have the assistance of the missionaries, of the local protectors, and of the blacks, with regard to what is going on. For instance, the information I got with regard to the fishermen and the timber-getters on the Yarrabah Reserve was obtained from the missionaries in charge, and also from a gentleman connected with the land commissioner's office.

You spoke about deporting aboriginal prisoners to other districts—Do you believe that is a good thing? I have to consider the safety of the other blacks, and the punishment of the prisoner himself.

Do you mean you take an aboriginal from his own country, and send him into a strange land? Yes.

Do you think that is a good thing? It is the best thing that I can do. If a man murders his gin, an example must be shown to the other blacks. What else can I do? There is not sufficient evidence to bring him before the court and legally prove the murder.

But do you think it is a good thing to put him amongst a strange tribe? So far, the only ones I have been instrumental in deporting have been sent down to Fraser Island where, I am informed, they have developed into law-abiding and useful members of the community.

They are not deported from one tribe to another? No.

They have not been put amongst a hostile tribe? No.

You said that several blacks were stranded? Yes. What I meant to say was that an employer in the North takes a "boy" South. The latter's relatives come to me a year or eighteen months afterwards and say, "What for so-and-so"—mentioning the boy's name—"never come back." Before we had these bonds or agreements the employers simply laughed at me, they took the blacks away, and in many cases left them stranded. Since the bonds came into force this abuse has been greatly minimised.

Have you any idea how many cases of this kind there have been? No.

Would it be any considerable number? It is difficult to tell, but I should think there are at least between 200 and 300 taken away, and not brought back, *i.e.*, still away from their homes. Eighteen months ago I took my own Cooktown boy right round to the Northern Territory, and

at Camooweal and its neighbourhood there were two Cooktown boys who were taken away years ago.

You found their statements correct? My boy could speak with them.

But did you ascertain whether their statements were correct? Yes; but I made no fuss, because the boys were contented where they were. They had no desire to go back? No.

Would you advocate the deportation of boys from any district where they were to a reserve? The deportation is adopted as a punishment.

But if an aboriginal is employed in the outside districts, and is contented, would you adopt it in that case? I should try and meet his wishes as far as I could.

You would not send him to an aboriginal reserve? I would consult his wishes.

You would treat him as a free agent? As a human being.

Then it would be at his request, or at your discretion, because there was something wrong with his employer, that you would interfere? Yes.

Only under those circumstances? Yes, only under those circumstances.

By Hon. P. Macpherson: When did your experience with aboriginals begin? In 1893.

Where? At Boulia.

I suppose you are acquainted with many aboriginal dialects? No.

With how many? I am not acquainted with any dialect. I happen to know the structure and grammar of two languages.

You can communicate with the blacks? I can make myself understood, but I cannot speak any aboriginal language.

Have you read the provisions of this Bill carefully? Yes.

I suppose the Bill is drawn principally at your instigation? Yes. It is based upon abuses which I have brought forward, and my draft has been put into legal phraseology.

Do you approve of its provisions? I approve of its objects.

Were you consulted as to the provisions of it? I drew up a draft myself originally.

Embodying these provisions? I think so, but I have not looked at my original draft to compare the two.

By Hon. A. Gibson: Can you form any idea how many aboriginals you have under your jurisdiction? That is a very difficult question to answer, but I may tell you how I gauge their number. We found last year that there were upwards of 5,800 aboriginals who were known to the police—that is to say, the men, women, and children who received blankets. In other words, some 6,000 aboriginal blankets were distributed last year in the district north of Mackay. For every black known there will be two who are not known; I think that is a very fair estimate. Therefore, if there are 6,000 blacks who are known, it is a safe calculation to make that there are 12,000 in the district who are not known. That would give us a total of 18,000.

How many of those do you think would be adults? That is one of the things I am trying to find out. It is very difficult to find adult age. I could not tell you.

I notice you hire them out at different ages. Do you keep a record of the hiring out? Yes. It is very strictly laid down in the regulations that the local protectors have to keep a register. Both civilian and police protectors see to this. I go round each year and have a look at the registers.

Do you hire them out in the districts where they have been brought up, or do you make them go into other districts to be hired? If a man wants to employ an aboriginal he has to apply to the local police for a permit. The

police put on the permit "satisfactory" or "non-satisfactory." That is sent on to the protector for the district. If it is "non-satisfactory" he wants to know why not, and it is on the police report, unless the protector knows the man himself, that the permit is given or not. When the permit is given the agreement has to be made, but until the latter is signed there is no contract. The agreement has to be signed by the blackboy as well as the employer.

Do you find the aboriginals standing by their agreements? On the whole, yes, where we only allow them to go for six months. I have tried to impress upon protectors the necessity of cutting down as far as possible the length of service for which aboriginals are engaged. I think twelve months is too long to keep an aboriginal in continuous employment. As it was a doubtful point whether under the old Act aboriginals could be engaged for less than twelve months, a clause has been introduced into this Bill clearing up the doubt.

Do you find aboriginals take kindly to agricultural pursuits? No; that is the whole secret of it. The aboriginal is a nomad, and he reasons thus to himself: "If by roaming for an hour in a day I can get my food for the next twenty-four hours, why should I work seven, eight, or nine hours for a white man?"

Just now there is a difficulty in reference to coloured labour in the canefields. You say there are in your district 18,000 of those people, more or less. Do you think it would not be possible for the sugar planters of Queensland to employ them with advantage on the canefields for six or eight months in the year? The question is whether the blacks would be willing to do it. I have no right to force the blacks to work, although they are quite capable of doing it.

Would money not induce them to take up employment of that description? I do not think so. The blackboy notices that by working for an hour he can get food for the day, and he will not go to work for a whole day, except under compulsion. That is the difficulty; they are a nomadic people, not a settled agricultural one.

You do not find the aborigines on the Johnstone River going in for working on the canefields? As a rule the blacks will not go in for labour of that kind.

The point I have in view is whether they can be made useful to themselves and to the colony? If they are taken to the mission station while young they may be, but not after they have once become adults.

There are a large number of half-castes; would they not take more kindly to work if they were removed? At the Mapoon and Yarrabah Mission Stations they are all made to work in the field, and they will continue to work as they grow older, but they must be taken in hand when they are children.

By Hon. J. Webber: Do you know anything about the Western blacks? I am only speaking about what I know in the Northern district.

By Hon. W. Allan: Have you been on the Johnstone River? Yes.

Do you know the Mourilyan plantation there? Yes.

Did you see any aboriginals working there? At present I could not say.

I have seen a large number of them working there, and it struck me they might be similarly employed in other places too? They might in exceptional cases; but, as a rule, they will not do such heavy and continuous labour.

When you made your calculation that there were 18,000 blacks in the Northern district, did you go on any particular system? No. From my own observations and information I consider it a fair estimate. Many men I have consulted on the matter have told me it is more likely

there are three or four times the number of unknown to known blacks. I am satisfied to take it at twice the number north from Mackay.

By Hon. B. B. Moreton: I think you say 35,000 in your report? That was the original estimate given. But the blacks are dying out. Even I can see that. During the last five or six years in the Cloncurry, Boulia, and Normanton districts a great many blacks whom I knew are all gone.

By Hon. A. Gibson: How do you account for that? Contagious diseases, opium, and alcohol, and, in a minor measure, consumption and lung troubles owing to the use of clothes. We have no means of taking a census or of getting certificates of deaths. Of course, we can get accurate information from the mission stations.

By Hon. B. B. Moreton: How many mission stations are there? Six: Mapoon, on the Batavia River; Weipa, on the Embley River; Hope Valley, at Cape Bedford; Yarrabah, at Cairns; the mission station on the Bloomfield River; and Mari Yamba, on the Andromache River.

By Right Hon. Sir H. M. Nelson: Have you the same functions to perform with regard to half-castes as with regard to aboriginals? As a matter of duty, and as a matter of humanity, I labour for all the children, whether half-castes or aboriginals.

Have you the same power to deal with half-castes as with aboriginals? Under the old Act I do not legally have the power, but I have taken it. Many people evade the provisions of the Act by saying to me when I threaten to take action, "I had that child with me at the time of the passing of the Act; therefore it is exempt." I can do nothing in such cases except to take the children up under the Reformatories Act.

This Bill seems to make a distinction between half-castes who are males and half-castes who are females? There is a distinction in the original Act, and it has always been a difficulty with me. Many individuals are obtaining the services of half-castes, especially girls, without permit or agreement, on the ground that at the passing of the principal Act such were habitually living or associating with aboriginals. Over those I accordingly had no control whatever, and when action was necessary to be taken I have been obliged to have recourse to the Reformatories Act.

And this Bill gives you that power? Yes. It is assumed that the male half-caste, when he arrives at maturity, is generally able to take care of himself. I am firmly of opinion that there is a good deal of murder going on with half-caste children. I cannot prove it, but I know the proportion of half-caste children, male and female, born is much greater than one would expect from the number of adults one sees later on. There are many half-caste girls, but comparatively few half-caste men.

By Hon. B. B. Moreton: You think the male half-caste children are murdered? I say there is something wrong somewhere. I cannot otherwise account for the scarcity of half-caste males.

I see from your report that you object to granting permits for the employment of juvenile blacks? I am afraid you are mistaken. What I said was that many people come to the police and say they want a good black boy or girl. Many such applications have been made to me. I set my face firmly against such applications.

By Hon. A. C. Gregory: In some outlying stations blacks are employed, are they not, to assist in the care of cattle and horses? Yes, women as well as men.

Do they come under your control to round them up into camps? I do not see any clause in the Bill which says I am to put blacks into camps.

In certain cases you may require every aboriginal to be drafted away into some camp or reserve? In cases it may be necessary; but I have no idea, and no one else has, of shifting the blacks from their hunting-grounds on to reserves unless it is absolutely necessary to do so.

Then you would not have a provision of that kind in the Bill? I have not asked for any.

And you would not approve of it? No.

In fact you would rather require station managers to get a license to have a camp near them? Yes, and there is nothing to prevent them doing so. I do not wish to take the blacks away from their homes unless it is necessary.

I wish to know whether you consider that all the aboriginals should be put on reserves, or whether, where there is no mismanagement in a district, the owners of stations should not be permitted to have camps near their stations from which they could obtain labour if necessary, and the blacks would not be debarred from their annual excursion for obtaining food? I perfectly agree with that. It is done now in the country west of Townsville. They are fed by the station-owners, and the blacks are very happy there. If all the blacks were taken away they would be a heavy charge on the Government.

Should there not at the same time be some sort of supervision by the protector? That goes on at present. Of course there are some districts where all the food is eaten out and the blacks are starving. In those cases it would be a mercy to take them away. As a general rule, I would much rather see the *status quo* maintained, provided they do not get opium or grog and no immorality is practised.

Then you consider it is desirable that these camps should be continued, but that the inspector should have power to put a stop to any improper supplies, such as opium and grog? He has that power at present. I can prosecute a station manager for harbouring, but I would not think of doing such a thing, unless certain misconduct, etc., compelled me.

You do not think it advisable to abolish these camps and force all the blacks to go on to reserves? Very far from that. How can we keep 18,000 or 20,000 blacks on reserves?

On what terms do you allow blacks to be employed on stations? The would-be employer has to get a permit from a protector to employ a black.

You keep the power to grant permits in your own hands? If a man thinks himself aggrieved at being refused a permit he can complain to me, and then I call upon the local protector to assign a reason why so-and-so has been refused a permit.

But supposing you give a permit, the boy may decline to work? I cannot force him to work.

Then the permit amounts to nothing? I beg your pardon, the permit is no good without the agreement, according to the regulations; but it prevents the employer being prosecuted for harbouring, though it does not by itself bind the boy. But if, after signing an agreement, the blackboy runs away, you can issue a warrant for him. Many people do. The agreement is always signed by the blackboy, and witnessed by a justice of the peace or a police officer, who explains to the boy the nature of the agreement, how many months he has to work, and what the work is required of him. That is the best control I have, because I cannot see every blackboy in my district who signs an agreement. Both parties are bound by the agreement.

By Hon. W. F. Taylor: Do you know of much opium being supplied to aboriginals? There is a great deal of it.

Do you know that from your own personal knowledge? I know it from what I have seen.

How do you think they get it? It is supplied partly by Chinamen, etc., and partly by Europeans, both by males and females. There was a white woman caught the other day. The awful part to me is that certain white people are taking to indulging in the vice.

Is it given to the blacks in payment for work done, or what? On some occasions it is given to aboriginals for their women. When a black once becomes addicted to the use of opium he sinks so low that you can do nothing with him. If a blackboy takes grog he is a bit dangerous for the time being, but when it is over and done with he is all right again. With opium he seems to sink fast, both body and soul being rapidly destroyed.

Is there not some difficulty in getting opium? In most cases where we get convictions it is the charcoal opium that is used. A boy will give 1s. or 2s. for it and drink it after it has been smoked by the Chinamen. The blackboy will put this charcoal-opium in water and drink it. That is the commonest way.

Do you think this Bill will be sufficiently stringent to put an end to that? I am perfectly sure it will be stringent enough if the justices are prevented from inflicting paltry penalties. I have reported to the Minister cases where we have had erratic fines, and what can you expect when that happens? It is disheartening to the police who have got the convictions.

Do you think there ought to be a heavier penalty? Certainly. This very white woman I just spoke of was convicted ten days after a Chinaman who pleaded guilty, and was fined £10, but this white woman before the same bench was only fined £2.

You think there should be a minimum penalty? I am quite satisfied with the £20, but it must be a fixed thing.

By Hon. P. Macpherson: Do you not think £10 would be sufficient as a minimum? £10 is nothing to some of these Chinamen.

For a first conviction? It is such a serious offence, to me, that I would like to see a heavier penalty.

What about the alternative of imprisonment for two months? You must remember that when we do catch a Chinaman or a white person it has been going on for months. The police probably have been watching the culprit for a long time, and, although legally it is a first offence, in reality, it is very far from being a first offence.

Do you think that one month would be enough? If we have £20 or one month, I think the Chinaman would prefer to do the month.

By Hon. A. Norton: In your experience have you reason to believe that the Chinese keep the blacks round their camp, and supply them with opium in order that they may have immoral connexion with the women? It is not the Chinese employers who give their employees the opium—it is other Chinamen. But it is not always Chinese who supply opium. Cingalese, Malays, and white people also give it to them.

With respect to the local protectors, are you limited in their appointment to ten? No, it is just a matter of fitting in with the police arrangements, so that the districts shall not clash with one another.

How is it that no police magistrates are appointed protectors? There is no reason for it. I should be only too glad to have a police magistrate as a protector; but I have to pick men who can give me the time, and who have a great interest in the work. I would much rather work with men who are fond of their work than with men who do it as a matter of compulsion.

By Hon. B. D. Morehead: I suppose the police can move about more readily than police magistrates? Local protectors have not to move about.

By Hon. A. Norton: I suppose the police officers who are appointed do move about? They have not to move about in connection with their duties as protectors, but during their peregrinations they would be able to see things.

From their having to move about they acquire a larger knowledge of the manners and customs of the aboriginals? Yes.

What matters are these local protectors allowed to deal with without instructions from you? I only require them to report to me on matters of non-criminal aboriginal interest. They deal with permits and agreements, and carry out my instructions. By the regulations their duties are to act as my deputies; but, as I am directly responsible to the Minister if anything goes wrong, I am always anxious to know what they are doing.

I notice that protectors only are allowed to give permits for marriages between female aboriginals and persons other than aboriginals. Do these local protectors give these permits without your permission? At present people can defy the protector by saying that they are married to a gin.

If this Bill becomes law, they will be prohibited from marrying without a permit from a protector? Yes, because inquiry will be made. There are many cases now where we know a white man to be a disgracefully bad character, but, if we try to prevent him employing a gin, he marries her, and thus defies the protector.

I understand your object, but I want to know how far the authority of the local protector goes? He has nothing whatever to do with that. The only thing I propose is that when a man wants to marry he will have to apply for permission, and that will give me an opportunity for inquiring into the why and wherefore of the case. A woman may be already married tribally, and I consider it a grave breach of the moral law if a woman who is married according to the tribal rites is allowed to marry another person under British law. I know of two cases where a gin married a white man when she was already the wife of an aboriginal, but, although the two tribally-recognised husbands applied to me, I could give them no redress.

I understand you to say that the local protectors report to you every month? No; they report to me on every matter of special aboriginal interest as it occurs. They have to report to me monthly on the food relief. For instance, supposing I authorised a distribution of food in a particular district, the protector in that district reports to me at the end of the month as to who supplied it, the nature of the supply, when it was supplied, and how many aboriginals partook of it. By that means I ascertain how many blacks require relief, and whether it is necessary to continue it. In two cases, where a distribution was left in the hands of private individuals, I found things were going on that should not have been. In fact, the blacks did not get what was provided by the Government for them. The result is that now all distributions of food are made by Government officials—either of the police department or of the Telegraph Department. I may say that the telegraph officials in the Peninsula render me very valuable assistance in that way, because they see the blacks in the interior of the Peninsula, and they get information of what is going on on the coast line, and their information is often very useful.

Are the protectors' reports kept by you, or do you send them on to the Home Secretary? If the information is official, and I cannot act on it

myself, I send it on; but in many cases I get private information. Then I make my own inquiries.

You spoke of the large death rate among aboriginals. Do you find that, when influenza or measles are about, large numbers succumb to those diseases? We had many examples of death by measles in Mr. Gordon's district eighteen months ago. I have never seen an epidemic of measles amongst them; but from what Mr. Gordon says in his report, they succumbed very easily to measles down on the Georgina.

Do you find that the death rate is increased by reason of their casting off their clothing when they want to go out hunting for days together? I cannot prove it, but I am greatly of opinion that clothing has done a great deal towards increasing the death rate of the aboriginals. The fact is that the aboriginal does not know how to use his clothes; he sleeps in them, and keeps them on when they are wet—he is too lazy to take them off.

That adds largely to the death rate, independently of the diseases you spoke of? Yes. Of course, that is my personal opinion.

By Hon. A. J. Carter: You stated that you were not able to get rid of the fishermen on the Yarrabah Reserve. Have you applied to have that district closed to fishing? No; but Mr. Foxton very kindly saw Mr. Philp about it, and he gave orders to the Customs officers to have the fish-traps removed.

By the Secretary for Public Instruction: Are there any great number of aboriginals employed by the Chinese? In some places, yes. Personally, I am averse to the Chinaman employing them unless they are reputable, but in some places my hands are forced to allow the aboriginals to be employed by Chinamen. As I mentioned in my annual report, there is a typical case at Atherton. If we prevented the Chinamen from employing aboriginals there the Government would have to spend a great deal of money in supporting the aboriginals, as they have nowhere else to go for their food.

I notice that the Bill provides that no permits shall be granted to Chinamen? I am not responsible for that. Reputable Chinamen are amongst the best employers of aboriginals—they do pay them their wages.

By Hon. A. Norton: Do you find that Malays and Japanese employ aboriginals to any extent? I have noticed that on the boats.

Do you think there is any great difference between them being employed on boats—especially by Malays and Japanese—and their being employed by Chinese? I do not judge the employer by the colour of his skin, but by the way he treats the aboriginals. To me it is immaterial who an employer is, so long as he treats them kindly, and gives them their wages, provided the boys are agreeable to work for them.

Do you consider that under the present Act a permit could be given for an agreement of less than twelve months? I was under the impression that they could not legally be entered into for less than twelve months.

That is the reason for this provision in the Bill? I believe so.

Have you no power to revoke an agreement? The question has cropped up. I thought, and continue to think, I had the power to do so, but I was told by a lawyer that only the court could terminate an agreement. I can revoke a permit. I was not responsible for the wording of the principal Act, and I have to do the best I can with it.

Have you read clause 7 of this Bill?—Do you notice the confusion with regard to the word "person"—in the first place it means the employer, and afterwards it apparently refers to the aboriginal or female half-caste? I am not prepared to give an opinion on that.

Did you notice that? Not till you pointed it out to me.

Do you think it advisable to allow a police magistrate to grant permits for marriages? It would depend on whether the police magistrate had the interests of the aboriginals at heart.

They ought to have the interests of the aboriginals at heart? I do not care who gives the permit so long as I get the information in time, and can make inquiries whether the marriage is desirable, and prevent it, if necessary.

You do not care, so long as it is properly done? So long as I am satisfied there is nothing wrong about the case.

Now, with respect to subsection 3 of clause 10—Do you think it desirable that female aboriginals or half-castes should be employed on boats?—Have you allowed them to be employed on boats up to the present? There are many reputable Papuans belonging to the Torres Strait Islands who are legally married to aboriginal wives. They recognise the marriage ties, and are bound by them, and in such cases I do not refuse to permit them to carry their wives on their boats. Our principle has always been that the lawful husband should be a reputable person.

But this seems to apply to a permit for a female half-caste, whether married or not. Do you think it is desirable that when they are not married, particularly young girls, they should be allowed to be employed on these vessels? That is just what I have been fighting against. I have refused to allow them, but I do not think I had the legal right to do so.

By Hon. A. J. Carter: The aborigines decline to be separated, do they not, and it is necessary, when a man is engaged, to allow his gin to go with him? If he is legally married, and is a reputable man.

By Hon. B. D. Morehead: What do you mean by legally married? By the English law. I may say that since women have been stopped from being employed on the boats, serious crimes have greatly diminished.

By Hon. A. Norton: With regard to clause 13, do you require, and would you exercise, the power to "take possession of, retain, sell, or dispose of, any property of an aboriginal, whether real or personal"? At present, when a boy signs off at Thursday Island, the police give him so much money to spend on the island, and send the rest to Mapoon. I cannot at present sue for wages. If a boy says his master has not paid his wages, and I, on making inquiries, am satisfied that he has not, I cannot do anything.

With regard to the 14th clause, which provides that in certain cases the burden of proof that the girl is not under a specified age shall lie on the person charged, is that desirable in so serious a charge? How can he prove it, and would you recommend the retention of that clause? If hon. gentlemen could suggest any better way of punishing those who commit such bestial offences upon little children I should be very glad. I am not particular about the wording as long as I have some means of taking steps to punish such outrages.

With respect to the 15th clause, which refers to the holders of miners' rights; they claim a right to mine on reserves; is that so? Under the Mining Act of 1898 they have. They had not when the Aboriginals Act of 1897 was passed.

With regard to the 16th clause, it appears to me that an injustice may be done in cases where blacks are encamped near a township? The object of the clause is to prevent undesirable persons from going to and remaining in the camps. At present I have no power to say, "Clear out of that camp."

The CHAIRMAN having thanked the witness, on behalf of the Committee, for the assistance he had given them, Dr. Roth was escorted out of the Chamber by the Usher of the Black Rod.

The SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC INSTRUCTION moved that Mr. Archibald Meston, Protector for South and

[5 p.m.] Central Queensland Aboriginals, be called to the bar, and be examined in relation to the Bill.

Question put and passed.

Mr. Meston was introduced to the Committee by the Usher of the Black Rod, and invited to take a seat at the table.

ARCHIBALD MESTON examined:—

By the Secretary for Public Instruction: Will you give the Committee a brief detail of the nature of your duties? The district under my supervision includes all South and Central Queensland, north to Broadsound and west, including Aramac and Muttaborra, to the Diamantina. Boulia is now under the control of Dr. Roth, the Northern protector. All south of this line to New South Wales, and west to the South Australian border, is under my jurisdiction. When the Act came into force it dealt chiefly with reserves and removal from reserves of those aboriginals whose conditions make it desirable for their own sake that they should be taken somewhere where they would receive proper care and attention. More particularly in the beginning we dealt with aboriginals and half-castes more or less living in improper surroundings in camps and under degrading conditions. Those were removed and brought down to the coast, some to the reserves, and the girls were put under the charge of a matron in Brisbane who was under the control of the protectress. These girls were sent out to suitable mistresses. I think between sixty and seventy have been sent out up to the present time, and all, with the exception of two or three, have given satisfaction. Some sixteen or seventeen were sent to the Magdalen Asylum at Woolloowin, an institution which exercises marvellous control over them. They also have done remarkably well, have been sent out, and have given complete satisfaction to their mistresses. Those girls cost the State nothing whatever. They paid their way by the labour they did, such as washing, ironing, and laundry work generally. Those at service receive from 2s. 6d. to 10s. and 12s. 6d. a week. So much is given to them and the balance is banked to their credit. If one of those girls gets married, her accumulated wages are available, and the same if she prefers to go on a reserve. I have removed about 237 men from different parts of the West. I would like the Committee to understand that no aboriginals are ever taken away from employment. Whenever they are employed and properly attended to they are left there. Many station-holders treat their blacks with great consideration, and during the late drought the lives of hundreds of blacks were saved by being fed by the station-holders, when the white people had considerable difficulty in feeding themselves. For that they are entitled to every credit. Every station employing aboriginals fed a large number who were dependent upon those who were employed. In some cases they did not get much wages, still the State saved the cost of feeding them, which would otherwise have been the case. Those who got wages used to spend the most of it on the rest of the camp; in that way they gave away nearly the whole of their wages. One serious evil we have to deal with is opium. In my opinion opium has been responsible for the deaths of 1,000 aboriginals within the last ten years. In one camp on the Maranoa 18 out of 36, or 50 per

cent., died from that cause in six months. When an aboriginal takes to opium he is useless. It is said that on some stations the blacks are given opium in order to retain them, and that unless they are given opium they will go elsewhere. If all squatters were to refuse to give it there would be no chance of their getting it except from the Chinamen, and from white men, some of whom are much worse than Chinamen. They are more cunning and insidious in their ways. To give the Committee an idea of the opium used, I may state that in one district alone £3,000 worth goes into use, and in another £2,000 worth every year. This is entirely consumed by the aboriginals, although whites are taking to the habit in increasing numbers. When the original Act was introduced there was a very drastic provision in it which gave the police absolute power to deal with the opium traffic, and had there been no interference by the Treasury that traffic would have been stamped out in six months, because the police were extremely active in the suppression of it, and they were charged with the administration of that part of the Act. In my own division alone during the last twelve months there have been seventy-eight opium prosecutions, with fines inflicted amounting to £1,220. The Treasury issued licenses to certain Chinese in different parts of the colony to sell opium, and this formed a loophole for indiscriminate traffic in it. As a squatter on the Maranoa said, everywhere in the West opium is as common as sugar. The blacks get opium, and they are dying in scores all over the West on that account. There is no possibility of doing any good with the aboriginals who are scattered about in isolated parties or single individuals over such an enormous territory. We can only deal with them effectually by placing them on reserves. It was said by some persons that the transfer from the Western part of the colony to reserves on the coast would be fatal to them. Well, the first experiment certainly dispels that belief. Over 110 blacks have been on the Durundur Reserve for nearly eighteen months, and during the whole of that time there has been only one death, and that was attributable to the man taking cold on the night of the corroboree at Government House. It has nothing to do with the climate. The climate has agreed with them in a remarkable manner. The death rate is a surprising contrast to that on the other stations where the blacks are in their own territory. These Western aboriginals are quite content at Durundur. They are under our own supervision, and we can do some good with them, and I would only advise leaving in the West those aboriginals who are in service with people who look after them properly. In a very short time there will be very few blacks left in the West. The aboriginal death rate of Queensland for the last ten years, or rather the actual decrease, appears to me to have been 500 annually, and if that rate continues, I place the period of their extermination at about fifty years ahead. When Queensland was first occupied the total population of aboriginals was at least 200,000, whereas now it is about 25,000.

How many do you reckon you have in your division? Between 8,000 and 9,000. The great majority are in the Northern district.

Have you found that you have been hampered, and that you have not sufficient power to carry out the provisions of the Act? No. I have received every encouragement from the Home Secretary, and every possible assistance from the police, who have ever worked in perfect harmony with me.

But is the present Act sufficient for your requirements? In an Act of that character, its administrators naturally require a great deal of

power for exceptional cases. The original Act was introduced at my instigation, and the suggestions which I submitted to the Government were embodied in the Bill, with one or two provisions of Sir Horace Tozer's own. He introduced the agreement clause, and I pointed out to him at the time that that clause was no protection to the aboriginal, and no benefit to the employers; because every station, besides the few permanent aboriginals, employs a large number of casual hands, and it was manifestly unfair to ask every employer to have a fixed agreement with every black who came there and worked a few weeks—there was no need for it. So the Home Secretary agreed to waive that in South and Central Queensland; hence I have had no complaints whatever from any employers in my division—I am not aware that there is in the office a single complaint about my administration of the Act; I have administered it very leniently. With regard to the agreement clause, it would have been just as well if it had been left out, because it is not well to compel an aboriginal who makes an agreement to carry it out against his own inclination, although the protector has power to enforce it. It will therefore be seen that the clause gives the employer no satisfactory control over the aboriginal, while it is no benefit to the aboriginal himself. Although I was not consulted with regard to the present Bill, I agree with the whole of its provisions, recognising that the administrators of the Act require to act very judiciously with regard to the administration of some of the clauses, which might be intolerable if they were severely carried out. Take, for instance, the clause which prevents marriages without a permit from a protector. That is a very proper clause. I have a strong aversion to the intermixture of the black and white races; and, without express instructions from the Home Secretary, I would never sanction a marriage of that kind.

Do you think the Bill will meet all requirements? Yes. I see no objection to any of its provisions. Take, for instance, the clause which prohibits persons from approaching within five chains of an aboriginal camp. That requires very careful administration, otherwise a man who goes to buy a boomerang, a spear, or a shield would come under it; but the Home Secretary wisely reserves to himself the power to direct prosecutions under that section. With that power left in the hands of the Minister, there is no possibility of its being abused.

By Hon. A. Gibson: Were the aboriginals that you brought in from the West male or female? Both.

You have them on the reserve on Durundur? Some of them are there. That does not include the girls who have gone to service.

Do you find employment for them on the reserves? They are at present employed working by contract for the surrounding settlers. Those Western blacks are about the best working blacks I have ever had to deal with.

Do they go home in the evenings? Some of them are working too far away to do that, but they go home on Saturday night and leave on Monday morning.

Have you any opinion as to the possibility of utilising the 8,000 or 9,000 in your district in the sugar districts? I am strongly of opinion that they could be utilised in connection with sugar, and it is my intention to submit a comprehensive proposal to the Home Secretary dealing with that subject. I feel sure they could be successfully used in working on sugar plantations. I have not the slightest doubt that several thousand picked men could be made available for that class of work, and it would be better for them-

selves. I have had that in my mind for years, and proposed it in my scheme to the Government in 1894.

By Hon. J. Lator: Where are these 8,000 or 9,000 aboriginals in your district? They are scattered over an enormous territory.

For instance, you can go from the Maranoa to Callandoon without meeting a single black? You may run through the country and not meet them, but they are there.

And from here to Roma you will not find a single black? Well, they are there.

By Hon. W. Allan: How many blankets are there distributed in a year? Last year there were something like 8,000 distributed. The cost came to something like £4,000.

By Hon. B. D. Morehead: How many go to the blacks? They all go to the blacks. Originally they were given anywhere—it was grossly abused.

By Hon. P. Macpherson: Are you intimately acquainted with the habits and customs of the blacks? Well, I have been forty-two years amongst them.

When did your experience of them begin? On the Clarence in 1859.

Have you been amongst wild aboriginals? Yes.

Have you passed any time amongst them? Yes.

Where? In various parts of Queensland and New South Wales. I went through the bora ceremony in the year 1868, when the Duke of Edinburgh was in Australia.

What is the bora ceremony? It is the ceremony by which the young men are initiated into the habits and customs and secret rites of the tribes.

Are you acquainted with any of their dialects? Yes, I spoke one dialect when I was fourteen years of age.

You can make yourself understood by any of these men who come in from the West? They speak an unknown dialect to me; but in two weeks I could easily master enough of any dialect to make myself understood. But there is no necessity for that, because these Western men speak English, more or less.

Have you any idea what the death rate was in the West before these men came in? There has been only one death among the 110 who came to Durundur up to the present time, and, according to the previous death rate, there would have been twenty or twenty-five deaths.

You say you were not consulted in the framing of this Bill? Probably because it chiefly deals with the Northern portion of the colony, consequently the Northern protector would be more consulted.

Would you advise this Council to pass it? Yes. I have read the whole Bill, and there is no clause in it that I regard as being liable to abuse.

What is your opinion about clause 8, which prevents justices from imposing a penalty of less than £20, or imprisonment for less than two months for a first offence? The object of the Home Secretary in fixing a minimum penalty was to put an end to the small fines, which destroyed the intention of the Act altogether. For instance, when the fine was £50, with an alternative of imprisonment for six months, you would see a case where an individual was fined 5s., with the alternative of a week's imprisonment.

Do you not think that £10 would be a sufficiently high minimum for a first offence? Ten pounds would be a fair amount to start with.

And do you not think that one month would be a fair amount to start with? As the alternative to a fine of £10, yes.

By Hon. J. Webber: Are you in favour of bringing blacks from the West and forming them into camps on the coast? Only those who are not employed—those who are roaming about demoralised and are doing no good for themselves or anyone else.

Have none of those in employment been brought down? No—only camped blacks who were wandering about.

Do you not bring down any of the blacks who are in employment? Not on any account. The employers tell me that the aboriginals are in their employment, and they tell me themselves, and I can easily ascertain whether they are employed.

Have you never known instances in which blacks have been taken away from their parents, and have been removed from the district where they were born? That has not been done to my knowledge.

Have you never heard of instances of that kind? Do you mean they have been removed by compulsion?

Compulsion to this extent: that the blacks were taken away from their parents? I have no knowledge of it.

Do you not know of any case in which children have been taken out of the colony? If they are under proper guardianship, and a guarantee is given that they will be brought safely back again. I do not believe in their going out of the colony, and I have only allowed it four or five times during the five years I have been protector.

What power have you to secure their return? A bond is given, and you can make it as heavy as you like.

But if they are taken away from the colony, how can you proceed under that bond? I would never allow them to go away unless with responsible persons, and unless I was satisfied that there was no likelihood of there being any difficulty about their return. I am strongly averse, however, to allowing them to go, and have no intention of allowing any more to go without express instructions from the Home Secretary.

You know that you have allowed them to go? I can only recollect two cases of little girls, and I know that they were properly cared for.

You have no guarantee that they are properly cared for? There is the bond, and under the Act you can make the bond for any amount you like.

You know that in one case a child was taken away, and is now in South Australia, and the mother is very anxious to have her back? She will be brought back.

Then there was another case in which a woman was taken away from Thargomindah? Yes, and it was highly desirable that she should be removed.

She left, as you know, because she was frightened—you telegraphed from Cunnamulla to send her on? She came of her own accord.

Two or three of us were there when she went—She went in a state of absolute terror, and she left her son behind, too? The son was in employment. The woman was on the station, and was commencing with all hands, and had borne children to several fathers. Her condition was a disgrace to everybody concerned.

I do not think that? She is now the wife of a tracker at Charleville, and is very happy and contented. The wife of Inspector Graham speaks of her in the highest terms.

I do not see why blacks should not be allowed to choose their own means of making a living? They are allowed to do that so far as it is desirable, but they are not always the best judges of what is good for themselves.

In what form does opium go out to the West?

It is sent in every conceivable form. [5:30 p.m.] I have known the barrels of a double-barrelled muzzle loading gun filled with opium. One of the stationmasters could give some startling revelations on the subject.

By Hon. J. Lolor: Did I understand you to say that stationholders supply blackfellows with opium in order to keep them? Only a few.

Do you know that of your own knowledge? It is a matter of common knowledge. I have it on their own admissions.

Why do you not prosecute them? We could not prosecute them very well on their own admissions. All we can say is that if they do not stop it we will take their blacks away.

By Hon. B. D. Morehead: When did your experience of the aboriginals commence? In 1859.

You were what age then? Seven.

You commenced young? I did.

And you have had continuous experience of them ever since? Yes, for forty-two years.

Have you mixed up with what are called wild aboriginals? I have been a good deal amongst the wild blacks.

Have you ever seen that performance called bora? Yes. I passed through one in 1868.

Through the whole ceremony? All but the last stage.

That stage you declined? I could not without being an aboriginal.

It might have inflicted too much suffering on you, perhaps? There is no part of it very pleasant.

Would it be any breach of confidence between you and your old black friends if you were to explain the ceremony to us? I have never mentioned it to father, mother, wife, or child. I was bound under a most solemn compact not to do so.

Probably there might be an impression on your mind that it might not be received with credence? It is an extraordinary and most impressive ceremony.

Considering there would be money in it, I wonder you did not let the Press have a copy of it? I would just as soon expect a mason to publish the secrets of masonry to make money out of it.

Did the going through the ceremony give you an advantage amongst other aboriginals? Yes. The bora system runs through all Australia. You can make yourself understood amongst any tribe. By making certain signs they know you have gone through it. There is an elaborate system of signs and passwords.

There is some secret by which you would be known from Cape York to our southern border? Yes. I have no difficulty anywhere with them. I went among them alone in the Cape York Peninsula.

Do you not think it would be a fair thing to tell those of us who have to do with blacks how to get along with a safe conduct? There is no necessity for it at this stage. The wisest course is to treat them as gentlemen. They are extremely polite to each other.

By Hon. A. Norton: Did you send in a report this year to the Home Secretary? Yes.

In that report did you bring under the Minister's notice those statements you have made to us about the large number of deaths from opium, and the large supplies of it obtained surreptitiously? I did. I made special reference to it. I dealt fully with the whole question.

By Hon. A. Heron Wilson: Is it the best opium they get? Some few get good opium who can afford it. Otherwise it is opium which has been used by the Chinese or adulterated largely. It is

called charcoal opium. When under its influence especially in winter, they will lie anywhere, and they catch cold and are gone in a few days.

By Hon. A. Norton: Have you heard instances of blacks suffering from influenza or pneumonia? Yes. Pneumonia is a very common complaint.

Do you think the death rate arising from their sleeping in their wet clothes is as great as that from opium? No.

Have you known any cases where they have been attacked by measles? No. There is a record of an epidemic of measles which carried off a large number of them at Sydney in 1803. I have never noticed it.

By Hon. B. D. Morehead: In your experience of blacks, have you known of any considerable number of instances of longevity amongst them? Yes. I have known men who must have been eighty-five or ninety years of age. There is a man on Fraser's Island now who must be eighty-five, because when the "Stirling Castle" was lost in 1836 he had gone through his third bora ceremony.

Those would be very exceptional cases? Yes. Do you think the wild blacks live to a considerable age? Not the majority of them.

I am taking the average duration of life? It would be about sixty years.

How do you know? From my recollection of them and their apparent ages.

Have you seen the Western blacks in their wild state? Yes.

Have you seen many old men among them? Not a great many. There are usually very few old men.

Would that show that longevity was not common among them? A great many are killed in tribal fights. I should say a good number live to be over sixty.

By Hon. J. Webber: How do you get at their age? I usually compare it with some historical event which they recollect. I can also tell by their appearance.

By Hon. A. Norton: You spoke of blacks being employed on sugar plantations. In your experience, have you found the blacks work at agriculture? At certain forms of agriculture.

What do you mean by certain forms? Many are unwilling to settle down to continuous labour.

Then if they were employed on sugar plantations you could not always depend upon them when they were wanted? If you get a body of them together they work infinitely better than when isolated. Those men at Durundur work in the most cheerful manner. If employed in the canefields merely for the season they could go back to the reserves for the rest of the year.

Would you employ them for cane-cutting only? They will take to that very readily, I am sure.

Do you find that they give preference to any particular kind of work? Yes, to axe-work and horse-work.

On stations I understand they want to go away at a certain time of the year? That is so.

Do they always come back to the same place, and within a reasonable time? Yes, after a week or a fortnight.

Do you think they could be regarded as a reliable form of labour for cutting cane? I do.

Do you think thirty or forty of the blacks on Fraser Island could be got for this season's cane cutting. Yes, under proper supervision.

What do you mean by proper supervision? Some person who has control over them.

Some man of your own? Yes; they would be sent out with a proper man to control them. In fact, I intend to try it next season, with the Home Secretary's permission. I think I can get 100 good men next season.

By Hon. A. Gibson: From Fraser Island? From Fraser Island and the other reserves.

By Hon. A. Heron Wilson: How many can you get for that purpose in the Southern and Central districts? About 800 men.

By Hon. W. Allan: Without taking them away from the stations and their ordinary work? Yes; without taking those in permanent employment.

By Right Hon. Sir. H. M. Nelson: How would the wages be distributed? That would be a mere question of detail.

They would take a contract to cut so many acres, and then the money would belong to the whole lot? Yes.

How would you distribute it? So much would go to the men themselves, and so much to the support of the reserves from which they came.

By Hon. P. Macpherson: How many blacks are there at Durundur? There are sixty-two there just now. I sent forty to Baramba.

I suppose they enjoy good health? Remarkably good health.

By Hon. A. Heron Wilson: How many are there on Fraser Island? One hundred and thirty or 140. There are about 140 at Deebing Creek, and 100 at Baramba.

By Hon. P. Macpherson: Who is in charge of Durundur? My son was there, but a young fellow from Maryborough is there now. He and his wife are superintendent and matron.

Who attends to them in case of sickness? In a bad case I have them sent direct to the Brisbane Hospital, otherwise medicine is given to them on the station. Sick women and children receive special attention.

How often are they inspected by you? Perhaps once a month, or once in two months.

By Right Hon. Sir H. M. Nelson: Have you anything to do with the mission station at Deebing Creek? I am supposed to visit and report, and settle any special trouble.

It is in the hands of the committee? Yes. I do not like to interfere. They have done very excellent and unselfish work there.

By Hon. B. B. Moreton: Is not the station on Fraser Island a mission station? Yes; under the Anglican Church.

Can you shift them from there without their consent? I am not supposed to.

You spoke about taking 100 from there? Of course that would be with the consent of the Home Secretary. He has absolute authority over the whole of them.

Is there not a superintendent there as well as the matron? Yes.

Who is the head there? I think Archdeacon Rivers is the controlling force just now, and a gentleman named Anderson is the superintendent.

By Hon. A. Heron Wilson: Could you get these men to go against their will—supposing anyone objected to go? They would not be likely to object. In any case I would not consult them; I simply tell a man to do a certain thing, and he does it. I have never had one say "No" to me in five years.

By Hon. W. Allan: But if he said "No," I suppose you could not make him? Well, I could stop his supplies; and there are other remedies.

The CHAIRMAN having thanked the witness for his attendance, and for the evidence he had given, the Usher of the Black Rod escorted Mr. Meston from the Chamber.

The House resumed; the CHAIRMAN reported progress, and the Committee obtained leave to sit again on Tuesday next.

The Council adjourned at six minutes to 6 o'clock.