

GOVERNMENT HOUSE.

WHY REMOVE IT?

WILFUL WASTE OF MONEY.

When the position of Governor of South Australia on a vacancy occurring is offered to a gentleman by the Imperial authorities a full statement is made of the emoluments and the conditions attached to the office. After an appointment has been made it is not considered the right thing to vary the agreement, either by raising or lowering the salary or by changing the terms of the agreement in any other particular. The houses which the Governor is to occupy and the grounds which surround them are just as much a part of the contract with his Excellency as is the salary or the allowance mentioned in the contract. Whatever alteration, then, is contemplated in respect to the position of the viceregal residence and whatever change is proposed in connection with the domain can only be carried out between the departure of one Governor and the arrival of the next. There is a well-authenticated understanding between the State and Imperial Governments that no addition to, or deduction from, the pay of a Governor shall be made during his term of office, whether with or without his approval. The object of this stipulation is to preserve the independence of the King's representative, and to prevent even the suggestion of influence being exercised by the party in power in regard to him. The rule in respect to the pay of the office applies also to other conditions attached to it. Obviously, therefore, it would be a most irregular proceeding for the Verran Ministry to carry out during the tenure of office of the present Governor the schemes which it has promulgated for converting the present Government House domain into a park, and to demolish the stone wall round the enclosure with the object of substituting an open iron palisading. The late Hon. T. Price was the first to suggest the removal of the wall along King William-road, but when he ascertained that the then Governor (Sir George Le Hunte) preferred to retain the privacy enjoyed by himself and his predecessors Mr. Price took no further action. While the Governor is in possession of the viceregal mansion and grounds it is as much his own as if he had a lease of it, and it would be an affront to make any changes in the structure or its environment without his approval.

Why Alter the Position?

The Government have placed on the Estimates for the current year a sum of £20,000 for a new Government House, including the site, and the Treasurer, in delivering his Budget speech recently, said—"The subject of the better utilisation of the site now used for Government House has been brought prominently before Ministers, and they are of opinion that it would be desirable to find other quarters for his Excellency and staff. It is proposed to pull down the walls surrounding the present Government House, to convert the domain into a park, and utilise the building for some public purpose. I might mention that the site now occupied by Government House domain is valued at £150,000. A sum of £20,000 has been put down for the purchase of and additions to any suitable building which might be offered for this purpose."

A good many questions arise in respect to this statement. In the first place it would be interesting to know who brought "prominently before Ministers" the proposal that the viceregal mansion should be transferred from its present central, convenient, and historic position to some site to be purchased in the suburbs or

elsewhere. The reference to the value of the site is beside the question. A similar statement might be made with regard to the Botanical Gardens, the Zoo, or the parade ground. Surely it is as important to have a suitable and easily accessible home for the Governor as it is to house the University or the National Museum on North-terrace. If any moving has to be done it would be much more to the purpose to transfer the University to a site where there would be space to erect residential colleges, and where the students would have ample space for recreation and sport, as is the case in Melbourne and Sydney.

A Mania for Buying Land.

The Government recently have been smitten with a perfect mania for removing buildings and institutions. The railway goods department is in process of transfer to Mile-End; the show ground is to be banished to Goodwood; the Government Printing Office is to be shifted; the Destitute Asylum is to be spirited away; and now the viceregal residence is also to be moved. Money is apparently no object, and the persons most interested seem to be the last to be consulted. The general impression seems to be that the new site for Government House is to be at Rostrevor, a beautiful property near the Magill Reformatory, which has about 100 acres of ground attached to it, and which includes in its domain the Morialta Falls. This, it is understood, is under offer to the Government, who are apparently unable to resist bargains in land when put before them. It is also said that the property of the late Mr. Hunt, on the Magill-road, which comprises from 80 to 100 acres, has been submitted to the Ministry as an eligible site, and it is known that not long ago they were considering the advisability of purchasing Torrens Park, with the mansion erected there. It would be difficult, however, to show that any one of these properties has an advantage as a residence for the Governor over that on North-terrace. On the contrary, none of the private residences hitherto suggested would be at all suitable for the purposes of a viceregal establishment, in which it is necessary to make provision for levees, receptions, and other State functions on a considerable scale, besides the housing of a large number of servants. From this point of view the amount placed on the Estimates for a new Government House, including the site, viz., £20,000, can only be regarded as ridiculously inadequate. At

least twice that sum would be required to provide a residence equal to that which it is proposed to abandon and presumably demolish.

Greatly Enhanced Expense.

Supposing the Governor were banished to Magill, the extra cost of keeping up his Excellency's establishment would be considerable. He would have to keep additional motor cars, with the necessary skilled chauffeurs, while the enhanced outlay in carriages and horses would also be very great. A moderate estimate would be that the outlay of his Excellency in this way would be raised from £1,500 to £2,000 a year. Would the Government be willing to compensate the Governor for that compulsory increase in his expenditure? Supposing the Ministry were callous on the subject of the Governor's extra outlay, what about the general public? How would the loyal subjects of his Majesty get backward and forward on the occasion of the annual levee? What would be done by the persons invited to official dinners or "at homes," or to garden parties and dances? Everyone is not in the position of the Ministers, who have State motors at their beck and call. Is the Governor, in future, to be a mere nonentity socially and merely to attend Executive Council meetings and sign documents?

The Historical Aspect.

The historical aspect of the subject is worth considering. Government House occupies what is approximately the site selected by Colonel Light, the founder of Adelaide. The first portion of the present edifice was built by Colonel Sir George Gawler, the second Governor of South Australia, who fought under Wellington at Waterloo, and to whom many of the oldest public buildings of Adelaide are due. The structure was designed by an architect who brought both good taste and experience to bear on his work, and the facade is as chaste and handsome as that of any building which is likely to be purchased or erected to take its place. The Duke of Edinburgh resided at Government House on the occasion of his visits to the State more than 40 years ago, while the present King and Queen have also occupied the mansion. Then all the interesting associations which belong to the distinguished careers of the able men who from the time of Sir George Gawler to the present occupant of the office of Governor are inextricably attached to the place. Lady Franklin, the widow of the Arctic explorer,

also resided there. Thus, perhaps, as only a sentimental argument, but it has weight when it is added to all the common-sense and practical business reasons which exist for refraining from laying an iconoclastic hand on the building which has so long and so efficiently done duty in its present location. In response to the extravagant strictures passed by the Minister of Agriculture on Government House, a correspondent of "The Advertiser" on Monday writes—"Government House is one of the few houses in Adelaide that, architecturally speaking, can be called good. It has breadth, proportion, simplicity, truth, and dignity. Any building that has all these qualities must be good architecture. As to the building being old, I might remind the Minister that our King lives in Windsor Castle, built chiefly in Tudor times, and the aristocracy of the world live chiefly in houses built hundreds of years ago." Those who are acquainted with Government House will agree with the correspondent, for it is unquestionable that Government House has an appearance of comfort and roominess which is extremely attractive. There has been much expenditure of money by the Government on "things that did not matter" during their tenure of office, but the contemplated removal of Government House, if carried into effect, would involve a wicked and wilful waste of money, which it would be impossible to justify to the ordinary taxpayer.

The Enclosing Wall.

"The man in the street" has never discovered that the walls of the Government House domain are ugly or unsightly. He has been accustomed to them all his life, and has never thought of complaining. The aesthetic taste of Ministers may have been offended, but no one would have thought it necessary to interfere with the boundaries had not the Premier mentioned the matter. The ivy-covered wall along North-terrace is certainly not an eyesore, but is restful to the eyes, especially in hot weather, while the wall running down King William-road is far less unsightly than the unfinished wall of Parliament House on the other side of the thoroughfare, and is quite picturesque as compared with the iron fences which protect Government property in Frome-road. The long stretch of railway wall facing North-terrace west is at least in the same category.

A Real Embellishment.

If instead of wasting money on transferring Government House, and in providing another pleasure ground for the people, which is not needed in a city surrounded by parks, the sum thus saved, with the money which it is intended to lavish in removing the Show grounds, the Government Printing Office, and in other ways were devoted to completing the North-terrace and King William-street facades of Parliament House, the people of Adelaide would have much greater reason to rejoice over the enterprise of the Government than will be the case if the projects announced are persisted in. Of these, the one for which least excuse can be given is the proposed removal of Government House.