

"A PRICELESS MEMORIAL."

Fauna and Flora Reserve.

Government Sympathetic.

A large and representative deputation, which represented 27 societies and 12 corporations, and district councils, waited on the Treasurer (Hon. C. Vaughan) on Tuesday morning and asked that 300 miles of Kangaroo Island, known as Flinders Chase, should be set aside as a reserve for fauna and flora. The deputation room was filled by many prominent scientists, and the speeches extended over an hour and a half.

Mr. Smeaton, M.P., who introduced the deputation, said previous Governments had already granted about 140 miles; but a considerably increased area was necessary. Those present represented every scientific society in Australia. Far beyond the boundaries of the State people were taking a keen interest in the movement.

Hon. T. Bruce, M.L.C., said there could be nothing so valuable in Australia as the natural animals and birds. It was now impossible to find a kangaroo, wallaby, or similar animal within 100 miles of the city. In fact they were nearly extinct. The deputation did not ask for a large sum of money, but simply for the reservation of an area that brought to the State a revenue of only £28 a year. The land would probably never be used for cereal growing or grazing, so to a large extent it was waste country. If the request of the deputation were granted they would have on Kangaroo Island an educational reserve of the greatest importance for generations yet unborn.

Mr. Samuel Dixon (Chairman of the Fauna and Flora Protection Committee) said it had been contended that the area desired was too large, but if anything, it was too small. In the United States there were no fewer than 36 million acres set aside for similar purposes, and patrolled by troops. In Canada, at Kicking Horse Pass, there was a reserve of 4,500 square miles. There were a few blocks on Kangaroo Island granted on perpetual lease, and for the success of the reserve it was essential that those should be resumed, because if they were left there was a danger that the animals would be attracted away from the reserve. On Kangaroo Island there were a few specimens of the original kangaroos, which were supposed to have been protected for the last 20 years or so. Instead, however, they had been remorselessly shot down and their skins smuggled into Adelaide. Now there were only about 30 of them there. On one of the perpetual leases there was a particularly good spot for the platypus, and to preserve that unique animal would be a priceless connection between birds and animals. In the Act there should be a clause to provide for the resumption of the several perpetual leases on the basis of past profits. The leases, he believed, could be secured on the ground of public utility. He suggested that the board to govern the fauna and flora reserve should be constituted on the lines of the Wilson's Promontory trustees, who were appointed for life. Science should be fully represented. There should be four trustees nominated by the Government from the University, four from the Royal Society, to represent the different branches of natural history, and the popular side could be represented by one nominee of the City Council and two of the suburban corporations. Firearms, traps, and so on found on any one in that area should be forfeited, all dogs destroyed, and penalties inflicted for lighting fires in unauthorized places.

Mr. E. Ashby (Flora and Fauna Society) traced the history of the movement to secure an adequate reserve. Any limitation of the area desired would make the reserve unsuitable for the great national purpose they had in view. The country could be granted subject to existing leases. There were on the island scientific interests which it was important should be preserved, and apart from the birds and animals there were valuable plants and flowers. Indeed, the place was a veritable garden. By securing the reserve the deputation wished they would open a lesson book in which their children's children would be able to read lessons in Nature study, and at the same time develop their powers of observation.

Professor Stirling (Director of the Museum), who represented the University, said the underlying motive of the deputation was to preserve the most unique, the most ancient, and in many respects the most interesting species in the world that were perilously near to extinction. If it were a good thing to preserve them—and who was going to say that it was not?—then it was imperative that they should take immediate steps to that end. In Europe they had nothing in the way of antiquities to boast of as Australia had in their flora and fauna, which were of an exceedingly interesting character. There were no animals in the whole world so interesting as the Australian marsupials, and yet they knew that it was practically impossible for visitors to Australia to see an opossum or a kangaroo or a wallaby except in the confinement of the Zoo. He had travelled Australia from north to south, and he did not believe he had seen 100 kangaroos the whole way. He had been Director of the Museum for 20 years, and they were able to see by the specimens they received that what was once very numerous was now very rare. From a personal point of view, as representing the University, and he was sure he could say the Royal Society of England, which would advocate the proposals they were making, he heartily supported the requests of the deputation. They had cleared out precious animals from Australia, and given the country to the rabbit, the fox, the starling, and the sparrow. Surely that was not a good exchange to go down to posterity as the result of their handiwork. He represented the Chancellor of the University that morning. Sir Samuel Way had received communications from the Universities of Melbourne and Sydney on the subject. The Chancellor of the Melbourne University had written to say the proposal they were making that morning was most important. "Not only from the standpoint of patriotism only, but because most of the Australian fauna are unique in illustrating the great theory of evolution so vital to modern science as well as

being deeply interesting in themselves. Not a day should be lost in securing their lasting preservation, because every one's hand seems against even the most harmless of them, and some have already almost disappeared from Victoria." In Victoria, which was small compared with South Australia, 264 square miles had been set aside for a similar purpose. The Chancellor of the Sydney University had conveyed his hearty sympathy with the proposal, and the Senate at its last meeting had unanimously expressed its entire concurrence in it. There could be no better place than Kangaroo Island for the reserve, which would be surrounded on three sides by water, and would require a fence only on one side. Every year the question of getting the land, and if necessary resuming certain of the leases would become more difficult. If the members of the Verran Government desired for themselves a memorial that would be remembered with gratitude and appreciation for all time by all political parties, by all men of science and by all lovers of nature, they could not do better than grant the requests of the deputation.

Dr. J. C. Verco (President of the Royal Society of South Australia) strongly supported the requests. He asked if anybody ever heard of any Government in the world having been adversely criticised for having devoted either land or money to scientific purposes. Kangaroo Island was destined to become an important health centre, and he had paid more visits to it than to any other place in Australia. He hoped the Government would grant the 300 miles.

Dr. Pülleine (representing the Linnean Society of South Australia and the Royal Societies of Victoria and Tasmania and also the Field Naturalists' Society) said before the present century was over people would be asking why they had not secured the ideal reservation for their flora and fauna—that was the whole island. To have on the island also the remnant of the Australian aborigine would be a glorious scientific achievement. Numerous devices allied to prevailing fashions had been a great factor in the destruction of animals and birds. In Queensland they obtained opossums by placing poisoned food at the foot of trees. In Western Australia, where numerous kangaroos had been slaughtered, the crime of ruthless destruction was still practised on a large scale. The method there, he believed, was to place strychnine in the native wells and water-holes, and that had the effect of poisoning every animal and bird that drank the water. In the gorges of the Flinders Range, in which opossums were largely secured for the Adelaide market, traps were employed, and at night the work was aided by acetylene bicycle lamps. Poisoned baits spread about for rabbits had destroyed a large number of valuable birds and animals, while hybrid dogs which mated with the dingo, and even common cats which got away from civilization meant death to all the smaller marsupials and birds.

Professor Rennie (representing the Royal Society of New South Wales), Messrs. G. Webb (S.A. Society of Arts), H. Solomon (Australian Natives' Association), Anstey, M.P. (for the District Council of Burnside), Cr. Frith (St. Peter's Corporation), and Capt. S. A. White (Royal Australian Ornithological Union), supported the proposals of the deputation.

—The Minister's Reply.—

The Treasurer, in reply, said no one could doubt the representative character of the deputation, which had not merely a local

but an Australian interest. The matter had been before various Ministers, and, like Oliver Twist, the societies interested had asked for more, and, unlike Oliver Twist, had got a little bit more every time. He was not saying they were asking too much, or that it would not be desirable to reserve the whole of Kangaroo Island if circumstances were favourable. He was sure that the people of South Australia would endorse the view that as large an area as possible should be preserved. The Government had every sympathy with the request, and that something more than had been done must be done. The Government, in a small way, had done what it could, and he mentioned the proclamation of Pearson's Island as a reserve for the wallaby. Nobody was allowed to go on that island. Those who disobeyed would be asked to pay a visit to one of His Majesty's hotels, either Yatala or the Adelaide Gaol. The Government intended to reserve the lower portion of the Coorong as a sanctuary for birds. The Government had no power to resume perpetual leases on Kangaroo Island or anywhere else. (Mr. Jackson, M.P.—"But you can buy them out.") Yes, they could get pretty well everything with money. If they did buy them out they would have to do so on the ordinary terms on which they bought anybody else out. Special conditions could not be specified. Whether the people would be willing to sell or not remained to be seen. (Mr. Jackson—"Compulsory repurchase.") But that Act was for other purposes. The question would have to be reserved for consideration. The deputationists had told a sorry tale of the way some of the valuable animals and birds had been treated. In the Flinders Ranges, where once wallabies were as thick as rabbits, it was difficult to see one. He had just travelled nearly 1,000 miles along the west coast in a motor, and he had seen only one mob of about six kangaroos. (Mr. Dixon—"There were millions there once.") He had seen one emu, and one wallaby disappear into the scrub. It was essential they should do something to preserve their fauna. He would make a personal inspection of the portion of Kangaroo Island required, with a view to have it thoroughly defined. He would recommend to his colleagues that a larger area should be granted, but the extent of it would be a matter for consideration. For instance, it would have to be decided whether the whole of the Hundred of Ritchie could not be excluded. In exchange for that they might add a little bit to the north of the hundred. He would recommend the erection of a fence across that portion of the island, in order to prevent the settlers' crops from possible damage. He thought it would be necessary to introduce a Bill to define the exact powers granted in connection with the reserve, because the Government had certain rights which needed consideration. Some of the country might be required for forestry purposes, although Mr. Gill had reported that he was disappointed with the land from the standpoint of trees.

Mr. Smeaton, in thanking the Minister, said he hoped he would make an inspection of that portion of the island as early as possible.

The following societies, corporations, and district councils were represented at the deputation:—University of Adelaide, Royal Society of South Australia, Microscopical Society, Malacological Society, Field Naturalists, Fauna and Flora Protection Committee, South Australian Ornithological Association, Society of Arts, Botanical Society, Zoological Society, Royal Geographical Society, British Fauna Guild, Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union, Royal Society of New South Wales, Royal tian Association, Young Women's Christian Association, Woman's Christian Temperance Union, Australian Natives' Association, Chamber of Commerce, Pastoralists' Association, Stock Exchange, the Commissioner of Boy Scouts, Horticultural and Floricultural Society, Royal Society of Victoria, and Royal Society of Tasmania; Corporations of Adelaide, Brighton, Glenelg, Norwood, Unley, Port Adelaide, and St. Peters; District Councils of Crafers, Payneham, Woodville, and Burnside.