

Sixth Day.
25 April 1907.

Mr. DEAKIN : " Colonies " covers more than " self-governing Colonies."

NATURALIZATION.

Mr. HERBERT GLADSTONE : That is quite true. I am talking in general terms now. That point certainly requires elucidation and discussion; and other similar points, for instance, as an illustration the meaning of the word " Governor " in the Bill. Points of that sort will require further discussion. I am only dealing now with the general drift of our proposals. I think then that so far as the removal of these anomalies is concerned, we do provide a certain basis of principle for an Imperial Naturalization Law. The second result of clause 26, to which I have alluded, namely that a certificate given in the Colonies is valid in other Colonies, has been the subject of considerable criticism in the Memorandum which we have received from the Cape drawn up by the Attorney-General of the Cape Government. His point is that the Imperial law is too lax to be accepted as a test of adequate conditions of naturalization in the Colony; and he develops the criticism in two directions. He points out that, the discretion of the Secretary of State being absolute, there was nothing in the law to prevent in the Mother Country a certificate of naturalization being given to undesirables who might even be criminals, and in the second place to persons of non-European descent. In passing, I might perhaps observe one remark in the Memorandum. The Cape Attorney-General noted that at the time the Memorandum was written there was no Act dealing with the immigration of aliens in this country. Since then, as is well known, an Act has been passed, and certainly with regard to undesirables that Act has had a considerable operative force, and it does arm the Government with large powers to deal with aliens who are found guilty of crime in this country; and under that Act we have got rid of a large number of extremely dangerous and unsatisfactory persons. So we are so much, at any rate, to the good in that matter. Perhaps I may here deal with the point that the law of this country is lax, or rather that the practice under the law, the administration of it, is lax, because that is what it comes to. I may just briefly describe to the Conference what our action is in regard to this matter in my Department. Every applicant for a certificate has to give four referees as to his character, and he has to give a fifth as to his residence. In every single case the most minute inquiries are made as to his character, his position, his antecedents, and his intentions. Of course, the inquiries are made in various directions, and whenever there is any necessity we make the inquiries through the police, who are the most convenient agents at our disposal in the matter. We also lay down certain tests which we require the applicants to pass; for example, we have the general test that the man must be able to read and write. We hold that he has not a real claim to the advantages of citizenship unless he is able to read and write English. Although there may be a solitary occasion or two in which some exception is made to that, that is the general rule on which we act. Then there is also a fee to be paid, if the alien is generally satisfactory, of 5*l.*, before he can get his certificate. If there is any suspicion of criminality on the part of the man, that suspicion has to be dissipated as a condition precedent to his obtaining his certificate; and, as far as we know, no criminal has been naturalised in this country. Of course, we maintain, whatever may be said about the provisions of the law, that in effect our administration of it is by no means lax, and would fulfil with regard to undesirableness and crime the requirements which are suggested on the part of the Cape Government. But it would be quite possible to consider whether certain classes of criminal undesirables might not be named in the Bill as being disqualified for naturalization. That is a matter which we should be very glad to consider, and, in fact, to put it briefly, we might see how far