

4th Day.]

COINAGE AND WEIGHTS AND MEASURES.

[2 June, 1911.]

Mr. BATCHELOR—*cont.*

of uniformity in weights and measures throughout the Empire, and also coinage, ought not to stand in the way of our, at any rate, pointing out that we aim at bringing about that uniformity if it can be made practicable at all. The Commonwealth Parliament has carried a resolution at the instance of Mr. Edwards, who has unfortunately since died, declaring the desirability of having uniformity, adopting uniform coinage and uniform weights and measures, as soon as Great Britain has adopted them. We recognise that it is quite impossible for any one of the Dominions, at any rate so far as Australia and New Zealand and, I think, South Africa are concerned, to adopt any system other than the present, or to make any alteration at all unless the United Kingdom are prepared to fall in with it. It would only lead to more complications instead of simplifying matters. At the same time, there is such a tremendous waste in our methods of determining weights and measures and coinage that it is extremely desirable that an alteration should be brought about as early as possible. I do not know what is the position the United Kingdom Government take up. I believe the matter has been discussed pretty frequently in the Imperial Parliament; but we feel it would be a good thing, and possibly that it would strengthen the hands of the Government if they brought the question before Parliament, if we were to carry this resolution. It would be a desirable thing, before attempting to introduce anything of this kind, if this Conference were to express its opinion of the desirability of having a uniform and simpler method of computing weights and measures, and as to coinage.

Mr. BUXTON: I am afraid, on the part of His Majesty's Government and the Board of Trade, I cannot accept the resolution as it stands, because it implies that this reform ought to be carried through—that is to say, that we should take active steps to carry it through. I will admit that if we had a clean slate in this matter we should, I think, probably, with very little difficulty and little hesitation, in consonance with the general view, and certainly the general advantage, adopt, both with regard to coinage and with regard to weights and measures, the proposal of the Commonwealth of Australia.

As regards coinage, that is not in my Department, but I understand it will be discussed later on with the Treasury. However, the two things, weights and measures and coinage, really go very much together. The coinage really will take precedence, I think, of the weights and measures; at all events, the two matters go very much together in reference to any question of alteration. Our position here is really this: that we do not think it is a reform which, however advantageous a thing in its way, is a practical matter really to carry through here. It has been discussed more than once in the House of Commons, and the question of the voluntary adoption has been accepted. The question of compulsory enforcement was as short a time ago as 1907 rejected on the motion of a Private Bill by a considerable majority in the House of Commons; and generally, as far as the Board of Trade are concerned, we do not believe it would be practicable to introduce it—at all events, at present, if it ever were possible. In these matters you have to look at the general custom of the country, and the custom has grown up so much, perhaps unfortunately, on the opposite system that I do not think it would be possible for us to get over that general position here—at all events, for a very long time. One of the real difficulties about it is the point which was included in all these Bills proposing compulsory enforcement—that the various industries should necessarily be included. Take, for instance, the case of the cotton trade: the cotton trade here accounts for about 30 per cent. of the whole exports of our home manufactures; and the Lancashire cotton firms and the employees are very strongly opposed to the proposal of 1907, and are strongly opposed to any alteration on this ground: that if this metric system of weights and measures were introduced it would necessitate having to renumber the sizes of their hanks of yarn, pieces of cloth, &c., to accord with the metric system, as the present numbering is fully understood wherever their goods go throughout the world, and they fear that there would be considerable loss of trade from any alteration. Although the inch and the