

2 June, 1911.]

COINAGE AND WEIGHTS AND MEASURES.

[4th Day.

Mr. BUXTON—*cont.*

centimetre are not commensurable units, it would mean, as far as they are concerned, that the sizes could be only approximately specified, and in dealing with large quantities appreciable errors would result. This would specially affect the complicated scales of pay for different classes of work, which have been drawn up with great care under the existing system, and labour troubles would be likely to occur. The alternative of altering all the looms and other machinery to produce sizes commensurate with the metric units would involve a prohibitive cost, and would be detrimental to the foreign trade.

As regards the engineering trade, they stated that they were opposed to it on somewhat similar grounds, and also it involves the scrapping of patterns, gauges, &c., if the metric system were to be fully enforced. As regards measurement of land, it would entirely upset the existing system under which land is measured and sold and dealt with. As regards various other industries, the same arguments were advanced on their behalf—not against the metric system principle, but against the difficulty of carrying it out in detail. Until those difficulties are overcome—and it is very difficult to see how they can be overcome, as far as we are concerned—we do not see how we could adopt a resolution which would necessarily commit us to action in the matter.

I would first like to point out as regards the question of the trade of the United Kingdom, taking the whole trade throughout, about half of it is done in countries which have adopted the metric system; and so far as the trade in Great Britain is concerned (the foreign trade I am speaking of), it would not really be greatly advantaged by the adoption of the metric system.

Putting them very shortly, those general points show the attitude which the traders of this country, and the retail traders especially, have taken up, and I do not think under those circumstances, however much we may feel that if we based our system on the metric system it would be an advantage, it would be possible for us to move in the matter. Practically it is a business proposition, and we could not enforce it even if we desired.

CHAIRMAN: May I say one word on the point of decimal coinage? although I am not concerned in it except as an individual. It is recognised generally that the pound sterling is the coin of account of the merchant and the banker, and, indeed, of large parts of the world, but you must consider that with the great population of the British Isles the penny is really the coin of account of the poor, and if you were to reduce the shilling or the token silver coin of that size to 10 pennies instead of 12, you would be inflicting a great injustice and hardship on the poor, whose only knowledge of coinage is by the penny, of which there are 240 now in the pound. I only offer that as a casual observation from a student of rural life and poor life in England.

Mr. MALAN: What is the position as regards foreign nations? Do they press for a change at all in connection with the British Empire?

Mr. BUXTON: There has been no representation as far as I am aware.

Mr. MALAN: The Dominions, of course, have got a fairly free hand in this matter. They are younger communities, and they have no very old established institutions as the United Kingdom has got. Canada, for instance, has given us a lead in having its own coinage and its own metric system. Australia has already got its own coinage, and South Africa will probably start its own coinage one of these days when the Union gets a little bit further advanced and we are more or less looking at ourselves. We have a freer hand than the United Kingdom has got. We have not got the trade connections that Mr. Buxton has