

Enclosure.

IMPERIAL WAR GRAVES ENDOWMENT FUND BILL.

ORDER for second reading read.

SIR L. WORTHINGTON-EVANS: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a second time. This is a Bill which was referred to the other day when the supplementary estimate was before the Committee of the House. It is a Bill which really has only two clauses. Clause 1 incorporates the trustees of the Endowment Fund by the name of the Imperial War Graves Endowment Fund Trustees. They are the trustees who are being set up for the Imperial War Graves Endowment Fund, and, as was explained the other day in Committee, a sum of £5,000,000 is to be contributed, as to 81 per cent. or thereabouts by the funds of the United Kingdom, and as to the balance by the various Dominions who share in the fund. In order that that money shall be in trust perpetually, and that the income shall be accumulated in order that the capital sum shall be raised, this Bill is brought in to incorporate the trustees, and, notwithstanding anything in the Charter, the trustees shall have power to accumulate the income of the fund. Honourable members will remember that it was stated on the supplementary estimates that this Government would contribute £50,000 for the next three years towards the fund, £125,000 for the subsequent two years, and then for each subsequent year £300,000, until the capital reached the British proportion of £5,000,000. The Bill goes on to give the trustees power to make investments, to accumulate the income, and provide for the audit of the accounts. I do not think there is anything else I could explain to the House, and I trust that a second reading can be given. I ought, perhaps, to say that, when a second reading is given, the Bill, as it affects private interests, has to go before a hybrid Committee, appointed partially by Select Committee and partly nominated by the Government, and has to be considered by them before it comes back to the House.

MAJOR HILLS: I do not want to detain the House long, and I do not want to oppose the Bill. I merely rise for the purpose of making a suggestion. First of all, I should like to congratulate my right honourable friend the Secretary of State for War on the very great interest he has taken in this fund and the very successful way in which the fund has been run. The suggestion I make is this: The Imperial War Graves Commission was founded by Royal Charter, and that Royal Charter went before the Imperial Conference of 1917. I believe it was discussed clause by clause. The Charter was amended twice by subsequent Imperial Conferences, and now the Government proposes to make a further amendment by Bill. I quite agree that the Bill is necessary for changing our law, and that subsection (1) and subsection (2) permit accumulation of interest that is not allowed by British law; but when I come to the rest of the Bill I do see a grave objection that I hope my right honourable friend will consider. Supposing we pass this Bill, the fund is contributed to by all the Dominions, and they share with us the work of the Imperial War Graves Commission. Supposing we pass an Act of Parliament, is it not probable that all the Dominions will feel it necessary to bring that Act before the Parliaments of the Dominions? I think, if you put yourself in the position of the Prime Minister of any of these Dominions, that it is very likely to occur; and then if that does happen, do we not run some risk of something being passed by the Dominion Parliaments which might conflict with this Act? Up to now we have gone by Royal Charter, and we have had the consent of the Imperial Conference. If we now proceed by Bill and Act of Parliament, I rather fear there might be some conflict between the views that this House might take and the views that the Parliament of Canada, of Australia, or of South Africa might take. It would be a cumbrous procedure that this matter should go all round the Dominion Parliaments; but the real danger is that there might be some conflict. The Imperial War Graves Commission has been a great act of Imperial co-operation, and it would be very disastrous if that were endangered. I do not want to test it. I merely suggest the point for the consideration of my right honourable friend, for I think there is a real risk of something occurring that might endanger the matter. The point can be considered in Committee, or perhaps between now and the Committee stage it might be considered. I need hardly say that in no sense do I oppose the Bill; I merely wanted to point out the danger and to express the hope that the Government would consider it.

THE FINANCIAL SECRETARY TO THE TREASURY (Mr. Ronald McNeill): We must proceed by Bill, and therefore we must have one. My honourable and gallant friend admits that clause 2 must be in the Bill. He appears to fear—I do not know why—that the Parliaments of the various Dominions may think it necessary to take action; but there is not the slightest danger of any trouble. I do not know whether my honourable and gallant friend has noticed the point that this Bill only deals with our contributions. It does not deal with those of the overseas Dominions. Therefore I really cannot imagine why any legislation passed here should come into conflict with the proposals of the Dominions. But my honourable and gallant friend has achieved the end he had in view, for the Committee point he has raised will be very carefully considered.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Bill committed to a Select Committee of nine members, five to be nominated by the House and four by the Committee of Selection.—(*Mr. R. McNeill.*)

Ordered, That all petitions against the Bill, presented five clear days before the meeting of the Committee, be referred to the Committee; that the petitioners praying to be heard by themselves, their counsel, or agents, be heard against the Bill, and counsel heard in support of the Bill.

Ordered, That the Committee have power to send for persons, papers, and records.

Ordered, That five be the quorum.—(*Mr. R. McNeill.*)