

war the Germans controlled the briar industry, and that they were driving the British manufacturers out of the market. Here, then, is an opportunity for the Government. They should see that every facility is given to establish these industries at which incapacitated soldiers can be employed. The Government should lend their assistance to the establishment of an industry in which our own timbers will be used. We can make pipes to compare with the best made in other countries. I believe the Treasurer will do anything he can to remove the difficulties in the way. Last week I called on Mr. Swinburne, of the Inter-State Commission, and put the case before him. I hope we are not going to allow anything to block these industries, for we know they will be of great advantage. We should do everything we can to train the returned soldiers. Some of them will become instructors, and they will be able to teach other men who will be coming back for probably a long time to come. I appeal to the Treasurer to do all he can in this matter. I believe that the Attorney-General will have some influence, for he is interested in the company I have referred to. He should endeavour to see that everything is done to remove the difficulties in the way.

Mr. STEWART.—I was very pleased to hear the remarks of the honorable member for Prahran on the subject of repatriation. I was very pleased indeed to hear him refer to the possibilities of settlement in the Murray Valley. I quite agree with him that in that valley we have a finer opportunity for the settlement of our returned soldiers than anywhere else in the State. At present the Murray is in flood. All the lakes and lagoons are full, and along the border of the Murray there are hundreds of thousands of acres of Crown lands which are absolutely the finest lands in the State. Still no settlers are there. On the land almost every kind of timber is to be found; grass is growing in profusion, and it is so thick and high that, as one walks through it, he leaves a trail behind him like he does when walking through crops. Through this country runs the finest river in Australia. That is the place where we should settle our returned soldiers. We should not think of settling them on land nearer the sea-board, some of which, I understand, has

been purchased for soldier settlements at from £18 to £20 an acre.

Mr. J. CAMERON (*Gippsland East*).—We could give £50 an acre for land if it was worth it.

Mr. STEWART.—It would be very much better to clear some of this land in the Mallee, erect houses and fencing, and secure a stock and domestic supply of water, than purchase land in other parts of the State. The returned soldiers might be charged for the improvements, but surely the men who are fighting for our country, while we sit here in comfort, are entitled to a piece of the land they have been defending, without being charged £50 an acre for it. The soldiers' settlement at Merbein is an object lesson in the repatriation of our soldiers, when carried out on proper lines. There is another matter to which I desire to refer. Settlers in the northern areas last year had to deal with the mice plague, which resulted in a considerable amount of damage. At the present time these settlers are suffering from another plague, which, in my opinion, is going to do more damage than the mice plague. I refer to the rabbits. At the present time, in the northern parts of Victoria and the Mallee in particular, especially those areas which adjoin Crown lands, thousands of acres of crops have been destroyed by rabbits. These crops represent thousands of bags of wheat, which will be lost, not only to the individual, but to the State. Three years ago, during the drought, not a rabbit was to be found in many localities where to-day they exist in myriads. Last May the officers of the Vermin Destruction Department were taken away from the work of destroying rabbits to cope with the mice plague. During their absence rabbits multiplied in very considerable numbers. There are hundreds of hard working settlers in that locality whose living is disappearing before their eyes. Honorable members may well ask what are the causes for this multiplication of rabbits. One is the reservation of large areas for water and timber. When an area of land is made available for settlement, the Lands Department reserves large portions for timber and water. That is a very proper thing to do, but nothing is done to these reserves, and they provide a breeding ground for vermin. If the reserves were properly dealt with they

would be wire-netted, and suitable supplies of water provided for grazing purposes. The amount of fees the Department would receive for grazing rights in ten years would pay for the expense of the improvements I suggest. When applications are invited for the grazing rights of these areas, not 10 per cent. of the land available is let, principally because there is no water and no fencing. The Lands Department has to pay hundreds of pounds in the effort to keep down the vermin, and very little success attends what is done. The settlers alongside these reserves suffer very considerable losses. Last Saturday afternoon one of the settlers asked Mr. A. E. Richardson, the Agricultural Superintendent, if it would not be possible for him to bring an action against the Department to recover compensation for the loss of his crop by rabbits. Mr. Richardson took a photograph of part of the holding near a Crown reserve. For a distance of 10 chains from the reserve the land is absolutely bare of grass, and the destruction is increasing from week to week. The settler cannot harvest his crop, because it is not ripe, and when it would be ripe in ordinary circumstances there will be nothing to harvest. This is not an isolated case, but one of hundreds throughout the Mallee. Something must be done to relieve the settlers in this district for the losses they are subjected to by the rabbits, and I hope the Government will give this matter their earnest consideration, because it is unjust to the hard working men in the far north that they should have to put up with such great losses.

The motion was agreed to, and the resolution was reported to the House, and adopted.

#### WAYS AND MEANS.

The House having gone into Committee of Ways and Means,

Mr. McPHERSON (Treasurer) moved—

That, towards making good the Supply granted to His Majesty for the service of the year 1917-18, the sum of £1,350,897 be granted out of the Consolidated Revenue of Victoria.

The motion was agreed to, and the resolution was reported to the House.

Mr. McPHERSON (Treasurer) moved the second reading of the resolution.

Mr. PRENDERGAST.—I should like to say that I am just now in the frame of

mind that I do not feel inclined to criticise anything the Government are doing, because they have done nothing yet. It seems a pity to disturb the equanimity of the Chamber by inquiring what the Government intend to do. The present Government have done nothing, and they ousted the previous Government because that Government had done nothing. The members of the Government that have gone out appear to be quite content that the present Government should do nothing.

SIR ALEXANDER PEACOCK.—I am hopeful that the Premier will give us a statement as to what is proposed to be done.

Mr. PRENDERGAST.—Nobody wants to disturb the serene atmosphere of the Chamber by making any statement. Apparently the Government do not intend to make any statement, or to do anything. Whatever may be said about the land along the Murray, whatever may be the demand for land for the settlement of soldiers, whatever may be the desire of the country to know how the Government are going to square the ledger, and deal with the thousand and one other things that the Premier mentioned when he delivered his great oration at Wangaratta, apparently nothing is to be done. All these things are so much surplusage now, and apparently it would be better for us to adjourn when there is so much unanimity as to the desirability of the Government doing nothing. The same old game is being played. One set of members are seeking for office and trying to shove the others out. One set of members have been shoved out, and they are sitting down hard, waiting for their opportunity. That is the position that exists to-day, and every honorable member on the Ministerial side of the House knows it. Every Minister is looking round, calculating how long he is likely to be in office, and watching for any game going on in any corner that is likely to shift him from the position that he has got into after much trouble and worry. After a considerable period a Government has to be scraped off the Treasury bench, but the crowd that scrapes it off has to be scraped off in its turn, and so it goes on. We are now up to the final stages of Supply, and if the Premier could pluck up courage enough to pull out the programme which he has in his inside pocket, and let the House and the country have it, it would