

a great deal of good. No doubt the gold mining industry would be benefited to a very large extent by such a Bill as this. The only question, and one which hon. members will have to consider very carefully, is how it will be regarded by capitalists in foreign countries. With these remarks, I move the adjournment of the debate until Wednesday next.

Motion for the adjournment of the debate put and passed, and the debate adjourned accordingly.

PERTH GAS COMPANY'S ACT FURTHER AMENDMENT BILL.

ALL STAGES.

HON. F. T. CROWDER moved the suspension of the Standing Orders, to allow of this Bill passing through all its stages at one sitting.

Put and passed, and the Standing Orders suspended.

HON. F. T. CROWDER, in moving the second reading of this Bill, said: Hon. members who have perused this short measure, and have taken the trouble to look up the original Bill under which the Gas Company of Perth has its charter, will see that the only interests involved are those of the shareholders of the company. Some time back negotiations were entered into by the Gas Company for the sale of their property. It was then found that, in consequence of a word or two being left out of the original Bill, the company, while having the right to dispose of their business, had no power given to transfer the rights under which that business was carried on, and the purchasers would not complete the purchase unless those rights could be also transferred. The Bill now before the House only seeks to make three short amendments in the original Bill. The first amendment gives power to increase the capital of the company to £300,000; the second gives power to the company to dispose of their property and assets; and the third transfers the powers and privileges held by the present company to the purchasers. The Bill has had the careful consideration of the Legislative Assembly, by whom it has been transmitted to this House.

Question put and passed.

Bill passed through committee without debate, reported without amendment, and

report adopted. Bill read a third time and passed.

DOG ACT AMENDMENT BILL.

Received from the Legislative Assembly, and read a first time.

ADJOURNMENT.

THE MINISTER OF MINES moved that the House, at its rising, do adjourn till Wednesday, 10th November.

Put and passed.

The House adjourned at 5:30 p.m., till Wednesday, 10th November.

Legislative Assembly.

Wednesday, 3rd November, 1897.

Papers presented—Question: Lengthening of North Mole at Fremantle—Question: Preferential Right to Local Makers of Batteries—Question: Insurance Companies and Fire Brigades—Question: Legislation re Early Closing of Shops—Dog Act Amendment Bill: third reading—Excess Bill, 1896: second reading; in Committee—Noxious Weeds Bill: second reading (debate resumed); Speaker's Ruling (progress suspended)—Adjournment.

THE SPEAKER took the Chair at 4:30 o'clock, p.m.

PRAYERS.

PAPERS PRESENTED.

By the PREMIER: Returns of various Life Assurance Societies (1896); Report of Government Railways and Tramways (1896-7).

Ordered to lie on the table.

QUESTION—LENGTHENING OF NORTH MOLE AT FREMANTLE.

MR. DOHERTY, in accordance with notice, asked the Director of Public Works, Whether it was the intention of the Government to carry out the North

Mole of Fremantle harbour works to the entire length shown on the original plan.

THE PREMIER (Right Hon. Sir J. Forrest), on behalf of the Director of Public Works, replied:—The mole in question has already been carried out to a greater length than is shown on the original plan, while at the same time the south mole is shorter than shown on original plan. The length originally shown was about 3,000ft. for each mole, but the length of the north mole, as constructed, is 3,450ft., and of the south mole 2,040ft. It has been suggested at various times and by various persons that the north mole should be carried out for a further length of from 1,200 to 1,500ft., so as to afford more shelter to vessels entering the port; but it has not been shown conclusively that such additional shelter is necessary, and the Government has not consequently felt justified in incurring the additional expense, which would be, at the least, £100,000.

QUESTION—PREFERENTIAL RIGHT TO LOCAL MAKERS OF BATTERIES.

MR. DOHERTY, in accordance with notice, asked the Premier, Whether it was the intention of the Government to give a preferential right of from 10 to 20 per cent. to local manufacturers for the construction of Government batteries.

THE PREMIER (Right Hon. Sir J. Forrest) replied: The Government have not considered the question from the point of view named. Before it would be regular to do so, a resolution of Parliament or an Act would seem to be required.

QUESTION—INSURANCE COMPANIES AND FIRE BRIGADES.

MR. ILLINGWORTH, in accordance with notice, asked the Premier, Whether it was the intention of the Government to bring in a Bill to compel insurance companies to contribute a fair quota towards the maintenance of fire brigades.

THE PREMIER (Right Hon. Sir J. Forrest) replied that the Government had a Bill nearly ready, and hoped to be able to introduce it.

QUESTION—LEGISLATION RE EARLY CLOSING OF SHOPS.

MR. EWING, in accordance with notice, asked the Premier, Whether the

Government intended to introduce legislation for the purpose of securing the early closing of shops.

THE PREMIER (Right Hon. Sir J. Forrest) replied that the Government had not decided, as yet, to do so.

DOG ACT AMENDMENT BILL.

THIRD READING.

Bill read a third time, and transmitted to the Legislative Council.

EXCESS BILL, 1896.

SECOND READING.

THE PREMIER (Right Hon. Sir J. Forrest): In moving the second reading of this Bill, I regret that the expenditure, which this House is asked to approve, should have been incurred such a long time ago. This Bill deals with the unauthorised expenditure which was incurred in the financial year ending 30th June, 1896. In a very few days I hope to be able to submit to the consideration of hon. members the Excess Bill for the year ending June 30th last. The reason why it has become a custom—not a custom which I like, or that anyone can very well admire—but the reason why it has become a custom not to deal with the Excess Bill immediately after the excess expenditure has been incurred has been owing to the difficulty of obtaining the report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the year early enough to permit of this being done. Under the Audit Act three months are allowed after the end of the financial year for the Treasury to forward a statement of the accounts to the Auditor General. If hon. members will look at the votes and proceedings for this year—for the last meeting of Parliament—they will see that the accounts of the colony are somewhat voluminous, and in fact, without the Auditor General's report at all, take up an immense number of pages. One hundred and eighty one pages of this book are taken up by the returns from the Treasury. Three months are allowed to compile them. Whether this work could be done in less than three months I could not say, but I think it might if more expedition were used. The Auditor General has to investigate these accounts in order to make his report, and

he supplies in great detail the reasons why there has been any unauthorised expenditure, and why there have been underdrafts, and in fact he gives a complete account of the financial transactions of the colony. That takes another 90 pages. I may say at once that the system by which we do not get the Excess Bill before Parliament immediately after the conclusion of the year is not, in my opinion, a satisfactory one. We ought to try and find some means of obviating that inconvenience and difficulty. The reason of it is because Parliament meets immediately after the closing of the financial year. There are great advantages in that, no doubt. Certainly from the Treasury point of view—the financial point of view of the colony—there is a very great advantage in knowing exactly what you have received during the past year and the amount you have expended during the past year, before you have to calculate and submit to Parliament what you are supposed to spend for the coming year. I am sure every hon. member who has looked into this matter will acknowledge that that is a great convenience to this House. In looking at the estimates of the year, and in dealing with the items, it is extremely convenient to know what has been expended in the previous year on each item. That we have always been able to do in this colony; but it is not done—I believe I may say—anywhere else, because the estimates are laid on the table at an earlier period of the session than we are accustomed to get them here. When the estimates are laid on the table early in July, when Parliament meets, it is impossible for the Treasurer to have the expenditure for the past year, ending on June 30, published and ready for members to examine. The whole matter requires consideration so as to try and overcome this difficulty. It was the custom, at any rate I think it was the custom, as it certainly was the intention of the Government, when we first entered upon the system of Responsible Government, to introduce the Excess Bill immediately after the opening of the House, or very soon after, without the Auditor General's report. That we could not get because the Treasurer has three months to prepare his report, and the Auditor has another two, and we could not therefore get the Auditor General's report in

time. I did lay upon the table of this House on one occasion the Excess Bill without the Auditor General's report, but the House agreed not to deal with it that session until they had before them the report of the Auditor General. The Government did not object—it was thought that the Government rather disliked it, but the Government did like it to this extent. It is much easier to pass Excess Bills fifteen or sixteen months afterwards, than immediately after the money has been spent; so it comes about that hon. members rarely think it is worth while looking into the matter when so long a time has elapsed since the money was spent; and unless there is something outrageous on the surface, and open to adverse comment, hon. members do not take very much exception to this Excess amount. I hope we may be able to devise some plan to meet the difficulty. I do not know how we are going to do it unless we change our financial year. We could meet in March instead of in July, and so give the Auditor General time to make his report before the end of the financial year, but that would be very inconvenient to the Treasury, because they would be working on old estimates, the estimates of the year that had passed, and it would be six months before they could get fresh estimates to work on. Then there is the old plan to have our meeting in July as we have it now, and have the financial year end on the 21st December. That was found most inconvenient for members, for the Treasury and everybody else; not for the Treasury, but it was an inconvenience to the Treasurer and to hon. members and to the country, because not only had we to estimate the amount of revenue for the current year, but if we passed those estimates in August or September there would be three or four months more to run in the year, so that we had to estimate 16 months ahead. Anyone can understand that the estimates thus made would be somewhat haphazard. You cannot really estimate with any sort of preciseness what you are going to receive for 16 months ahead. The shorter time you have to make your estimate for, the more likely you are to be accurate. That plan was not found advisable, and so we fell into the plan adopted in most of the colonies to have the year end on the 30th June.

The only way I see of getting out of the difficulty is to hurry up the Treasury and the Auditor General to put on as much power as they can, and to have the report of the Auditor General out before the end of the session. In saying that, I do not mean that the Treasury and the Auditor General do not hurry up now. If we put on more power we might perhaps do it now, and that seems to me the only way in which we can get out of the difficulty. I regret that sixteen months after this expenditure has been incurred I have to bring this matter before Parliament, because I have to ask the House for the approval and confirmation of expenditure which the Government incurred without Parliamentary sanction. The expenditure amounted in the year 1895-96, ending on the 30th June, 1896, to the sum of £493,378: very much more revenue than we had altogether when we first undertook the management of our affairs. It comes to this, that the Government the year before last expended, without the authority of Parliament, a larger sum than we had altogether when we commenced the system of Responsible Government. I may say, however, that hon. members who have watched these estimates year by year, and have looked closely into them, as I hope all hon. members have, may have observed that this excess—although it comes before the House in the shape it does now, namely, of a Bill to be confirmed—has already been before members; because, as I said just now, when we introduce the estimates every year, we also show the expenditure on every item for the previous year; and the items last year, when submitted to the House in August, not only showed the expenditure we proposed to incur, but the exact expenditure we had incurred during the previous year on every single item throughout. If any hon. member had taken the trouble, he could have at once seen how much we had exceeded our authorisation during the year past. On the 27th August of last year I introduced the Estimates and made my Financial Statement, and I told the House then all about the Excess Bill, though I did not state exactly the form it is in to-day, as I was not in a position then to say exactly what would be said to be an excess. I could only say what was the

excess of the expenditure over the estimate. I could only deal with totals. I pointed out that the estimated expenditure for that year was £1,572,506, and the actual expenditure was £1,823,863, showing that we had spent £251,357 more than we were authorised to spend; but that £251,357, which we spent more than we were authorised to spend, does not count in the £493,378 of this Bill, because there was a considerable number of underdrafts. Although the excess expenditure amounted to £493,378, there are underdrafts amounting to £249,205, and if you take the £249,205 from the amount of this Bill, you get the amount of £244,173, which is the amount we expended beyond that which we were authorised to spend; but we have to add to the £249,045 the sum of £7,084, because we were authorised by statute to expend that amount for interest on loans, so that if you add that amount to the £249,045 you have the actual amount expended more than was authorised—£251,457. These are very large figures for us in this colony, but we should not forget that, although we spent this large amount of money without authority, and even taking the total we spent, a quarter of a million more than is actually authorised, still we received a great deal more than was anticipated. The receipts from revenue for the year ending the 30th June, 1896, exceeded the estimate by £549,545.

MR. ILLINGWORTH: How much of that was from the railways?

THE PREMIER: I will come to that directly. On the year's transactions we saved £34,832. Thus the balance which we had on the 31st July, 1896, which amounted to £277,232, we increase to £312,604. We had arranged our expenditure for the year 1895-96 so as to leave a balance only of £15,876, but instead of having a balance on the 30th June of £15,876, we actually had a balance of £312,604. Taking the whole year—a splendid year for the colony—although we spent more than a quarter of a million more than we were authorised to spend, we received so much more than we expected to receive, that we added to our credit balance instead of reducing it. Last year was a year when great changes were going on. What we called the mining boom was in full swing. Attention was attracted to the colony

from all parts of the world, and there was an enormous drain on the Treasury, and it was our duty—we expected to have the approval of Parliament—to try to keep pace with the times. Looking back at that time as I may do now, things being quieter, although the revenue is greater than it was then, our capacity to deal with matters is very much greater than then. Looking back on the time when everything in the colony was in a complete state of change, I think there is no reason to regret the expenditure that took place at that time. I think we may congratulate ourselves that we were able to keep some sort of grip on the finances of the colony at that period. Everyone knows the trouble there was. There were water, telegraphs, railways, and railway trucks wanted; nothing but promotions from one end of the country to the other; and we came out of the ordeal with a credit balance of £312,604 instead of £15,876. I think we acted very much more wisely in spending this money than in shielding ourselves behind the plea that we should not do it because we had not parliamentary sanction. I may say that during all that time, and even up to the present—if I except from the present year my own exertions, because everyone knows that I have been away from the colony for the greater part of the year—the members of the Government have been working really as hard as if they were departmental clerks. They really have had so much to do, and so many details to look after, that I can assure hon. members, from my own knowledge, that they have had very little time for many questions that required attention. We are often blamed for not dealing with what is called social legislation, affecting our everyday life in this community, and no doubt we are somewhat behind in this respect. We hear constant complaints that this or that Bill has not been introduced; that we have not dealt with the closing of public-houses earlier. A complaint—which is probably justified—is that we have not introduced a Civil Service Bill. The necessity for this Bill is fully justified, but I can assure hon. members that up to the present time the members of the Government have had very little opportunity to give attention to these matters. During the last few years I have learnt that if you want a

Bill well drafted, you cannot hand the subject over to the Parliamentary draftsman and tell him to draw the Bill on it, because, if you do so, you will not get what you want. If you want a Bill on a certain subject, you must master that subject, and know what you want, and then, when you tell the Parliamentary draftsman what you really want he will give it to you. If you are not prepared to tell him, you will not get from him a Bill that will suit the country or that you know anything about. We have not given attention to many subjects because we have not had sufficient time. This Bill before me shows what has been going on during 1896. We have not only expended the revenue we anticipated, but £394,378 more than was authorised. We had all the loan expenditure going on—something like £84,884 above the expenditure in regard to loans, that is the amount in excess of what we were authorised to spend. Hon. members will see that that means it was a year in which a great deal had to be done, and it was not a time for us to use the plea that the work was unauthorised, and therefore we could not expend the money. Considering the times we have passed through during 1895 and last year, which was a very good year for the finances—there never was a better—hon. members, I think, will be inclined to look at the matter more in the direction as to whether the money expended by the Government without authority was wisely expended, rather than to take the point that we had no authority to spend it. If hon. members, on looking through this excellent report of the Auditor General, Appendix B, find any item of expenditure that was not justified, that we expended without necessity, well then I think they may fairly ask us to justify the course we took. That is a good deal for me to say, because there are a great many departments of the State, and a great many sub-departments, and sub-heads and foremen all over the colony, who may incur expenditure without the knowledge of those directly responsible. The Government are responsible for every penny of public money expended, and they are particularly responsible for all money expended without the authority of Parliament. I do not want to go back from that position, or to shirk the responsibility in any way, because I know

that for every penny of expenditure—not only expenditure approved by this House, but especially expenditure set forth in this Excess Bill—I have to be personally responsible to this House. Hon. members can look through the items of this Bill, and while I do not mean to say they will not find anything to which they can take exception—that would be expecting too much—yet they will be able to judge for themselves whether any of the items which the Government have taken upon themselves to spend are not necessary, or whether it was undesirable that the Government should have expended them without the authority of this House. Although, no doubt, everyone of these details must have come before me in one shape or another as they were being incurred, still it is a long time ago, and I have therefore refreshed my memory by reading the Bill itself, and also the Auditor General's report, as hon. members will have to do. Taking some of the totals, I find that there was a sum of £25,449 expended in excess of the estimates under the heading "Medical." Everyone knows the great difficulty we have had in looking after the hospitals on the goldfields and other places, and that sum does not seem to me to be very excessive considering the increase of population. Then we have "Police." We might have expected that the police would have "outrun the constable" a bit, but we find here that they have spent only £6,391 more than was authorised by this House. Then there was expenditure on "Admiralty Surveys," £10,744, including purchase of a ship. There was no vote for that, and the matter was pressing. The House had several times urged upon the Government the necessity of making surveys of the various ports, and we found, although an Admiralty surveyor had been lent to us, that we could not carry out surveys on the North-West coast, at Port Hedland and other places, without a ship; therefore, I took upon myself the responsibility of purchasing a ship from the Victorian Government for £7,500. I believe it is not only a very cheap but a very suitable vessel for the work. Under the heading "Miscellaneous" will be found various items, including purchases of land and sanitary grant. I will only refer to a few of the larger ones. It will be seen that subsidies

to municipalities exceeded the vote by £6,313, and that the Kalgoorlie sanitation grant was £3,097. There is a lot of other small items which I will not refer to. Then there was the grant in aid of improving the Menzies Town Hall site, £2,000; the purchase of the site of the Freemasons' Hall in Howick Street, Perth, amounting to £9,000, for housing the Minister of Mines and his department—a very good purchase, and a cheap one too. With regard to the purchase of Point Chidley, near Fremantle, the Government had an opportunity of securing 12 acres of land for £1,000, and I took upon myself the responsibility of purchasing it. It is a place very much used by the public. The sites on the river which were open to the public were few, and this is a favourite place for boating parties. It was very cheap indeed at the price, and is worth considerably more at the present time. Then we purchased in Perth, lots 11 and 12 for £4,000, where the Mint now stands—a very good site for the purpose. We purchased a site in William Street for a bonded store, lot 11½ for £9,000; and we purchased St. George's Hall, in Howick Street, for £7,500. I am not well acquainted with the values of property in Perth, but I think that all these places were bought at reasonable prices, and that, if the Government desired to realise on them, they could certainly do so without loss. The total of the miscellaneous expenditure is £60,163. On railways and tramways there has been a total expenditure of £49,445. That is not an unreasonable amount, considering the great increase of traffic that took place at the time it was spent, and the great demands of all sorts that there were then made upon the Railway Department. On works and buildings the vote was exceeded by £222,720. Hon. members will notice two very large items in this long list: "Additional improvements to opened railways, £53,194," and "Development of goldfields and other mineral resources, £76,730." The vote, I think, was £30,000, and we spent £76,730 on minerals and goldfields. Among the other items are additions and repairs to jetties and river improvements, £4,645; and furniture for public offices, £6,013. A special grant for Esperance Bay road bridge amounts to £2,000. Hon. mem-

bers will see that even the few items I have referred to form a large portion of the total expenditure in the Excess Bill. On roads and bridges we spent a total amount of £10,813 more than was voted —no one, I am sure, will object to that; a sum of £10,706 was spent in the Mining Department; and £56,466 was spent in the Postal Department, owing to the many demands that were made upon it at that time for constructing telegraph lines and other works. The total expenditure in respect of the nine items which I have picked out of this Bill is £452,997, and the rest of the expenditure is made up of smaller items. While I am sure that hon. members will regret, with me, the necessity for expending this money without authority, yet I do not regret it for any other reason; and I think it was a very good thing for the colony that at that time we had the money to spend. If it had been otherwise, if we had had to ask this House at the present time for authority to expend nearly £500,000, and at the same time to tell you that we had to borrow the money to do it, of course it would be a much more serious matter; but we had the money in hand, and while we were spending it, the revenue was increasing at such a rate that we wound up the year with about £300,000 in hand more than we expected to have, so that there was every inducement for the Government to keep pace with the times and to meet the requirements of the country. I think hon. members will agree with me that it was not unwise for us to take upon ourselves the responsibility for the expenditure of the money which had come into the coffers of the State to a much larger extent than we anticipated. I do not think I need say more about this matter at present; but I will make a few further remarks when we get into committee, in regard to the Loan Estimates. In preparing this Bill for the information and consideration of the House, an omission was made by leaving out the excess of expenditure under the Loan Estimates. This amounts to £84,866 1s. 10d.; a considerable part of that amount, £46,000, being for the harbour works at Fremantle, which I will refer to in committee, as I have just received the Bill, and therefore am not prepared to explain it in the way I desire.

I now leave the Bill to hon. members with the remark that, when we get into committee, I shall be glad, and so will my colleagues, to explain, as far as we can, the reasons for the expenditure in respect of any of the items mentioned in it; and, as hon. members have before them the excellent report of the Auditor General, they will see that a reason is given therein, whether good or bad, the best reason the Auditor General could obtain, for every item mentioned in the Bill. I beg to move the second reading.

MR. ILLINGWORTH (Central Murchison): Looking at the Bill upon the face of it, I cannot help regretting that the sum of nearly half a million of money should have been expended without the authority of Parliament. Unless there were very good reasons for that expenditure, it seems to be a very grave matter, and one that we shall have to take into careful consideration. Year after year protests have been made against this unauthorised expenditure; and, whatever excuses and explanations have been accepted in years gone by, I think we have now come to such a settled stage in connection with our financial affairs, that these Excess Bills ought to cease. I am not going to blame the Government materially for this Bill as it stands; but I expect we shall have something more serious to deal with in the next Excess Bill. It is rather for the purpose of eliciting information, to be placed before the country in the way I think it ought to be, that I desire to make some remarks upon the situation. We find that a sum of £493,317, nearly half a million of money, has been expended by the Government without the authority of Parliament. Now the revenue of this country in 1890 was only £413,000; so that, in 1895, five years after we entered upon Responsible Government, the Ministry took on themselves to spend in excess of votes of this House a sum equal to the revenue with which they had started as a Government. It is not an answer to say that we had over £249,000 of underdrafts. There is no answer in that whatever, because these underdrafts simply represent uncompleted works which this House has authorised and directed to be effected, and which, we presume, have not been pushed on so fast as to require

all the money voted for them. Hence these moneys would have to be re-voted, and the works begun would have to be completed. But supposing it were otherwise, we would be placed in this position, that the Government have taken upon themselves not only to expend money without authority, but to take from the direct votes of this House a sum of nearly half a million which had been appropriated by the House to other purposes than those for which the Government actually used it. [THE PREMIER: No; we had the money.] That, I say, on the face of it, is a charge that cannot possibly be laid to this Government, but it is a thing that might be done by another Government less pure than this one, if we but admit the principle that it is an answer to excess expenditure. I am now arguing that the explanation of shortages or unexpended balances is not an answer to the excess expenditure, because, if we were to admit that principle, then all that a corrupt Government would require to do would be to get votes for popular things which the House would approve of, and to appropriate, irregularly, that money to other purposes for which the Government might not be able to get votes. I have no reason to suspect anything of the kind in the present case. All we have in reference to these unexpended balances is that money which this House deemed desirable to be expended on certain things has not yet been fully expended on those things, and is required to be expended; consequently we have to face the fact that there is nearly half a million of unauthorised or over-expenditure. We ought to have it recorded for the benefit of the public—although probably every member of this House will understand the position—that we, as a Government, are now a large trading concern; that we have railways and post and telegraph offices, and other things which are bringing in revenue, and that all this revenue appears from year to year in the balance-sheet of the Treasurer. If, therefore, there be an increase in the railway traffic involving a considerable amount of unforeseen expenditure, I presume it is occasioned to a large extent by the increase of business, and this increase of business accounts for the revenue of which the Premier and Treasurer has spoken; hence, with an increas-

ing traffic it is almost inevitable that the Treasurer shall exceed his estimate. I want it to be recorded as my opinion that this increase of business and of revenue is one of the reasons why this Excess Bill is so large, because I take it that not only is the Treasurer responsible to this House, but this House is responsible to the country, for the expenditure of public money. I take it that when we appear before the country in our capacity as representatives, we ought to be able to give a reason why we sanctioned an expenditure of half a million of money which Parliament had not sanctioned in the ordinary course. As one answer, I should be disposed to say the unexpected increase in the railways and the posts and telegraphs involved an increase in the staff and in the expenditure which has paid for itself; that the railways will have covered their actual working expenses, together with some profit, and I presume the post office will have done this also to some extent. Making allowance for all these, I think that any member taking the position of Treasurer would not be worthy of that position unless he was prepared to take the responsibility involved therein. Then we have a number of other items in the Excess Bill, and in reference to these I think, however urgent, some of these excess items were scarcely wise. We can express our opinion on that point in the present case without anyone having the slightest shadow of suspicion in reference to the items, or of any impropriety having been committed. I do think, for instance, it was an unwise piece of policy for this Government, as it would be for any Government, to purchase from a member of that Government a property belonging to himself, and to do it unauthorised by this House; and this objection would apply, whether the property were large or small. Such a mistake would require a strong Government to justify it. As to the value of the property purchased in this case, I know nothing about that, and I suppose the Government have got fair value. [THE PREMIER: It was not all his own.] I say that, if there was a possible shadow of suspicion, I would not mention it; but here we have an opportunity to mention and enter our protest against this kind of thing because, on this occasion, we know it is above suspicion. As a prin-

ciple, I think it is open to grave objection that the Government should buy from itself without the authority of Parliament, and I do think that the purchase of this particular property might have waited.

THE PREMIER: It was full of grass at the time.

MR. ILLINGWORTH: It is not full of grass now. Referring next to buildings, I believe that every time you increase the number of your buildings you very materially increase the cost of working your establishment; and one lamentable thing connected with our departments at the present time is that they are scattered all over the country, so that there is not and there cannot be that oversight which the importance of the works demands. I am glad to see that the Works Department is endeavouring to concentrate its offices in one position. This particular property will have to be sold, and I hope it can be sold to the advantage of the State; but that is one of the things I hope a future Government will not do—if ever there is to be one. As to the purchase of the ship mentioned in the Bill, I do not know that there was that urgency which could justify the Government to take on itself the purchase of a ship from the Victorian Government without consulting Parliament, and I think that purchase was an unwise one without a vote of this House. Whether the Government have got value or not I cannot say, but I do know that ships which cost upwards of £200,000 have been sold for £12,000 in Hobson's Bay. Any votes that are not of a distinctly urgent nature should wait for the authorisation of Parliament; and the Government ought not to undertake to expend moneys without authority, except upon such urgency as will justify the case. Of course hospital votes should not wait, the calls of the sick could not possibly be deferred, and these are increases which no Government could possibly foresee. An increase of traffic in the Railway department and in the post and telegraph offices is a thing to rejoice over; and, if we analyse this report, I think the Premier has placed the case fairly before us, showing that a very large proportion of this half million has been expended upon things which could not possibly have been avoided. I have looked carefully through the items, and that is the

conclusion I have arrived at, that the excesses were consequent on increase in the railway business and in the telegraphic and postal departments, and increases in public works that are reproductive to the State. While there are a number of little items to which I might take exception, I want to feel that I am not giving my vote without some reasonable explanation for the half million of money that has been expended without the authority of Parliament. I hope the Government will endeavour to lay before the House estimates framed as carefully as possible, so that they may obtain votes for the actual expenditure required. With the exceptions named, I am prepared to support the second reading of the Bill.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

IN COMMITTEE.

THE PREMIER (Right Hon. Sir J. Forrest) said the Bill was originally prepared to confirm the expenditure of the sum of £493,378 9s. 4d. and to declare it a charge against the Consolidated Revenue Fund of the colony; but the Bill as now submitted was to confirm the additional expenditure of the sum of £84,866 1s. 10d., being excesses on votes out of the Loan Account for the year 1895-6. He had thought the best way would be to put these two branches of excess expenditure into one Bill; and that was why two loose pages were substituted for the corresponding pages in the Bill as printed.

Schedule A — Excess, £493,378 9s. 4d.:

Medical Contingencies, Item 132—Incidental expenses (including travelling expenses), £1,718 11s. 7d.:

MR. ILLINGWORTH asked for an explanation of this item.

THE PREMIER said travelling expenses formed a large proportion of the amount named, which was the total of the items contained in the "Incidental" book, of which travelling formed part. In all departments an "Incidental" book was kept of expenses not considered important enough to mention, and this no doubt was one of them. It would be impossible for him to state the items off-hand, but if the hon. member felt strongly about them, and would ask for particulars,

he would get them. He had no doubt there were hundreds of items in this "Incidental" book, which were not considered to be worth a separate heading.

Item passed.

Printing—Item 48, Salaries, Provisional and Temporary, £2,490 9s. 7d.; extra labour :

MR. SIMPSON asked if the estimates for this department could not be made a little more exact. £2,500 was a very large sum to be in excess of the estimate. Year after year complaint was made of the extreme delay in getting the work done. It was an annual complaint. He suggested that a more exact computation should be made of what was likely to be required during the ensuing year. He thought it was generally admitted that the department was very much behind in its work.

THE PREMIER said he did not know that.

MR. SIMPSON: There was no doubt the work was splendidly turned out—too splendidly perhaps for the resources of the colony, considering the way in which similar work was turned out in other colonies.

THE PREMIER: The whole of the amount came under the heading of "extra labour." £3,000 was asked for and £5,000 odd was expended. Everyone knew that, as the colony progressed, so did the necessity for printing. The Government Printer was taxed to the utmost to comply with the demands made upon him. It was not quite right to blame the Government Printer for all the delay, as sometimes he did not get the work from the departments in proper time. He (the Premier) was not prepared to lay all the blame on the Government Printer, who was a most excellent officer, desirous of doing what was right, and most anxious to try and comply with the demands made upon him. All of the expenditure incurred in excess of the estimate was for extra labour. There had been a lot of printing done last year, among other things, for railway tickets.

MR. SIMPSON: Did not the railway authorities pay for this?

THE PREMIER: The Government Printer sometimes got work of this kind done privately.

MR. SIMPSON: Then he ought to charge for it.

Item passed.

Miscellaneous Services—Item 1. Queen's Plate (racing), Perth and Roebourne, £100 :

MR. ILLINGWORTH asked the Premier for an explanation of this item.

THE PREMIER: Hon. members must notice, if they glanced at the Auditor General's report, that a sum of £100 had been placed on the estimates for this particular purpose. It happened, as the Auditor General explained, that this amount was not paid in 1895, so that the amount for two years became payable in one year—the amount for 1895 in addition to that for 1896.

Item passed.

Works and Buildings—Item, consulting engineer in London, £1,125 :

MR. SIMPSON asked for information with regard to this item. Was it for salary or commission?

THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC WORKS (Hon. F. H. Piesse) said the amount was for past payments from the 1st April, 1894. The gentleman was appointed consulting engineer, but he was not paid, and the amount now totalled £1,125.

MR. SIMPSON: Was the officer Mr. Carruthers?

THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC WORKS: He was.

MR. SIMPSON: Had not Mr. Carruthers a retainer of £500 a year at this time?

THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC WORKS: He had.

MR. SIMPSON: Some trouble arose in New South Wales in regard to the consulting engineer in London for that colony drawing £22,000, and he (Mr. Simpson) did not want such scandal to ever occur here.

THE PREMIER: There was some little difficulty about this matter. Firstly, the Government agreed with Messrs. Grevy, Isles, and Co., the well-known firm of engineers in London, to carry out the inspections; but the Engineer-in-Chief thought the colony would be better served by the appointment of Mr. Carruthers, and an arrangement was made that he was to receive £500 a year, and, provided the works passing through his hands did not exceed a certain amount (not a large amount), he was to receive a commission. The colony went into a

vigorous policy of works, a considerable amount of business passed through Mr. Carruthers' hands, and it was then arranged that another firm of engineers should do the inspecting for a very big charge, in the aggregate. Now he believed Mr. Carruthers received a retainer of £500 a year and a small commission, the exact amount of which he did not know, for inspecting, and Mr. Carruthers had to employ the inspectors himself. He (the Premier) went into the matter and arranged with the Agent General to settle the whole thing, and no doubt very good terms were made. The Agent General seemed to have made a good bargain. The system even now was not satisfactory; and his (the Premier's) idea was for the Government, if they bought largely in the London market, to have an engineer attached to the office of the Agent General, at a salary, and he would be able to assist the Agent General in many ways almost daily. This gentleman could do all the consulting, and act as Consulting Engineer for the colony. He (the Premier) always thought the amount they had to pay for inspection was very heavy, and his idea was that they should get hold of a good firm and put them to the test of supplying a good article, and if not good, the firm need not be dealt with again. This would do away with the inspection altogether. He could not help thinking that well-known firms ought to be able to supply good articles without being watched at every turn. Even when an engine was being built, the inspector had to watch every plate and every bolt going into it. He (the Premier) was not prepared, at the present moment, to depart from the present system. Some of the colonies were going into this matter, and the Premier of Natal had told him that his Government was sending from that colony a consulting engineer who understood the circumstances of the colony, and that the expense would not be as great as it was at the present time.

HON. H. W. VENN was gratified to hear the remarks of the Premier that the Government were willing to trust a firm on its reputation. The Engineer-in-Chief of this colony had held this view.

THE PREMIER said the Engineer-in-Chief did not. He (the Premier) had

argued with him on the point, and the Engineer-in-Chief would not give in.

HON. H. W. VENN believed the Engineer-in-Chief did hold the view. The present system of inspecting was a bad one; it was a system of plunder; and anyone looking at the charges for supervision—which he did not believe ever took place, or it was done in a very cursory manner—would be astonished. No one was particularly responsible for the work, but these engineers were a relief to the manufacturers, as the responsibility was taken off their shoulders. Some time ago, the fishplates on the South-Western Railway were found not to be up to the standard, and it was thought at the time that it was the fault of the inspecting engineer, and the manufacturers shielded themselves behind the inspector. To send a trusted man from this colony as consulting engineer would be the best thing the colony could do. Let the engineer pay his inspectors himself, and also let the Agent General have complete control. If that principle were adopted, the colony would save a large amount of money. He believed that if the absolute view of the Engineer-in-Chief of the colony was taken, he would advocate the course stated by the Premier. The whole system of purchasing property for the Government in London should be placed on an altogether different basis. When tenders were called for any public work in this colony, anyone could tender; but in England the case was entirely different, for when we called for tenders there, none but particular persons could compete. He did not say there was collusion, but tenderers had to have some knowledge of the consulting engineer. Hon. members could see that this system permitted of immense profits in the way of discounts, etc., going into the hands of private persons. If discounts were payable, the colony should receive them. The present system was bad; and he was gratified to hear the Premier's expression of opinion on the matter, feeling sure it would be in the best interests of the country if the right hon. gentleman established a new method of procedure on the lines indicated. The Premier was the only member of the Government who could take effective action in the matter; and even he would meet with serious

obstacles in his attempts to bring about a reform. He would be told that this was the method of procedure in other colonies, and that there was no precedent for a change; and, unless he took up the subject in a strong and resolute manner, the system would remain unaltered.

THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC WORKS (Hon. F. H. Piessé) agreed with the remarks of Mr. Venn. The present system was in force when he (the Director) came into office, and he brought up the question himself with a view of effecting a change. The only point on which the hon. member was mistaken was with regard to the position of the Engineer-in-Chief on this question, as that officer considered that, if a change were made, we would not get as good work as we were getting under the existing arrangement, and he was opposed to purchasing direct from firms in England. He (the Director) was confident that if a change could be made, it would effect a great improvement; but he had been unable to give effect to his views on account of the large orders under execution in the old country, and the want of stock here. To change the system under such circumstances would have been like changing horses when crossing a stream, for the sending of a man home in the capacity suggested would probably have upset the whole of our arrangements. Many of these large orders would, however, be out of hand this year or early next year, and a new state of things could then be inaugurated. There could be no doubt that they had in Mr. Carruthers a very reliable man. When he (the Director) took office, Mr. Carruthers was receiving a salary of £500 a year, but complained very much, however, of the inadequacy of the amount, and a recommendation was made to the Governor to give him an all-round commission of 2½ per cent., which was done accordingly. Having regard, however, to the large amount of business which was then being done, he (the Director) pointed out that the amount which they were paying this gentleman was altogether too large for the services rendered, and in fact, they would have to pay him, on this basis, something like £25,000 for his work during the past year; and, after some negotiation, and cabling to the Agent General, they saved a considerable amount

of this money, and there was little to complain of with regard to the work turned out up to the present time. He certainly thought, however, that they could do much better, and hoped that the time was not far distant when they would bring about some change in the method of making purchases in the old country. Possibly at the time the hon. member for Wellington (Mr. Venn) discussed the matter with the Engineer-in-Chief, that officer might have expressed himself in favour of purchasing direct from large firms at home; but he was now altogether averse to such a course, and preferred that all purchases should be made through the consulting engineer in London.

HON. H. W. VENN: So far as his recollection went, the views expressed by the Premier in the course of this debate were identical with those at one time held by the Engineer-in-Chief, who, however, might have had reasons for changing his opinions in late years.

THE PREMIER: The officer in question did not often change his opinions.

HON. H. W. VENN: If Mr. O'Connor was now opposed to the Premier's view, he (Mr. Venn) was surprised to hear it.

MR. SIMPSON: It was well known that the iron trade was honeycombed with discounts and commissions; and, as this colony's purchases were extensive, the amount of these allowances must be very large. Even in connection with the contemplated purchase of public batteries, the amount of the commissions paid would never be known. The practice was so general in the trade that no one considered it immoral, as everybody knew of it except the ultimate purchaser. In a few days the House would have an opportunity of discussing the whole position of the colony's London Agency; and possibly some facts would be brought under the notice of hon. members, the careful consideration of which would be for the benefit of the country. While he was not reflecting on any of their staff, he must say that he knew that this system of commissions was working to the great advantage of certain individuals; and his statement was confirmed, not only by the present and the former Director of Public Works, but also by the experience of the Premier.

He knew it would be hard to upset the system, for the men who were benefited by it would put every obstacle in the way of a change. He was glad they would have another opportunity for considering the matter.

Item passed.

Item, Improvements to opened railways, £53,194 4s. 5d.:

MR. LEAKE asked for explanation of this item.

THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC WORKS said the extra expenditure was incurred in connection with traffic and other requirements. At the time the vote was taken, the amount was altogether under-estimated, because it was impossible to anticipate the large increase in the traffic which followed. The expenditure was incurred at the time when the block in the traffic was most intense at Fremantle, and continued up to the end of June.

Item passed.

Item, Development of goldfields and other mineral resources, £76,730:

MR. LEAKE asked for explanation of this item.

THE PREMIER: A vote was taken for this purpose amounting to £30,000, the reason being that the Government desired to contribute from the revenue as much as they could towards the development of the goldfields, and the loan votes were nearly exhausted. The department, however, spent £106,000 during the year, or £76,730 in excess of the vote. It must be remembered that the water supply and, in fact, all other works on the goldfields were charged to this vote, there being no other vote against which such expenditure could be placed. Railways, telegraphs, and even buildings in some cases, were included in it, and the wonder was that the amount was not larger. There was a good deal of expenditure from loan account as well, particulars of which would be furnished if required.

Item passed.

Remaining items in the schedule agreed to.

Schedule B:

THE PREMIER (Right Hon. Sir J. Forrest) said this schedule, relating to loan expenditure in excess of loan votes, had been placed on the table since he made his general statement on the Bill.

The amount voted for the year ending 30th June, 1896, from loan account was £863,640, and the expenditure was £650,708; so that the Government spent less than was voted by £212,752, therefore the actual excess was £4,840 in excess of the amount voted. This sum was made up largely of two items, namely, £22,896 17s. 8d. on account of the construction of the railway from Southern Cross to Coolgardie, on which an extra expenditure had to be incurred owing to the extreme necessity of pushing the railway through dry tracks just before an expected water famine; also in regard to the Fremantle harbour works, which were carried on more quickly than had been anticipated, thus causing an excess expenditure of £109,000 beyond the vote actually taken for the amount estimated to be expended during the year. These two items of £46,000 and £22,000 accounted for a total of £68,000 out of the £84,000 of excess, the other items being comparatively small. The fact of the Government having to ask for the confirmation of this excess showed how the estimates sometimes worked out differently from what had been expected; for while the Government had a balance of £212,000 to work on, they still had to forego some of the works on which they had intended to spend certain sums, and they had to incur excess on some other items. There was nothing in these excesses requiring special comment. The works had been authorised by Parliament under Loan Acts, and the estimates placed before the House every year merely showed how much the Government intended to spend, and on what works the money was to be spent during the year. It was important to the House that this information should be brought before hon. members, because it gave them full control over the proceedings of the Government in regard to loan votes, as well as to votes out of the consolidated revenue. It did not follow that because an amount had been placed in a Loan Bill, that work was to be carried out at once; and if the Government wished to push on with that work more quickly than the House might think it ought to do, members thus had an opportunity of expressing their opinion. However, the excesses, when not too large, were really not so important as they might otherwise be, because works on which the

money had been spent were authorised, and this only showed that circumstances might arise necessitating the works being pushed on faster than had been first intended, and consequently a larger expenditure incurred.

Put and passed.

Loan of 1893—agreed to.

Loan of 1894—agreed to.

Preamble and Title—agreed to.

Bill reported without amendment.

Report adopted.

NOXIOUS WEEDS BILL.

SECOND READING.

[Debate on the second reading continued.]

HON. H. W. VENN (Wellington): I rise to say a few words on the second reading of the Bill introduced by the member for Beverley (Mr. Harper). I had not, at the time when I moved the adjournment of the debate, read the Bill, and had then only read the marginal notes. The hon. member twitted me, when I said that I had not read the Bill, with my want of knowledge of the contents; but I feel satisfied, after having read it, that had I read it before I should have been inclined last night to speak very strongly on it, as I purpose doing this evening. I regret that the member for Beverley did not give sufficient prominence to one of the leading features of the Bill. He introduced the measure, doubtless, with the very best intentions, because no one for a moment thinks that the hon. member would intentionally mislead the House by not giving prominence to the principal points in any Bill which he might introduce. I feel satisfied that, after hon. members have read the Bill, they will acknowledge that the hon. member did not introduce it in the manner that the subject deserved. The hon. member emphasised, more than once, one particular point. He said it was a question of local option. The Minister of Education interjected, "Where do you find it?" The hon. member did not reply, beyond repeating that it was a question of local option. I had not looked over the Bill at the time. I have done so since, but I have failed to discover any part of the Bill which deals with local option. There is, to my mind no question of local option in the matter. The Bill says that the Governor

shall appoint inspectors—[MR. HARPER: "May" appoint]—well, may appoint inspectors. The Bill does not say upon whose instigation the inspectors are to be appointed, but you can take it for granted, without the slightest doubt, that as this Bill is a little child of agricultural growth—[MR. HARPER: No]. I am glad to hear the hon. gentleman say it is not. The Governor has power to appoint inspectors, but how can you call that a question of local option? No one knows how or when, but all at once an inspector is appointed by the Governor for a certain district, and once he is appointed it is a serious matter indeed, the powers of an inspector being very great. I can hardly see one redeeming point in the Bill—none whatever. I have looked through it very carefully, and as a farmer and pastoralist, and as one who has had a very great deal of experience in Western Australia—I do not think there is any one who knows more about the farming districts in this colony than I do; I have travelled over a large part of it as Commissioner of Agriculture, and made myself acquainted with nearly every agricultural district in the colony—it appears to me that very great hardship is likely to ensue to both the agricultural and pastoral industries, if the Bill is carried into effect. For what particular cause the Bill has been brought forward, or what is the object of it, I cannot tell. Certain plants are to be defined as weeds, including all sorts of thistles, some of which are named. But the Bill does not confine itself to this, because an inspector may call any plant he likes a weed. It includes the Bathurst bur and also the Canadian thistle, and under the noxious seed clause it includes wild oats as well. Hon. members can see what a large field this opens out, and what a deal of injury the operation of this Bill may do to individuals holding large or small areas of land. The Bill provides that after 14 days' notice has been served on an individual, he must start eradicating these noxious weeds. The Bill does not tell you exactly how the resident magistrate shall get at the fact that these weeds are there. You can only suppose that he will be stimulated by the report of the inspector. The Bill does not say at what time of the year these notices may be served. But supposing an inspector had

noticed at this time of the year that a farmer had some noxious weeds growing on his farm—not only on his farm, but even half-way across the road—it might be that the plants which were thus designated as weeds might have peculiar properties, and be valuable for the cure of skin diseases and other complaints. We do not know what the views of the inspectors might be on these matters, but the farmer would be called upon to clear the land of these weeds. If he has not commenced to do so in fourteen days he is brought before the court, and, if he cannot show sufficient reason why he has not taken his men from their work to exterminate these weeds, he is liable to a heavy penalty. Anyone can see, therefore, what a serious thing it would be for a farmer to be called upon to leave off doing his work at this most inconvenient time of the year to eradicate these weeds. I contend that the Spanish radish does no particular damage except to the individual himself, and you may be sure that a farmer has sufficient intelligence to do the best he can for his own land, without being called upon to do it under grave penalties by the Government. We exterminate noxious weeds at considerable expense, if it is to our interest to do so, and not before. Take the Spanish radish, which is perhaps one of the greatest scourges we have—if it is a scourge—it may be a very bad thing, but I am not quite so sure of it. I am inclined to think that it is a good fodder plant. The seed does not float about like the thistle, but drops immediately where it is grown. That is in contradistinction to the thistle plant, the seed of which is very volatile, and is carried for miles all over the country. Dealing with that particular plant, the Spanish radish, against which this Bill seems to be directed, we want experience to show whether it is a scourge or not. We pull it up, not because it is injurious as a chaff or to animals, because I do not believe it is, but because it interferes with the machinery, not in chaffing up, but with the binding machinery, and it is a great source of trouble. The Spanish radish is grown everywhere, and is all over the country at the present moment. We exterminate it ourselves. I contend there is no particular object in compelling a man to exterminate it, because, if he does not do so, the harm is confined to himself. It is not necessary

at this stage, or at any other stage, to introduce legislation which will harass the farmer and pastoralist. The latter is told that he must go to a great expense to exterminate the Spanish radish off his sheep-run, or else be charged with the expense of having it done for him. I do not think there is any necessity for this Bill so far as regards the Spanish radish. My remarks also apply in a great measure to the thistle. I must admit, however, with regard to that particular plant, that the seeds being volatile are carried from your land on to your neighbour's land; but that does not apply to the Spanish radish, which grows where it drops; yet even with regard to the thistle I would like to point out that the stock eat it very readily, and years ago after I began to exterminate it on my land, I found that I was exterminating what the cattle liked very much. In Victoria and New Zealand this has also been found to be the case. With the exception of these two plants, there does not seem to be any other plant against which such a measure as this could be directed. I have heard that the Bathurst bur is rather a scourge in some parts; and it would be well, perhaps, that we should get some information on that point. Summarising my position, I would say that it is not a question of local option, inasmuch as there is no provision for it in the Bill, and I do not see how you can put it in. If you give this power provided for in the Bill, you place in the hands of individuals the chance of doing a serious injury to their neighbours. Power is placed in the hands of one or two people who are able to move the Government to appoint an inspector, and this being done, the individuals disappear, and the inspector does the rest of the work. An inspector has power to go on land at any time, and do as he likes: he can come into your garden and do just as he pleases. It is not necessary to appoint inspectors at all, nor to place in their hands a power for the eradication of something of which the farmers do not complain. I will deal with one or two of the clauses of the Bill. Clause 5 says that "If it is proved to the satisfaction of a resident magistrate that noxious weeds are growing upon any lands, or upon the half nearer thereto of any road, he may, by a notice to

clear, expressed in writing under his hand, describe the land to be affected thereby, and declare that noxious weeds are growing upon such lands." I do not know where the real necessity occurs for bringing the resident magistrate at all into the matter; he is moved by the inspector. The magistrate has to get his proof from the inspector, and then he has to issue a notice to the individual. Fourteen days after that, the person affected has to start exterminating the weeds. There is also a provision that the individual should show good reason why he should not be fined, and the fine amounts to from £5 to £20. That is a nice thing to contemplate. Some of the small farmers would not like to be fined £20 or £5 for not exterminating something which they do not think is doing any harm. The hon. member said something about the absentees. It is an unfortunate thing that we have lands in this colony owned by people who do not reside here; but the same thing exists all over the world. Men can invest their money as they like, and it is a very serious thing to tamper with the rights of property in any way whatever. Some hon. members say that the land should be utilised by every man who chooses to put his money into it. I do not think that should be so. You have no right to legislate to press heavily on the man who does not utilise his land, any more than you would legislate to compel a storekeeper to sell goods at a certain price. We have land which belongs to some people who do not live in the colony. This land has come down to the owners by will, in some cases. Under the provisions of this Bill, the inspector, after waltzing around to find out who is the owner or agent of the land on whom he can serve a notice, winds up by putting a notice on the land, and after the notice has been on the land for 14 days, he then starts to clear it. He puts the Government men on, and takes off what are said to be noxious weeds. He then gives due notice in the local papers and in the *Government Gazette* that the time has arrived when he is going to sell the land. Under the direction of the inspector, the land is sold, and the title given by the inspector is a clear title to the land. The proceeds of the sale are paid over for the amount due for the clearing, and anything

that remains over is held in the hands of the Government until somebody turns up to claim it. It is very likely to occur under this Bill that lands will pass away from individuals in a way which is most objectionable. A charge is made on the land for exterminating something which is really not a source of trouble to anybody, and a man in consequence loses his land. That is a hardship to the absentee landowner. If you want to take the land from the absentee, then let us do it in a straightforward way, and not by a side wind like that. There is no one who has his senses about him who will hold any land to the prejudice of himself and the community, so long as he can realise on it to his advantage. I have no sympathy with those who cry out about large sections of land being held by absentees to the prejudice of settlement. I do not believe there is any land in the colony that cannot be bought at a reasonable price. There are large areas of land in the Avon district which can be obtained at a reasonable price. I can tell you what has happened in consequence of the policy adopted by Government. The Government has reduced the price of land by giving large blocks of land away—it has reduced the price of the land which was bought years ago.

THE PREMIER: But the land is not so good.

HON. H. W. VENN: When I say that land can be bought at a reasonable price, I mean a pound or twenty-five shillings, or thirty shillings per acre. I do not believe in passing special legislation to press heavily on the land owners. If you wish to legislate for the absentee landowners, you must do it in a different manner altogether. Now we come to Clause 16, which makes the Bill apply to Crown lands. The hon. member is going for the Government now. If any unoccupied Government land has bur or weeds or thistles on it, the inspector can serve a notice on the Commissioner of Crown Lands and tell him to clear it within fourteen days. It does not matter whether the notice is to be served on the Commissioner of Lands or the Commissioner of Railways. Notice can be served on either, and they have to pay for the clearing of the land held by them for the Crown out of moneys voted by

Parliament for the purpose; but as the Government is not likely to vote any money for the purpose, I do not know in what position the Commissioner of Crown Lands or the Commissioner of Railways will be. It is all very well to have a law that will not exclude even a Government; but I do not think that the Government will look on a clause like this with any degree of favour. I do not mean to say for a moment, if there was a necessity for a Bill of this sort, that I would not be found supporting it; but other than the Bathurst bur, of which I know nothing, the weeds enumerated are not noxious weeds at all, and do no harm. If these weeds were doing harm, the farmers would soon exterminate them without any pressure, and it would be unnecessary to pass a Bill of this sort to compel them to do it. But the Bill goes further even than this. Clause 19 deals with the question of hedges, thus:—

Every occupier of land shall, on or before the first day of December in every year, trim, cut, and burn all refuse from live fences or hedges of more than two years' growth, and shall clear his land one-half chain inside every boundary line, and one-half chain back from every dividing fence or watercourse, from all stray briar, gorse, broom, and blackberry, and shall continue so to clear, in every successive year, for not less than a quarter of a chain further till the whole is cleared, and for non-observance of this section shall be liable on conviction, to a fine of not more than ten pounds.

This applies all over the colony. A provision of this sort, under the scrutiny of an inspector, would be very harassing indeed. All persons who try to ornament their ground by a hedge or a fence are to be dealt with by this clause. Under any circumstances such a clause is not necessary, and it would be almost impossible to carry it out. Now we come to Clause 20, and if there were no other provision in the Bill to which I did not object, this clause would cause me to oppose the measure. The clause, to which attention was not drawn last night, says:—

Every person who sells or offers for sale any hay, chaff, straw, seeds of grass, or other seeds or grain for sowing amongst which is any noxious seed, and fails to show to the satisfaction of the court that, at the time of such sale or offering for sale, he had no knowledge of any such noxious seeds being amongst the article so sold or offered for sale (the onus of proving

the absence of knowledge resting on him) shall be liable, on conviction, to a fine not exceeding ten pounds.

I should like to know if there is one single ton of chaff in this colony that has not some noxious weed in it, not only chaff which comes here from other colonies, but the chaff grown here. There are not many acres of land in Western Australia, or any other portion of Australia, that do not grow some noxious weed or other, and how is it possible to prevent these weeds appearing among the chaff? If such a law as that now proposed were passed, there would be a panic in the hay and straw market. Stock would be thrown on the hands of the sellers, who could not possibly prevent noxious weeds appearing in their chaff, and who would be liable to a fine not exceeding £10. The clause is an impossible one. I am reminded of a weed—the Spanish radish—which is all over the place. This weed not only does no harm to the chaff, but comes within the order of plants that make very good fodder; at any rate I should like to see somebody have an analysis of the plant made, and show that it is not as good as any other of the same order. I have said enough to show that this Bill contains provisions absolutely damaging to one of the staple industries of this colony. My suspicions were aroused last night when I noticed the Premier did not move the second reading himself. The moment I saw the hon. member for Beverley rise, I thought to myself that the Government, as a body, did not know anything at all about the Bill. The Bill has been introduced, I do not know for what reason. The Government will not take any responsibility in connection with it at all, and the Premier has passed it on to the House to let hon. members deal with it as best they can. I feel satisfied that the members of the Government will speak independently on the matter, and I hope we shall hear that they have just as strong views against the Bill as I have myself. But there is another provision in the Bill rather unusual and rather startling. Clause 21 says:—

Every person in charge of a combine threshing machine shall, immediately after threshing at each farm, and before removing the machine or any part thereof, thoroughly clean out every portion of the machine, and in default shall be

liable, on conviction, to a fine not exceeding five pounds.

I do not know what a "combine threshing machine" is. I suppose that what is meant is a combined winnower and bagger. From what I have seen of the thistle, some of it is bound to stick, and I would almost defy any man to get every seed out without drenching the machine with water, and turning it upside down. An inspector could come round and find some seed, and the unfortunate owner would be fined £5 for not cleaning his machine in an almost impossible way. It would be impossible to keep a large threshing machine entirely free of seeds, especially of these light dairy-grass seeds, which are called noxious. I suppose this Clause 21 will apply with equal force to the steam chaffcutter and bagger, from all parts of which it would be almost impossible to remove every particle of seed. It is a very serious matter to have an Act which enables an inspector to visit a man's place, and on finding seed in the machine, to cause that man to be taken before a magistrate, who would have no option but to inflict a fine of £5. I think I have dealt fairly with every clause, from my point of view, and I hope I have shown there is no necessity for the Bill. I move that this Bill be read a second time this day six months, and I hope my motion will receive the unanimous support of the House.

MR. ILLINGWORTH: In seconding the amendment that the Bill be read a second time this day six months, I would say that the measure is evidently drafted from the legislation of some other colony. I have no doubt the person responsible for that legislation thought it very good, as no doubt it was for the place it was intended for. [THE PREMIER: Victoria, I think.] I thought it was a Victorian Bill. When one remembers the fact that a very large proportion of the area of Victoria is under cultivation, and that only a small proportion remains in the hands of the Crown, it will be understood that a Bill of this character might have some claim to consideration at the hands of Parliament there. But we must remember that in Western Australia there is only a very small proportion under cultivation, and that it would be utterly impossible for the Crown to keep its vast lands in any way clear of noxious weeds. The greatest

amount of irritation has been caused by the application of the Act in Victoria. There a farmer may clear his land on one side of the road, whilst the Government may on the other side of the road possess large areas, which they do not clear. The result is that the object of the Bill is entirely lost. Unless the Government undertake to clear their land, it is useless and unjust to ask the farmers to clear their areas. The State cannot undertake to clear the noxious weeds from the public lands of this colony, at any rate, for the present. This Bill might be very useful 50 years hence; at any rate it will be time enough to read it a second time this day six months.

THE SPEAKER: Having considered this Bill, I have come to the conclusion that it requires a recommendation from the Governor before the Bill can be proceeded with. This House has no power to proceed with a Bill affecting Crown lands, without a message from His Excellency, saying he gives his approval to the measure proposed to the House. I must rule that this Bill, without a recommendation from the Governor, cannot at present be proceeded with.

MR. HARPER: I suppose I have no right to speak further.

THE SPEAKER: I think not. The Bill can be introduced afresh, on a message being brought in from the Governor. It cannot be proceeded with at present with the clause dealing with Crown lands.

Progress of the Bill suspended.

ADJOURNMENT.

The House adjourned at 8.30 p.m. until the next day.
