

## Legislative Assembly, Thursday, 17th November, 1892.

Messages from His Excellency the Governor—Returns laid on the Table—Legalising of District School Boards Elections—Site for future Lunatic Asylum—Land Regulations (Rents) Amendment Bill: recommitted—Homesteads Bill: second reading—Adjournment.

THE SPEAKER took the chair at 7:30 p.m.

PRAYERS.

### MESSAGES FROM HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR.

Messages were received from His Excellency the Governor recommending that an appropriation be made out of the Consolidated Revenue Fund for the purposes of a Bill to authorise the issue of Treasury Bills, and for the purposes of a Bill to provide facilities for Agricultural Settlement and to give Free Grants of Land for Homesteads.

#### RETURNS LAID ON THE TABLE.

THE COMMISSIONER OF RAILWAYS (Hon. H. W. Venn) laid upon the table of the House the following paper:—

Return to an Order of the House dated November 10th, 1892, showing—

1. The numbers and areas of blocks or portions of blocks taken during the last twelve months within the city of Perth, for Railway purposes.
2. The amount of compensation offered in each instance.
3. The amount awarded in such cases as have gone to arbitration.

THE COMMISSIONER OF CROWN LANDS (Hon. W. E. Marmion) laid upon the table of the House the following papers:—

1. Return to an Order of the House dated 8th November, 1892, showing—
  - A. The cost of Survey of the Kataning Agricultural Area.  
The acreage of the said area.  
The number of the locations in the said area.  
The number of the selectors in the said area.  
The total acreage selected.
  - B. A similar return with regard to each other declared Agricultural Area.

2. Return to an Order of the House dated 7th November, 1892, showing—

The area of all Crown lands alienated for the two years preceding October 31st, 1892, and the area sold to each separate purchaser, and the districts in which such lands are located.

Ordered—That the papers lie upon the table.

### LEGALISING THE ELECTION OF DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARDS.

MR. TRAYLEN, in accordance with notice, asked the Premier, what steps the Government intended to take to legalise the approaching election of District School Boards?

THE PREMIER (Hon. Sir J. Forrest) replied that the Government did not admit that the elections would necessarily be illegal, but that they were considering whether any legislation was required.

### SITE FOR FUTURE LUNATIC ASYLUM.

MR. SOLOMON, pursuant to notice, asked the Premier, whether the Government were taking any steps with a view of selecting a suitable site for a lunatic asylum in the future?

THE PREMIER (Hon. Sir J. Forrest) replied that the Government had the matter under consideration.

### LAND REGULATIONS (RENTS) AMENDMENT BILL.

RECOMMITTED.

The Order of the Day for the third reading of this Bill having been read, and Mr. Speaker having reported that the Chairman of Committees had certified that the fair print of the Bill was in accordance with the Bill as agreed to in Committee and reported,

THE PREMIER (Hon. Sir J. Forrest) moved that the Bill be now read a third time.

Question put.

MR. MONGER, in accordance with notice, moved that the Bill be recommitted, with a view of inserting the following new clause, to stand as section 3:—

“The rent to be paid for Pastoral Leases in the Eastern Division shall be

—For each thousand or part of a thousand acres, two shillings and sixpence for each of the first seven years, and five shillings for each of the remaining years of the lease; and clause 70 of the Land Regulations proclaimed on the 2nd March, 1887, is hereby amended accordingly.”

Question—That the Bill be recommended—put and passed.

Mr. Speaker left the chair.

IN COMMITTEE :

MR. MONGER said that in placing this motion before the House there was very little necessity for him to deal with it at any length, because he was certain that in the opinion of all hon. members the request he now made as regards these pastoral rents in the Eastern Division of the colony was a very reasonable request. When first he thought of moving in this matter, it had been his intention to ask that the rents should remain as at present, namely, 2s. 6d. per thousand acres, during the whole term of the lease; but, in speaking on the subject to certain members of the Ministry, he was informed that such a proposal would receive but very little support. Therefore, believing that half a loaf was better than nothing at all, and sooner than that the pastoral lessees in the Eastern Division should receive no concession at all, he had brought forward the motion in its present form—that the rent should be 2s. 6d. for each of the first seven years, and 5s. for each of the remaining years of the lease. He understood that this proposal was likely to receive support from most hon. members, because they were all aware that the drought which had affected the Northern pastoralists had also equally affected most of those in the Eastern Division of the colony. If it could have been shown to him that the settlers in that division had not suffered from the drought, but had been enjoying a prosperous time of it—more prosperous than the settlers at the North—he should never have brought forward this motion. But he thought it would be acknowledged by all who had any knowledge of the Eastern Division of the colony that it embraced, without exception, the poorest land in Western Australia. It

was argued by some people that, in view of the proposed establishment of railway communication with the Yilgarn goldfields, it was unnecessary to make even this slight concession to the pastoralists in that division of the colony; but he thought if members would only examine the map showing this division,—

MR. A. FORREST: There is no map here to examine.

MR. MONGER said it would be found at the Land Office. If members would take the trouble to examine the map they would see that the Eastern Division, which comprised a very great portion of this large territory of ours, would not be all tapped by the Yilgarn Railway. Therefore there was very little in that argument. He did not think any other argument was likely to be brought against this proposal, and he had much pleasure in recommending it to the consideration of the committee.

MR. A. FORREST thought it was due to the House that a plan showing exactly the area of this Eastern Division should be placed on the table before they went into this matter at all. The proposal was a most important one, because there were many people just on the borders of this Eastern Division who had to pay £1 per thousand acres for their land; and he thought that before the House should entertain any proposal of this kind to reduce the rents within a certain area they ought to be placed in full possession of the facts of the case, otherwise they might be doing an injustice to other settlers. He sympathised with the hon. member in his endeavor to get this reduction of rent, because he believed that in most cases it was well deserved. Still it was their duty to see that those who had very good land, worth a great deal more than 2s. 6d., should not obtain this concession. In order that members should have an opportunity of examining a map of the country, he would move that progress be now reported, and leave given to sit again on the following Monday.

MR. CLARKSON had much pleasure in supporting the motion of the hon. member for York. It was a very great mistake to think that the Eastern settlers had not suffered during the late drought; they had suffered quite as much as the Northern settlers, and it was a very diffi-

cult matter to draw the line where the losses ended. The great drawback which the settlers in the Eastern Division had to contend with was the want of water; they had to sink to a very great depth, and then only got a very small supply, and he certainly thought they deserved quite as much consideration as regards a reduction of rent as the settlers of the North did.

MR. COOKWORTHY said he should have had very much pleasure in supporting the motion of the hon. member for York if he had included the South-Western districts in his motion.

Question put—That progress be reported.

Agreed to.

Progress reported, and leave given to sit again on Monday, 21st November.

#### HOMESTEADS BILL.

##### SECOND READING.

THE PREMIER (Hon. Sir J. Forrest): Sir, in rising to propose that this Bill be read a second time, I intend to devote a short time to explaining to hon. members the different clauses or sections of the Bill, and, after I have done that, I then propose to make some general remarks upon the whole question. Hon. members are no doubt all aware that this proposal of the Government is not altogether a new one—it is not one that they have invented—but it is a system by which the occupation and cultivation of the land has been advanced in the great continent of North America. Those who have travelled through that country, or those who are acquainted with its history, must all know that the chief plan of settlement in the United States of America and the Dominion of Canada in the past has been based on the homestead system; that is, a free grant of land to those who are willing to occupy and settle upon the land, on what is called there “a quarter section” of 160 acres. This Bill that is now placed before hon. members is founded upon the principles of the Canadian Act, with the exception of those sections which relate to the advance of money. All the other sections—I think I may say all, or almost all of them—have a place in the Canadian Act, although perhaps the wording is not exactly the same. But before I proceed to deal with the homestead system, I

would point out, as hon. members will notice, that sections 3 and 4 of the Bill deal with an amendment of our own Land Regulations. It is proposed to repeal clause 49 of the present regulations, and to substitute in its place section 4 of this Bill. The only real difference between clause 49 as it exists in the Land Regulations and section 4 of this Bill is simply this, that instead of making those who do not reside upon the land pay double rental, we propose to make them pay the same rent as if they resided upon the land, but to impose double improvements. I do not think I could explain sections 3 and 4 in fewer words than that. Instead of the occupier having to pay double rental in case of non-residence, it is now proposed that he shall pay the same rental as if he resided on the land, but that he shall perform improvements of double the value. Section 5 of the Bill is really the first clause dealing with the homestead blocks; and members will notice that it is not intended to grant the right of free selection over the whole area set apart for these blocks. It is proposed in this Bill to limit the right of selection to alternate blocks, and for this reason: while it will leave the land open between each homestead block, it will also afford an opportunity for those who may wish to pay for the land to occupy it; it will also give an opportunity—and this is a most important reason—to persons acquiring homestead blocks to increase their areas by securing these alternate blocks. Section 6 of the Bill prescribes who is eligible to obtain a homestead block under this Bill. Members will notice that those who have land already in fee simple, or who are holders of land under special occupation or conditional purchase from the Crown, are excluded from applying for a homestead block. Now, so far as I am personally concerned, I had not, when I first brought this matter forward, any objection to anyone being allowed to take up a homestead block, but it was pointed out to me that it might induce some people who already had farms to give them up, or, at any rate, to allow them to fall into disrepair, in order, in their eagerness to obtain more land, to take advantage of this homestead system; but I do not think, for my own part, that there is very much in that argument. At

any rate, it was an argument that was used against an indiscriminate right of selecting homestead blocks, with the result that in the present Bill it is provided that persons already holding land in fee simple, or under special occupation, or conditional purchase, are not eligible to apply for a homestead block under this Bill. Section 7 merely deals with the form of declaration to be made when applying for a homestead block. Having made the necessary formal declaration, all that is required of the applicant is that he shall pay an office fee of £1 to the Minister or his agent. He will then be authorised to enter upon the land and to hold possession of it against the whole world. It will be noticed from the concluding words of the section that the title to the land shall remain in the Crown until the issue of the Crown grant to the occupier, and (to quote the words of the section) "Neither the land nor the interest of the selector therein shall be liable to be taken in execution before the issue of the Crown grant." Section 8 is a very important section. I will read it, in order that it may be impressed upon members. Perhaps that is not necessary, as no doubt all hon. members have read the Bill; still, there can be no harm in my reading the clause. It says: "Every selector shall within six months from the date of the approval by the Minister take, in his own person, possession of the land, and shall, subject to the provisions of this Act, reside upon it and make it his usual home without any other habitual residence for the first five years from the date of approval by the Minister; and if possession is not taken as aforesaid, the land shall be forfeited and be open to application by another person, or to other disposition in the discretion of the Minister." Section 9 reads thus: "The selector shall, within two years from the first day of January or the first day of July (as the case may be) next preceding the date of the approval of his application by the Minister, erect upon his homestead block a habitable house, and within five years from the said date shall fence in, clear, and crop at least one-fourth of the whole acreage contained in such homestead block, and within seven years from the same date shall fence in the whole thereof, placing the fence on the

"boundaries, or as near thereto as shall be practicable." The next section is a very important one; it deals with the principle of advancing money to the occupiers of these homestead blocks, by way of loan from the Government. I will read it: "So soon as the Minister shall be satisfied by the certificate of a Government Inspector that the selector has expended upon the construction of a habitable house a sum not less than One hundred pounds, he may, with the approval of the Governor, advance to such selector a sum not exceeding Fifty pounds; for which loan the selector shall pay interest to the Minister at the rate of Five per cent. per annum from the date of the advance to the first day of March following, and thenceforth annually on the first day of March in every year until the advance be repaid." Hon. members will notice that unless the occupier of the land—selector," as he is called in this Bill—erects a house on his block that has cost at least £100, he is not entitled to obtain any advance whatever. We make that the minimum sum to be expended in the construction of the house. Any greater sum than £100 which he may have expended in building a house will not entitle him to an advance of more than £50; and any less sum than £100 will not entitle him to any advance whatever. That, I think, will prevent the Government from being called upon to advance any money upon mere shanties, or worthless buildings that will decay and become valueless in a few years. It will also stimulate those who go on the land to build substantial houses, houses that at any rate shall have cost them £100, and probably a considerable sum more. Section 11 of the Bill deals with the other improvements necessary to entitle the occupier to obtain a further advance. It says: "So soon as the Minister shall be satisfied by the certificate of a Government Inspector that the selector has expended, on *bonâ fide* fencing, or clearing, or cropping, any sum not less than Fifty pounds, he may, with the approval of the Governor, advance to such selector a sum not exceeding one half of the amount so certified as expended. Provided that no sum greater than One hundred pounds shall be advanced to any one person under this section. In-

"terest at the rate of Five per cent. per annum shall be paid by the selector to the Minister from the date of such advance to the first of March following, and thenceforth annually on the first day of March in every year until the advance be repaid." Hon. members will notice that it is only upon the certificate of a Government inspector, whose duty it will be to inspect the land and to satisfy himself as to the value of the improvements, that any advance of money is to be made by the Government. The inspector must satisfy himself that the improvements effected must have entailed an expenditure of at least £50 before he will issue his certificate. This certificate will entitle the occupier to an advance of not more than £25, or one-half the value of the improvements. Section 12 is another very important clause. It provides that "all moneys required for carrying out the purposes of this Act shall be advanced by the Colonial Treasurer to the Minister, on his application, approved by the Governor, out of the fund provided by Parliament for the purpose." If Parliament does not provide the necessary funds for this purpose, of course the Government will have to take the measures which are provided by the Act for suspending its operation. Section 14 is another important section. It prevents the assignment or transfer of any homestead block before the issue of the Crown grant. Any person who assigns or transfers his block of land, or who enters into any agreement to make an assignment or transfer, will forfeit the land, and will not be permitted to make another application for a homestead block under this Act. It will be seen that every security is provided against any other persons than the Government making advances upon these blocks of land, for the section provides that every assignment or transfer of the land or any part of it, or any of the occupier's interest in it, before the issue of the Crown grant, shall be null and void. Section 15 is another very important clause. If I have to read more clauses of the Bill than members may think necessary, it is because every one of them is so short, and every one of them, I think, is very important. Section 15 says: "At the expiration of seven years from the first day of January or

"the first day of July (as the case may be) preceding the date of the approval of the application by the Minister, the selector (or in case of his death, his legal representatives), upon proving to the satisfaction of the Minister that he, or they, or some of them have resided upon and made the improvements as prescribed by this Act upon the homestead block, shall be entitled to a Crown grant for the same upon payment of all moneys advanced thereon and all interest due or accruing upon such moneys, together with the survey, Crown grant, and registration fees." The next section provides that Crown grants may be obtained after twelve months residence, on certain conditions. It has been stated — I think I have read it somewhere — that the Crown grants under this section can be obtained much more easily than they really can be obtained. Members who will look at the clause will see that the selector has to prove to the satisfaction of the Minister that he has resided on the block for twelve months; also that he has made all the improvements required by the Act to entitle him to a Crown grant. If he succeeds in satisfying the Minister on these points he may at any time afterwards—before the expiration of the seven years mentioned in the 15th section—obtain a Crown grant by paying the fixed price of 5s. an acre and repaying all the moneys that have been advanced to him by the Government, with all interest due, together with the survey and other fees. That is, in the event of a man desiring to obtain his Crown grant before the expiration of the term of seven years, he can do so upon satisfying the Government that he has resided on the land for twelve months and made the necessary improvements, and also repaid the Government all he owes them. The next section of the Bill, section 17, is a stringent one. It provides for the forfeiture of a man's block in the event of his not having complied with the conditions imposed by the Act. Should he not have built a habitable house within two years, or should he not have done the necessary fencing and clearing and cropping within five years, and the further fencing required within seven years, or should he neglect to reside

on the land or neglect to repay the amount advanced to him within a given time, his homestead block becomes forfeitable, together with all the improvements upon it; and the Minister may either order the land to be sold, or otherwise dispose of it. In that case the selector shall not be eligible to obtain another homestead block, except in special cases, in the discretion of the Minister. That is a very stringent section. It has been pointed out that it is somewhat too stringent; but, after all, it is a provision that already exists in the Land Regulations of the colony at the present time. If the conditions imposed by the regulations are not complied with, the land becomes forfeitable to the Crown. And, for my part, I do not see any great hardship in these conditions, for those who take up land under them do so with their eyes open, and with a full knowledge of the conditions imposed; and it is not for them to complain if, in the event of their neglecting to comply with those conditions, their land should be liable to be forfeited. It will be optional with these people whether they accept these conditions or not. Section 19 is another section of considerable importance. It says: "The applicant for a homestead block may at the time of making his application, or at any time thereafter, apply for, in addition to his homestead block, such land as he may require under the Land Laws for the time being in force, either from lands set apart for selection for homestead blocks, or from any other Crown lands open for selection, and in the event of his applying for land under a regulation requiring residence as a condition, then in that case residence upon a homestead block or upon a village allotment, as provided by section twenty-two of this Act, if within ten miles of the land applied for, shall be a sufficient compliance with the residence condition for all purposes." It will be seen from that that the mere fact that a man is a selector under this Act does not interfere in any way with his rights under the present land laws of the colony. He may apply for any additional land he may require, just the same as if he were not the holder of a homestead block; and if the land he requires is land that comes under a regu-

lation requiring residence as a condition, then in that case residence upon his homestead block will be a sufficient compliance with the residence clause. The next section, clause 20, deals with the question of village sites. It provides that in connection with any land set apart for homestead blocks the Governor may declare a village site, and such village site may be subdivided into allotments not exceeding one acre each. That simply means this: if a number of persons chose to combine together for their own convenience, in order to secure the advantages of social intercourse, schools for their children, churches, and other conveniences, it will be competent for the Government under this Bill to declare village sites for this purpose; and the Minister may in his discretion vary or dispense altogether with the requirements of the Act as to residence upon each separate homestead block, but not as regards the necessary improvements. The next section provides that the holder of a homestead block may—with the approval of the Minister, but not otherwise—select one of these village allotments without payment, and all the provisions of this Bill with respect to residence, the erection of a house, and advance of money on the house, shall then apply to that allotment instead of to his homestead block, provided that within seven years he pays a sum of £5 for the Crown grant of such allotment. That again is a clause that finds place in the Canadian Act; and I have no doubt it has worked to advantage there, or we should not find it in the Act. Section 23 of the Bill amends the present Land Regulations in this respect, that wherever there may be a railway running within five miles of any Crown lands in any part of the colony, such lands may be thrown open for selection within the five-mile radius, either for direct purchase or on the deferred payment system, in the same way as is now provided in respect of lands within the South-West division of the colony. Take, for instance, the railway we are about to build from Northam to Yilgarn, running through a division of the colony where free selection does not now extend, or only within special areas set apart for that purpose. Under this clause the Minister of Lands may order that any

Crown land situated within five miles of that railway shall be open for selection. That, I think, is a valuable regulation, and should prove very useful; and I do not think anyone is likely to object to it. Section 27 merely provides that nothing in this Act shall prevent the holder of a homestead block from participating in all the privileges of any land laws that may be in force for the time being in the colony. Section 29 provides that the Bill shall not come into force until proclaimed by the Governor in Council, and shall be read and construed with the existing Land Regulations. Section 30, which is the last clause of the Bill, is a most important one. It provides that section 6 of the Bill shall remain in force for five years only, unless sooner repealed. That is the section that provides for the right to apply for a homestead block of 160 acres. The 30th section limits the operation of the Act to five years; but there is an important proviso under which the Governor, by an Order in Council, may at any time suspend the operation of the section referred to for any period, and may afterwards cancel any such suspension and revive the operation of the section. If from any cause, financial or otherwise, it may be deemed expedient to suspend the homestead system, or should it be found that it is not acting for the benefit of the colony, or our anticipations in regard to it are not realised, the Governor in Council may at any time suspend its operation. Of course any agreement or undertaking entered into during the time the Act remained in force would continue in force and have full effect until completed. Sir, I have now gone through this short Bill of thirty sections. I now propose to deal with some of the reasons why the Government consider that the Bill is necessary. The policy of the present Government has been to encourage and attract population to the colony; and we desired, and still desire, to attract the right sort of people to our shores. To that end our chief object has been to provide greater facilities of transit; and I think that, with the assistance of Parliament, we have been enabled, during the two years we have been in office, to prove to the satisfaction of most people that we are in real earnest as to our desire to provide cheap and

easy means of transit within the colony. But it is no use providing means of transit throughout the length and breadth of the colony unless we have people to settle and occupy and improve the land through which our railways run. Some people may say—and I dare say there are many I see before me here who perhaps will say—that we are doing very well indeed as it is, and that they have an objection to our desiring to go on too fast. They think that during the past two years the colony has prospered to a very considerable extent, and that if we will only leave things alone and not desire to get along too fast all will be well. Sir, I ask those people who say this to look at our imports; to look at the quantity of produce that we import into the colony that ought to be produced within the colony. I ask them to do this not only as regards our imports at the present time but also in regard to our imports during the past few years. During the present year alone I believe we shall have imported into the colony, in the way of food products that we could ourselves produce, imports to the value of a quarter of a million sterling. We are at the present moment, I believe, introducing into the colony in the way of products that we are capable of producing ourselves a greater quantity than at any other time in our history. I wish hon. members to carefully consider this fact, to ponder over it, and to ask themselves whether this is as it ought to be, and whether some steps should not be taken to alter this lamentable state of things? Some people say—and I dare say it will be said here to-night, or in the course of this debate,—that the Government, having provided facilities of transit, by means of railways, and intended to provide still further facilities in the same direction, had done all that is necessary. I believe myself that cheap, easy, and quick means of transit will do a great deal—that I believe thoroughly; but I am not prepared to say that that alone is all that is necessary. Hon. members know very well that we are incurring, very quickly, large liabilities, and that it is necessary we should increase our population, and develop our resources, and settle and cultivate our lands at the same rate as we are enlarging our liabilities. I think that is only sound policy. Let hon.

members bear this in mind—let them bear these facts in mind—that we have now a railway running from Fremantle to Beverley and on to Albany, that we also have a railway running from here to the Moore River, and that we have a railway from Geraldton to Northampton, and from Geraldton to Dongara and the Upper Irwin; let them also bear in mind that these railways have been running for a considerable time, but that yet, notwithstanding these facilities, the area of land in crop has not increased during the last five years; and some of these railways at any rate have been running during that time. I am going by the information that is supplied by the published records, whether we believe them or not—I know some people do not—but they are believed in by those outside the colony at any rate; and, according to these statistics, notwithstanding the fact that for years past we have had a railway running to our Eastern Districts, and also from Geraldton to Northampton (all good agricultural districts), according to these statistics our area in crop has not increased during the last five years.

AN HON. MEMBER: Is that throughout the whole colony?

THE PREMIER (Hon. Sir J. Forrest): Throughout the colony. I would ask members whether this is a matter that is to be viewed with perfect equanimity? I ask them are we justified in saying to ourselves, "We will leave these things to take their course; we believe in a 'do nothing' policy, a chance policy; and we have done all we intend to do, notwithstanding the fact that our area under crop has not increased during the past five years." I may tell members another fact that perhaps may interest them, and that is, that of all the land that has been alienated from the Crown from the beginning of the colony up to the present time—over 5,000,000 acres—there was only a little over 1 per cent. under crop in the colony last year. I would ask members whether that is a fact they like to congratulate themselves upon, and whether they intend to sit down and fold their hands, and say, "Never mind; we will wait and see what turns up." I will ask them whether anyone who thinks over the question—and I hope we all do think over this question—I ask hon. members, with these

facts before them, can anyone wonder that the Government should feel that something should be done, that something is necessary, to alter this unsatisfactory state of affairs? There is another thing: we wish to make the colony attractive, we wish to encourage people to come here, and we wish to encourage people of the right stamp to come here. Other countries all over the world are offering attractions to induce people, and especially people who are ready to enter upon the land and to cultivate it, to come to their shores. In fact, as we all know, there is a race between the civilised countries of the world to secure an addition to their population in the shape of persons who are ready to settle upon the soil and to cultivate it. Is it to be wondered at that we here should desire the same thing? We have tried, and are still trying, to provide cheap and easy means of communication throughout this vast territory of ours; but I say that our efforts in this direction will be entirely futile unless we are also able to obtain people to settle upon the land and to cultivate it, and so provide traffic for these railways that we have built and are about to build. The present Bill aims at that object. Some people place too much value altogether upon our land; their idea is that it is very precious, and that we must not part with it unless we get paid for it in money. My idea is that the land as it is, in its natural state, lying there only to be looked at, is perfectly worthless, unless it is made productive. What is the use of all this land that is only growing the scrub that was on it when the colony was founded? Of what value is it to the community in its present state? Surely it would be more advantageous to the community if this land were made productive, and made to contribute to the wealth and prosperity of the colony. It is not as if we had only a little bit of land; then I could understand people wishing to conserve it to look at it. But when we know that we have millions and millions of acres, the greater portion of which is now lying idle, surely our desire should be to see that this land should be utilised, and add to the wealth and productiveness of the colony. When we reflect that out of this immense territory that has been entrusted to our charge there were only



64,209 acres in crop at the end of last year, after sixty years of settlement, surely it is time we should be up and doing, and see if we cannot alter this state of affairs. The desire of the Government is to see a great deal more of the land occupied and cultivated, and we propose in this Bill what we believe will result in what we desire to see. We propose to give to any man, who is willing to come here, or who is here already, if he is prepared to enter upon the land and to cultivate it,—we propose to give to each man who is willing to agree to these conditions 160 acres of land that is now lying idle and worthless for the want of cultivation. As I said when introducing this subject, this is not a new scheme, this giving away of land in order to encourage settlement. We have it already in existence in the United States, and in Canada, and in other countries. We have it also in existence in the colony of New Zealand, this homestead system. I am not able to speak with authority as to how it has been found to answer in New Zealand; but we know they have it there. We also know it has answered very well in the other countries I have referred to; and I think there is nothing strange in our trying to introduce the same system in this great colony with its immense area of land and its very sparse population. I believe that the chief opposition to this Bill will come from those who have a lot of land already, and who had to pay for it. These people say—and there is something in the argument, although not much, in my opinion—they'll say, "We had to pay for our land, and why should not other people pay for it?" That is reasonable enough from one point of view, a very reasonable sort of argument. [Mr. RICHARDSON: Hear, hear.] But after all, what did they pay for their land, and did all of them pay the same price? In the early days of the colony, as we all know, those adventurous men of fortune who came here to found the colony received a certain amount of land for every eighteen-pence worth of property they brought with them to the colony. From that time up to the present there has been nothing but change in the value of the land, or in the price of the land. There was a time when men had to pay

an upset price of £1 an acre for their land at auction. Then it came down to 10s. an acre, while at the present time we charge merely the interest on 10s. at 5 per cent. spread over 20 years. So that there has been a great deal of difference in the amount paid by people for their land during the 63 years of the colony's history; and the man who paid £1 an acre for his land might as well complain that he was not well treated because other men had since been able to obtain their land at 10s. an acre; or the 10s. an acre man might as well complain of being badly treated because he did not get 20 years to pay for his land at the rate of 6d. an acre, as for the holders of land to complain at the action of the Government now in proposing to give some of the land away on certain conditions as to improvements. But, not only do we propose in this Bill to give the land away, we propose to go further than that. I admit that was my first idea, simply to give free grants of land; but when I came to consider the low price of our land and the easy terms of purchase, I found that the free gift of land by itself was not after all any great attraction, and not likely to induce people to come here to settle on the land and improve it to any great extent; for, after all, it only amounted to a very small sum, merely the interest on 10s. at 5 per cent., or 6d. an acre, for twenty years. This, on 160 acres, would only amount to £4 a year,—not a very large concession after all; and I thought, when it came to be announced with a great flourish of trumpets that we were going to give away free grants of land, and people came to consider what the gift was really worth at the present price of land and the present terms of purchase, it struck me that it was not a great deal to make any great fuss about. Therefore the Government now propose that in addition to giving the land we should also lend a certain amount of money to the occupier, after he spends a certain amount of his own money in improving the land and enhancing its value, so that he may further improve it. I would ask hon. members what better security we could have in this case than the conditions we propose to insist upon in this Bill, namely, that after it is shown that a man

has expended at least £100 in building a house we should lend him £50 on it, and that after he had expended £50 in other improvements we should advance him half that sum to enable him to carry out further improvements, the land and the improvements in the meantime remaining the property of the Government, until the whole of the money advanced had been repaid. What better security could any man require than that? Some people have suggested to me that the time when a man who enters upon land to occupy and improve it requires money is when he first enters upon the land. That may be all very well. No doubt some people would require monetary assistance as soon as they entered upon the land; but what would be the result if we adopted that principle of giving assistance? The result would be this: that impecunious persons, people without any means whatever, would enter upon the occupation of the land simply in the expectation of obtaining a loan from the Government. I would ask what security would the Government have that the money would be expended on the land? Possibly, this impecunious individual might walk away, or waste the money, without in any way improving the land. Our proposition is very different to that; we propose that before we advance any money the occupier of the land shall show his *bona fides*, and his intention to settle on the land, by first expending some of his own money upon it, and when he has done that, and we have ample security for the loan, we propose to advance him a sum not exceeding one-half the amount he has himself expended on his homestead, and to take his land with all the improvements on it as our security. The question of State loans to farmers and the development of our agricultural resources, and the question of adopting a policy of colonisation, have been talked about for many years in this colony. In fact, I think we were told when the present Government first met Parliament—we were told by some hon. members that our policy was no good because we did not go in for some large and comprehensive colonisation scheme. It was suggested that we should bring people here to settle on the land, and that we should clear the land for them, build houses for them, and do everything

for them, in order to try to settle them upon this very large estate with which we have been entrusted. While, for my own part, I was not in favor of that scheme, I have no doubt it had a great deal to commend it. But I was not in favor of it for this reason: I believe in letting people do what they have to do themselves. [SEVERAL HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!] I believe if you do everything for a man, instead of letting him do it himself, he will not be so well satisfied. That is my objection to the Government undertaking to clear the land for these people, and do everything for them, instead of letting them do it themselves. I say let these men select their land, enter upon it, and improve it in the first place with their own money, and when they have done that, then let the Government come to the rescue and help them to make further improvements. I see no objection to the Government doing this, so long as the colony does not suffer any loss; and I think we have sufficiently provided against that. Members will notice, on looking at the 7th and 14th sections, that we are well protected. No one else is allowed to have any lien upon the land, and the occupier cannot make any assignment or transfer of the land until the claim of the Government has been fully satisfied. The land is kept perfectly intact and secure against all comers, and the title to it is to remain in the Crown until the issue of the Crown grant, and neither the land nor the interest of the selector in it, is liable to be taken in execution before the issue of the Crown grant. There are a great many people in this colony who have told me that they are in favor of free grants of land—they do not seem to value the land very much—but they must stop short when it comes to lending money. Now my opinion is, and I say it deliberately and after considering the matter very carefully for a considerable time, that the free grant of land without the promised loan is likely to prove of very little value to us. If this House in its wisdom strips this Bill of the loan part of it, you will do your very best to take away the most important part of it, and you will do your very best to make it a failure. I am thoroughly convinced, after giving the matter a considerable amount of attention

and careful thought, that this loan part of the Bill is the very vitals of the whole scheme, because, unless you are able to promise these people not only a free grant of land but also some pecuniary assistance to enable them to further improve the land, they will not be able to perform the conditions imposed by this Bill within the prescribed time. We want men to enter upon this work in a hopeful spirit, with a firm determination to persevere, and with the knowledge that, having expended what little capital they may possess in improving the land, and that their labor will count to them in improvements, they may rely upon some assistance from the Government to carry out further improvements, and that no one can come between them and the Government to deprive them of their lands and the improvements they have made upon it. They will be further stimulated to exert themselves by the knowledge that their expenditure and their labor will not avail them unless they are able to redeem the property and make it their own. Another argument used by those who are against the scheme of the Government is that it will reduce the value of property. My reply to that is: Have the Land Regulations of the past, which lessened the price of Crown lands, reduced the value of property? I say deliberately, they have not, and I say I do not believe for a moment that this offer of free grants will reduce the value of property. I would like to ask, is it reasonable or probable that the fact of a number of people entering upon the occupation and the cultivation and improvement of the land is likely to injure anyone who has property in the colony, or to injure anyone at all? I say the thing is absurd. If we can induce a few hundred persons to enter upon the land and to cultivate it, even although we give them the land, is that likely to injure the colony in any way, or to lessen the value of anybody's property, or to interfere with the prosperity of anybody? I say no. On the contrary, it is likely to enhance the prosperity of the colony, and to enhance the value of property, and to benefit the whole community. If not, why should we bother ourselves about this proposal? Why should we take the trouble of formulating this scheme? I hope, therefore,

that no one will be found who will say to-night that this proposal of the Government is likely to lessen the value of property. If they do say so, my reply will be: Let the land remain as it is, a waste and a wilderness; do not give it away; let nobody touch it, and then you will have all these millions of acres still lying as idle as they were the day the colony was first settled sixty years ago. The thing is absurd, perfectly ridiculous, and not worth listening to. Hon. members of course know without my telling them that during the last two years the Government have embarked upon a loan policy which has for its object the building of railways throughout the length and breadth of the colony and the improvement of the harbors of the colony. They also know, if they will take the trouble to look into the matter, that the interest and sinking fund in connection with our loans, when this last loan of ours has been all raised, will amount to a sum of £140,000 a year. I have no doubt some people will say that we can easily pay that, even out of our present revenue, and still more so in the future; and I agree with that. But we must also remember that these railways and other public works that we are entering upon will have to be worked and maintained; and, if we are to take our past experience as any guide, this will entail a considerable expense on the colony. I cannot deal with all these works off hand, but members know as well as I do the great cost to the colony for many years the railway from here to York was. I think it (the interest and working expenses) cost us at one time some £40,000 a year. This is all gone by now, and so it will be with these other railways, in the future, if the policy which the Government wish to see carried out is approved of by this House. But at the outset we must be prepared to provide for the working and maintenance of these lines. It must be remembered that in dealing with these new railways we are now building there is no analogy between them and that line to the Eastern districts. That line from the very first ran through old established districts, and one of the most fertile, if not the most fertile, part of the colony; and it ran through country that was already fairly well populated. That is not the case with regard to these other

railways that we are building. We are trying to develop the districts through which these new lines are to pass, so as to provide traffic for these railways, and to make them productive. I only mention this now to show that we must be prepared to meet a considerable expenditure in the working of these railways, and that it is our duty to do all we can to settle people on the land and increase the productiveness of the soil. Of course our desire is that our railways shall pay, and that soon. Years hence, even with the "do nothing" policy of some hon. members, they may pay, after a considerable amount of expenditure and a considerable amount of difficulty. But what we want is to take time by the forelock so that these railways that are now being constructed may become productive and reproductive quickly, so that we who are here now may have the benefit of the expenditure incurred in building them. It is all very well to look to the distant future, but we also want something at the present time as well. Although I should be glad to know that this country is going to prosper thousands and thousands of years hence, at the same time I should like to see it prosper now, so that we of the present generation may participate to some extent in the good things we are providing for the future. The position taken up by the opponents of this Bill really amounts to this: they say, "We approve of your borrowing money for railways and other public works, but we wish the country's progress to be left to chance; we will neither approve of your scheme for making it progress, nor suggest any other scheme in its place." [Mr. DEHAMEL: No, no.] The hon. member says no, no; I hope he will give us—as I understand he is going to move that this Bill be read a second time this day six months—I hope he will give us the outline of some other policy of his own. He has had as much time to consider the subject as I have, and I trust he will not consider that he is doing his duty to the colony by rejecting the scheme of the Government, unless he is prepared to put forward some scheme of his own. But what the opponents of this scheme say is, "We will do nothing to make the country advance and prosper, we will do nothing to encourage settlement; we

will keep in the same old ruts we have been moving in so long." During the last few years, we all know, we have spent about £60,000 on immigration, and this House has authorised the Government to expend £50,000 more; and we could have spent that £50,000 if we had liked. But I am very glad to say we have not spent it, or very little of it, up to the present time. I say, instead of spending this £50,000, or the unexpended balance of it, which is over £40,000, in the way we have spent our immigration vote in the past, let us expend it in some other way that is likely to do more good to the colony. Let us give this other scheme a fair trial. Members will notice, as I have said before, that we have taken every precaution that this scheme, if it does not answer our expectations, may be discontinued. If we find that the scheme is a failure, we have provided means whereby it may be suspended. All that, as I have already pointed out, is provided for in the 30th section of the Bill. If the scheme does not work successfully, and be productive of good to the colony, we may take the opinion of Parliament upon it at any time as to what shall be done with it. I believe that the Parliament of this country has often embarked upon undertakings with regard to the success of which there was room for a considerable amount of doubt. We have embarked upon undertakings with respect to which there was room for a great deal more doubt than there is with regard to the present scheme. In this case we shall be merely spending money in improving our own property by making it more productive, in order that it may contribute to the wealth and prosperity of the community. What risk can there be in that? Every penny of this money that we spend will be money that has already been spent twice over by other people on land of our own. If any one can gainsay that, let him do so. We are putting ourselves simply in the position of a landowner who says to an incoming tenant, "If you spend £300 on this property of mine I will lend you"—and I wish members to take a note of this; we are not going to give away this money, for it has to be repaid; we are simply lending it—"if you spend £300 on this property I will lend you half that amount for further

improvements, and you can repay me afterwards." Meantime the land remains our own, and that is a most important part of the scheme. But as soon as the money is repaid and the conditions are carried out the land becomes the absolute property of the occupier. Surely that ought to be some encouragement to a man, to be able to see that he can make a comfortable home in this colony for his family. As I have already said, our object is to induce people to come here, and the right class of people. By the right class of people I mean those who are prepared to enter upon the land, and to cultivate it, and not to congregate about our towns. I do not object to people settling down in town and taking their share in the development of our industrial resources and the progress of the colony; but what we are now aiming at is to induce people to come here who will settle upon the land. Depend upon it, there are quite enough inducements in the town, as a general rule, to entice people to remain there; but we want to entice them to settle upon the soil, and to cultivate it, and make it more productive. The very people whom this Bill will induce to come here are those who desire to go upon the land and work it, those who are endowed with sufficient strength of will and sufficient energy to face and to overcome the natural obstacles that present themselves to anyone settling down in a new country. I now come to another objection I have heard to this scheme, and a very important one, and that is that we shall not be acting fairly towards the Land Grant Railway Companies in the colony if we embark upon this free grant system. I have read something to that effect in the newspapers, but I may say this: although the Government proposals have been before the country since the 29th July last, no representations have been made to me officially on the subject by any of the land grant railway companies. Therefore I may take it, that although they may speak of it casually, now and then, they have no great objection to it, or they would have made themselves heard. I will say now as I have said before, so far as these land grant railway companies are concerned they have no better friend in the colony than myself. I believe they deserve every assistance

and encouragement in their efforts in the direction of developing a large portion of our territory; and I should be the last man that would do anything that I considered would injure them. But if they are going to object to our legislating in the way we consider best as regards our own land, for the benefit of our own colony, I think they will be going rather out of their way. If we adhere to the terms of our contract with them—and I do not think that in the scheme now put forward by the Government we have any intention of infringing upon any of their rights; on the contrary we desire to assist them—if we adhere to the terms of our contract with them, I do not see that they have any cause for complaint. For instance, under our agreement with the W.A. Land Co., we closed our lands for seven years within a certain area, during which we offered no land for sale within that area; and I cannot see myself why, after that term has expired, we should not do the best we can with our own property, and do all we can to develop its natural resources. But I deny altogether that this project, even looking at it from any other point of view, will in any way injure or hamper these land companies who have come here to embark in these great public works. The more land there is settled and cultivated within the districts through which their railways pass, the more traffic will there be for those railways. I believe this myself, and I should very much like to see it carried out—it would be the finest advertisement and the finest stroke of policy for these companies themselves to adopt this policy I am now urging upon this House, that is, to offer free grants of land in alternate blocks over a large portion of their areas, so that people might be attracted to the colony and occupy these lands, which would vastly increase the value of their alternate blocks as well. After all, the best thing that can be done in this colony, either by these land grant railway companies or by the Government, is to populate the country and improve the public estate. There will be no fear then that these railways running through these settled districts will not pay, for there will be plenty of traffic for them; and, without the traffic, we know they cannot be expected to pay. If the Government proposal was to give away these

160-acre blocks without any conditions as to residence and improvements, there would be something to be said in opposition to the scheme, and I could well understand it. If we proposed to give away the land for nothing and to advance money upon it, without insisting and providing that the land shall be occupied and cultivated and otherwise improved, then I could see there might be certainly grave objection to the policy we propose to pursue. But this is not so. If members will look at sections 8 and 9 of the Bill they will see that the selector under this scheme must, within six months from the date of his application being approved, take possession of the land, in his own person, and reside upon it, and make it his usual home for the first five years; also, that within two years of the date of his application being approved he must erect upon his homestead block a habitable house; and that within five years he must fence in, clear, and crop at least one-fourth of the whole of his land; and that within seven years he must fence in the whole of it. I, for myself, cannot understand how anyone can be afraid of such conditions as these proving detrimental or injurious to anybody. I cannot see how anyone who occupies land upon these terms and who fulfils these conditions can be otherwise than a benefactor to the colony and a valuable acquisition to the community; especially at the present time when it is so necessary that we should do all we can to ensure agricultural progress and the advancement of the colony in every way, and particularly in the way of increasing its productiveness. As we all know, our mines have recently progressed in a manner that none of us could have anticipated a short time ago. Gold has been found in many parts of the colony, and in large quantities. We are also building railways into the interior, and it is necessary, if we wish to hold our own at all, that we should try to cultivate our lands in order to provide produce for those who are engaged in these mining pursuits. Surely to goodness this ought to be our chief object at the present time, so that we should not have to send away, as we do, for a large portion of the food products that we use, while we have only a little over 60,000 acres of land in cultivation throughout the

length and breadth of all this immense territory. Sir, I have now explained, as far as I have been able to, the views of the Government with regard to this Bill. To my surprise—I have heard it incidentally—that there is likely to be some opposition to the Bill. I have only heard it mentioned privately—I have no certain knowledge of it—because I have not felt it my duty to inquire what are the views of hon. members upon this matter. I think my duty is to place the matter as clearly before them as I can, and leave them to judge whether it is a scheme which they can accept or not. I have not gone round to find out what the views of hon. members may be, and I do not know what their views are. I trust to the justice of the proposal, and the value of the arguments, and the soundness of the principles embodied in the Bill, to commend it to the attention of hon. members. I am surprised, though, that there should be any opposition to it—a Bill that is likely to have such great results, and prove so beneficial to the colony. I cannot understand what arguments can be used against it in opposition to those that I have urged in its favor. I have endeavored to explain clearly the position taken by the Government. I consider the measure a sound and reasonable measure—as reasonable a measure as I have ever had the honor to advocate in this House—and I shall be very curious indeed, most curious, and shall watch with great interest the arguments that may be brought against it by those who are opposed to it. I hope they will, if they can, traverse my facts, or dispute my arguments; and I hope, at any rate, that they will base their opposition upon some good solid foundation. I hope I shall not have a repetition of the arguments I have heard elsewhere, that, after the selector under this Bill has spent £300 on his land, and spent several years of his life in bringing it into cultivation, he is likely to be induced, by the mere offer of a loan of £150 from the Government, to abandon his homestead, and to go away and shake the dust of the colony off his feet. I hope that no one here to-night will venture to advance such an argument as that against the Bill. I say if he does he has no faith in the colony, and he is very unpatriotic. If no better argument than that

can be found by any hon. member in this House, I hope he will hold his tongue, because I should be ashamed, as a West Australian and a man who believes in the colony, to make use of such an argument. I believe, myself, that the Government are on the right track in this matter. Whether the Bill passes or not, I believe we shall have credit for having endeavored to do our duty; and, if the Bill is not passed now, my belief is that it will be passed in a very short time. The Government have had a great deal to do since they came into power, during the last two years, in endeavoring to advance the interests of the colony. I think no one can say we have not been bold; and I challenge anyone to say we have not been careful. We found the colony in a very lethargic state—no life in it, and very little hope; but, since then, all things have changed, and at the present time we are a hopeful community, and not only satisfied with our present rate of progress but also looking forward in the future to a still higher rate of progress. Things are not what they used to be in this place, nor throughout the whole colony. People are waking up; and we must keep pace with the times we are living in. Our principal efforts so far have been in the direction of providing cheap and easy means of transit to enable people to get about the country, and to conserve their energies instead of wasting them as they used to on long and heavy roads, and to enable them to do in one hour what in the past it took them days to do. The next thing is to increase our productiveness, so that we may not be accused of looking at one side of the question only, and that it may not be said of us that we provided means of transit by building railways throughout the length and breadth of the colony but made no attempt to encourage settlement and to increase our productiveness, so as to give work for those railways. This colony labors under many disadvantages, as we all know. It is a long way from the great centres of population of the old world, and, unless we make some effort to attract population here, we shall remain as we are. If the great countries to the westward of England—Canada, the United States, South America—find it necessary to offer inducements to attract people to their shores, surely it

behoves us in this colony, with our immense territory lying unproductive, to endeavor to divert some of this stream of immigration towards this colony. We know the colony has had a bad name for years as a colony that was languishing in obscurity. For over fifty years we bore that reputation; but now, when we are attracting some notice, not only in Great Britain but also throughout most English-speaking communities as the “coming colony;” and, now that we have the ball at our feet, it is our duty, I say, to take advantage of our position and to keep it going. I will ask members to be very careful about this Bill, and not by their act to-night or to-morrow to destroy the good that has been done during the past two years. I say if you reject this Bill, if you reject this effort of the Government to encourage settlement and to increase the colony’s productiveness, you will do one of the worst things ever done to this colony—certainly the worst thing that has been done during the past two years. The electric wire will flash the news over to England, where, as members are aware, this scheme has already attracted considerable attention, and we shall then hear what the people in England think of your action, and we shall see whether they consider the present Government equal to the occasion, or whether they consider you who oppose this Bill are the wise ones. If you do reject it the responsibility will rest with you, and you will have to answer for it, because I shall not answer for you; I promise you that. We have been borrowing money at a considerable rate—a very considerable rate it was thought two years ago—but things have changed since then, and some people are not satisfied with what we have borrowed, but are looking forward to greater loans in the future. Our affairs are no doubt flourishing, but we must remember we are not going to live on loans for ever; there is a day of reckoning coming, and, unless we increase our population and make the land productive and to contribute to the wealth and prosperity of the colony, the day of reckoning will surely come, and you will have to account for it. We shall have to pay the interest on these loans that we are borrowing, and we shall also have to repay the principal, for, as members

are aware, according to our present system of borrowing—whether it is a good system or not I am not prepared to say—we have to provide a sinking fund for the repayment of our loans. All I wish to say is, if you go on increasing your expenditure and increasing your liabilities, without at the same time improving your estate, the day of reckoning will come, and you will find you are not in such a flourishing condition as you think you are. But, if you take my advice, make timely provision for this day of reckoning, and let the expenditure of public money and the improvement of the public estate go hand in hand; then, I say, you will be building your prosperity on a sure and sound foundation, and you need have no fear for the future. I have no fear myself for the future so far as this Bill is concerned. I believe it will do a great amount of good to the colony, and prove very advantageous to the whole community; if I thought it would not, I should have nothing to do with it. But my firm belief is that it is a scheme that will advance the prosperity of the colony. Whatever may be the fate of the Bill, I believe it will be conceded by everyone, if not now, in a very short time, that the Government have made an honest effort to meet a grave difficulty—a difficulty which is staring everyone in the face—and that is, the want of production in this colony, a want that is forcibly shown in the large amount of our imports of articles and products, which ought to be produced within our own colony. As I said before, with all our millions of acres of land, we had only a little over 60,000 acres in crop at the end of last year, after sixty years of settlement. I ask members whether that is not a humiliating fact? The thing is ridiculous, if we want to keep pace with the times. All I can say is this—and they are almost the last words I am going to utter on this subject—if we can induce a number of families to come here and to enter upon the land to settle and to cultivate it; if we can do this by the giving away of these free grants of land, and by advancing these people £150 after they have expended £300 of their own money in improving our land, then I say we shall do this colony a good turn, and we shall meet a very serious difficulty that is now staring

us in the face. I can only assure hon. members, in conclusion, that this Bill has received the very careful consideration of the Government for a long time. We have not entered upon this scheme lightly, in order to have the barren satisfaction of introducing some novelty. We have introduced this Bill because we believe it is in the interest of the colony that we should legislate in this direction. We believe the Bill is necessary, in order to stimulate the cultivation of the land, and in order to make this country to prosper and to progress as it ought to do. I consider that the settlement of the lands of the colony is the greatest problem we have to deal with at the present time; and, whatever defects members may see in this measure, I think there is at any rate enough that is good in it to commend it to their most careful and serious consideration. (Cheers.)

MR. RICHARDSON: I feel more confidence in addressing a few remarks to this Assembly on this measure than, I believe, I have felt on any former occasion, because I have up to the present felt that I have always been able to give the present Government my free and hearty support. All along I have given them that support, because I fully approved of their measures. There may have been some little minor points upon which I was not in accord with them, but I did not think it worth while to vote against a good Government upon trifling points not worthy of much consideration. On the present occasion, however, I cannot support them. I think it is a matter of congratulation for this Government and this Assembly that, as yet, the state of politics and political feeling in this country is such that, in the event of any divergence of opinion, the Government is sufficiently strong and party lines are not sufficiently acute, to endanger the position of the Ministry, or to lead to any disastrous results, simply because we may not all hold the same identical views in this House. I say we ought to congratulate ourselves that our politics have not yet arrived at that stage, when members have occasionally to sink their own personal views rather than take up a position antagonistic to the Government, and to swallow measures which they do not approve of, rather than endanger the position of the



Ministry in office. It is satisfactory to think that the Government of Sir John Forrest has as yet received such a full and hearty support from the Assembly that, in the event of our not all approving of every measure which the Government brings forward, there is not much fear of the stability of the Ministry, or of the good work they are doing being endangered, simply, as I say, because we cannot all be with them in every proposal they bring before us. On the present occasion I find myself in the unhappy position of being unable to agree with them, but I am happy to think that they do not intend to make a party question of this proposal of theirs, but to leave it to the House to say whether they believe in it or not. I do not think they desire it should be supported if our judgment does not see the matter, eye to eye, in the same light as they do. I intend, on the present occasion, to deal as briefly as I can with a few of the remarks and arguments of the Premier in introducing the Bill. First of all, I think I had better address myself at once to what he appeared to regard as one of his strongest points. I am sure no one in this Assembly would think for a moment that the Premier, in giving us certain figures in support of his contention, would do so with the idea of in any way misleading us. Nevertheless, I think that some of the figures, and very important figures, he has quoted are decidedly misleading. I refer to his statistical information with regard to the progress—or rather the retrogression, as he put it—of agriculture in this colony. The hon. gentleman said it was a matter of great regret and concern to find that we have not a larger amount of land in cultivation now than we had five years ago.

THE PREMIER (Hon. Sir J. Forrest): In crop; not in cultivation.

MR. RICHARDSON: I think that, although his figures, perhaps, are not a great deal out, still in the deductions to be drawn from them I maintain he was a long way out. I find that, while, as he says, we had only about 64,000 acres in crop last year, we had 58,000 acres five years previously—not quite so much, certainly. But there is one fact which has been overlooked: our agricultural returns, I think, are compiled in a somewhat different manner. I find that, in

1886, under the head of "Other land under tillage," there were only 5,000 acres. I presume that means land in fallow, land usually in tillage, but not in tillage that particular year. So that, all the land under cultivation in 1886 was 58,000 acres plus 5,000 acres, or about 63,000 acres in all; whereas, last year, we had 68,000 acres in fallow, besides 64,000 acres in crop, or something over 130,000 acres in all, as compared with 63,000 acres five years ago. It is a very important point to bear in mind, this large quantity of land in fallow last year, showing as it does that a large portion of that land has been recently cleared.

THE PREMIER (Hon. Sir J. Forrest): It has been the same all through. I do not think the hon. member's figures are right.

MR. RICHARDSON: I think they must be very nearly right. It is utterly ridiculous to say that all the land we have been recently clearing in the Eastern and Avon districts, as the result of railway communication, is all myth, and has no existence, and that we are no further ahead now than we were five years ago. I, for one, cannot think it possible. I believe that a great part of the decrease in the area of land under cultivation is owing to the quantity of land that has gone out of cultivation on the Greenough Flats, and has no reference to our Eastern districts. Another argument made use of by the Premier was this: that our progress in this direction is so slow, that the extension of settlement and cultivation is so tardy, that it must be stimulated in some way; and he considers that some such a measure as the Bill now before us is going to provide that stimulus, and that there will be a wonderful advance made in this direction. As to the statement that we are progressing very slowly in the matter of settlement and cultivation, I should like to dive a little deeper into that question, and see whether it is a fact that this increase of cultivation is so very slow as the hon. gentleman says. I have, through the kindness of the Hon. J. Arthur Wright, the representative of the W. A. Land Company, a return of the land they have sold or alienated within the last two years. I have also a similar return prepared by the Government; and, in dealing with this question, it will be necessary

that we should also take into consideration what has been done by private people. I find that the W.A. Land Company during the last two years have sold or alienated over 78,000 acres of land, and that since they started operations they have alienated no less than 243,000 acres. But I only propose to take the last two years. I find that those 78,000 acres comprise 164 different holdings, and, out of that number, no less than 146 of these holdings consist of areas ranging from 640 acres downwards; so that we may take it that nearly the whole of this land is held by small farmers, except a few large blocks; and we may take it for granted that at least one-third of this land will be cultivated. Then, from the Government return, I find that during the last two years 42,343 acres of Crown land has been alienated, which, added to the Land Company's land, makes altogether a very considerable area of fresh land, a great part of which is shortly to come into cultivation. Then, again, we have to take into account what private people are doing in the same direction. In the Eastern Districts we know that some large private land holders are vigorously extending the area under cultivation. There are several farms with at least 1,000 acres under cultivation; so that we may say that private enterprise is doing as much as the Government and the Land Company in this matter; and we have reasonable ground for concluding that very shortly we shall have an additional 80,000 or 100,000 acres coming into cultivation; for I cannot think that these people who have been buying land are going to let it lie idle. Therefore I am not prepared to accept the Premier's conclusion that we are making little or no progress with cultivation and settlement.

THE PREMIER (Hon. Sir J. Forrest): I go by the Blue Book.

MR. RICHARDSON: You cannot take last year's Blue Book for all the land that is becoming available for cultivation now. I am referring to land that has been sold or alienated only within the last two years, virgin land, which cannot be brought into cultivation immediately. But I think we may fairly anticipate that nearly the whole of this land will shortly be brought under cultivation; and I venture to prophesy—

although my prophecy may not perhaps be worth as much as the Premier's—but I venture to say that within two years we shall hear no more of the cry about the importation of agricultural produce, and about the colony not producing sufficient to supply our own local wants. I am very much afraid that the cry will be the other way. While on this point, I would remind the House of this fact,—it is not quite two years ago since we heard the cry throughout the land of a want of market for our produce, a cry of over-production. When we were talking about making railways to agricultural districts like Bunbury, we were told that we were face to face with the probable difficulty of having too much land under cultivation and of having an overstocked market. For that reason it was urged that we should extend our railways into our mineral districts, in order to secure a consuming population. I challenge anyone to contradict that that was not the case. That was the feeling two years ago. Now we take a hop, step, and a jump, right-about-face; and we are told that we are making our railways in order to increase the cultivation of the soil, in order to stimulate production. I believe we are increasing in this direction quite fast enough, and will continue to do so, so long as there is a growing demand. Therefore, I maintain that there is nothing in the Premier's argument that those who oppose this measure should take the responsibility of bringing forward something better. Our argument is that there is no necessity for bringing forward anything at all, and that the measure now before us is totally unnecessary,—and that we may safely rely upon the natural law of supply and demand to solve the difficulty. It has always been the case, in all parts of the world, that where there is a good market and good prices and a regular demand, the supply will always be forthcoming. The history of all countries shows us that if a colony is capable of producing what it requires, the best stimulus you can give to production is a ready market and good prices. On the other hand, if you have glutted markets and low prices, then you have depression and stagnation. That was the case in this colony a few years ago, and it

accounts in a great degree for our stagnation. Another prominent argument relied upon by the Premier is the large amount of stuff that we have been importing lately. But I think that is easily accounted for. We must remember that our population—thanks, in a great measure to the progressive policy of the Government, the inauguration of Responsible Government, and, more than anything, to the development of our mines—our population has lately been increasing by leaps and bounds, and we cannot expect cultivation of the soil, which is a slow process, to increase in the same ratio. Our population within the last year or two has increased by some thousands, and for a time we must expect the demand to exceed the local supply. But that is not likely to last long. Another factor in reducing the quantity of local stuff available was the drought at the North. Thousands and thousands of tons of fodder and other produce were sent up to the North to keep the stations there going. But that was an abnormal demand, a sort of paroxysm that we do not expect to happen every year. Another argument of the Premier's which I hardly think a sound one was that, having spent £47,000 on immigration, and sanctioned the expenditure of another £50,000 in the last Loan Bill, and this expenditure having in the past so signally failed in its object, it would be better to spend this money on this land settlement scheme. I think that is rather stretching the argument. If our immigration votes have miscarried their object, or have not fulfilled their object, if our expenditure in this direction has not proved advantageous to the colony, discontinue the expenditure, certainly; but that is no argument why we should divert the money and spend it on something else that may result in equal failure. I would point out that this Bill is not only to apply to immigrants; it applies also to those who are already in the colony. Therefore it cannot be said that it will altogether have the effect which is claimed for it, namely, attract population here. If you confined the operation of the Bill to immigrants only, there might be something in the argument. But so far as our own people avail themselves of it—if it is to be taken advan-

tage of by those who are already in the colony—it cannot be regarded as a very successful immigration scheme. I now come to one of the most salient features of the Bill. We propose to offer free grants of land to anyone who chooses to take them up, and we also propose to advance them a sum of money when they have built a house valued by an inspector at £100, and which will probably have cost £25, which I maintain is the general practice in valuing improvements. I have had some experience and knowledge of what are called “dummy” improvements, and I defy any Act of Parliament to stop it—no Act of Parliament ever stopped dummifying; there never was an Act framed for that object that you could not drive a coach-and-four through it—and if you can stop this sort of thing here you will be very clever. This offer of free grants of land to all comers, and the further offer of a loan, I maintain, will have this effect: it will induce a number of people probably to eagerly seize this attractive bait who will have no fitness whatever for the task they are undertaking, and no practical knowledge whatever of the work before them. This policy of free grants of land and a loan of money from the Government will no doubt be a very attractive cry in the old country and in distant parts—the more distant, I think, the more attractive, for this is clearly a case where distance will lend enchantment to the view. The less people know of the difficulties they will have to contend with the more likely is the bait to prove attractive. The result will be that we shall have a number of people making an attempt to cultivate the soil who are quite unfit for the work, and who, for a moral certainty, will make a great failure of their attempt. After all what does this apparently attractive bait amount to? What does it all boil down to? Under the present Land Regulations any man may take up 160 acres, paying for it at the rate of 6d. an acre annually, which is equal to £4 a year. That is the amount of attraction offered by this free grant scheme,—a gift of £4 per annum. That may be some attraction to a very needy man, with the prospect of obtaining a Government loan if he makes certain improvements; but is it likely to prove any attraction to any man of experience who has sufficient

means to buy the necessary implements and machinery to go on the land and clear and work it, and make any success of his enterprise? I maintain that to a man of that stamp—the only class who are likely to succeed—the mere saving of £4 a year will not prove the slightest attraction, and won't be worthy of a moment's consideration. We are therefore landed in this difficulty: while this scheme will have the effect of attracting a poor, indigent, helpless class of settlers, without experience or fitness for the work, it will be no attraction whatever to that class of people we would like to see come here—people with a certain amount of capital, with some practical experience, and able to enter upon the land with some hope of success. In saying this I am casting no slur upon a man because he happens to be poor; I am not one of those who despise a man because he is a poor man. But what I maintain is that the man without some capital and practical experience is not the man we want to tackle the wilderness in Western Australia, where there are a great many big gum trees to get out of the road before he can talk about cultivating the land. There is another very strong objection which I see to this scheme, and that is this: you offer a man a free gift of 160 acres, and you give him the option of going all over the country, picking out his 160 acres where he chooses. Now, it is well known to those who have any knowledge or experience of this colony—it is rather unfortunate, but the truth must be admitted—that we have thousands of localities where the land is of a very patchy nature, where you may find 160 or 200 acres of good, nice, arable land, surrounded by 2,000 or 3,000 acres of indifferent land, second, third, or fourth class land, but fit for pastoral purposes. Now under our present very liberal Land Regulations a man may take up this pastoral land, depending upon his 160 or 200 acres of good land for his home and cultivation paddocks, and making good use of the rest of the land, by ringing it, and feeding it with sheep, and gradually improving it. But if you allow anyone who chooses to select 160 acre blocks out of it—"pick the eyes" out of it, as we say—monopolising the most fertile spots, you simply spoil the whole thing. In that respect I consider

this a very dangerous measure. You encourage the poor and needy man, who cannot touch more than he can get free, and you permit him to spoil a large area of land to the man who, having a certain amount of means, would make very good use of it, and at the same time greatly improve the public estate. There is another little point I would like to allude to, and that is the immigration vote. The Premier said that those who oppose this Bill have never seriously demurred to the expenditure of £40,000, or £50,000 in bringing out a not very desirable class of immigrants, and that we are contemplating a still further expenditure in the same way; but that we make a great fuss about advancing a little money, some £150, to the intending settler under this Bill. But I would point out that this £150 would suffice to assist, not one but fifteen settlers to come out here, under the assisted passage system. So that, so far as immigration and increasing the population is concerned, the argument is 15 to 1 in favor of the system of assisted passages; and I maintain we are likely to get more good from these fifteen nominated immigrants than we are from one new comer attracted here by this offer of a free gift of land and a Government loan. I am dealing with the question now purely from an immigration point of view. The Premier referred to New Zealand as having adopted this homestead system, but I do not think that anyone who will go to the trouble of reading the report on the working of that system in New Zealand is likely to come to the conclusion that it has been a success in that colony. It was brought into operation, as members are aware, by the Ballance Government a few years ago, and afterwards rescinded or suspended by the Atkinson Government as having proved an utter failure. I believe I am right in summing up the whole thing as a miserable failure. But the Ballance Government, being again in power, appear to be somewhat concerned in resuscitating the thing, and an effort is to be made to try and put it on a better footing. Still there is the fact that hitherto it has been a miserable failure. And if this homestead scheme has proved a failure in New Zealand, with its fine climate and its good land, it

stands ten times more chance of being a failure with our climate and land in this colony.

THE PREMIER (Hon. Sir J. Forrest): Why?

MR. RICHARDSON: From its inherent difficulties. There is the difficulty of discriminating between the bad and the good, which was the difficulty they had in New Zealand. The good, bad, and indifferent came along, and they had no machinery for discriminating between the worthless and utterly unfit applicant, the man without experience, or pluck, or energy, and the man who possessed the necessary qualities to ensure success as a farmer. There is another point, which I allude to with a certain amount of delicacy, but still it must be faced—have we such a plethora, such a superabundance of good land, still unalienated that we require to run about, chasing people with offers of free gifts of it, and pressing them, for goodness sake, to take it, and that we will lend them the money to work it? If the land is good, is that not sufficient attraction itself, with our present liberal land laws? We know there is a great eagerness at present to take up land, and I thought the difficulty had been, not to get people to come and take the land, but to find the land for them when they came here. The complaint has been—as was pointed out last session by the hon. member for Northam—that people who come here seeking for land, and with a desire to settle, have not been able to find the land, and could not get anybody to give them any information about it, with the result that many of them went back disappointed where they came from. I believe that scores, if not hundreds, of good men who came here, with money in their pockets, prepared to take up land, have gone back disappointed, either because they could not get the land they required or could not get the information they required. Yet, in the face of this, we announce to the world that we have such a superabundance of land fit for cultivation that we propose to throw it in the face of people as a free gift. No doubt there is a fair amount of good land still available, but it is scattered about, and, if we had greater facilities for getting to it, there would be no necessity to offer further inducements such as are offered by this

Bill. I believe the Premier drew a rather misleading inference from the fact—even if it were a fact—that we have not progressed much in the way of increasing the area under cultivation. Surely that cannot be from the fact that we have not people here in possession of plenty of good land. There must be some other reason, and I maintain that the reasons are simply these: the difficulty of finding suitable areas within easy reach of existing railways, and the capital required to ensure success, and of late years the uncertainty of the market and the low prices ruling. I know of many farmers who have taken their wheat in, and could not get 3s. 6d. a bushel for it; and the same with other produce. So that the reason why cultivation has not advanced—if it be so—is not because we have not the land and the men already available, but because we have not had the facilities of transit, and because the market has been uncertain. That has been the great drawback hitherto as regards the Southern districts—the absence of railway communication—as it was formerly with the Eastern districts. It cannot be said that, where land suitable for cultivation is within easy reach of a railway platform, there has been any backwardness in bringing it into cultivation. I maintain that much greater results as regards cultivation would follow if, instead of spending £40,000 or £50,000 and at the same time doing ourselves out of a considerable amount of land revenue, as proposed in this Bill, we were to extend our existing railway lines into the interior, so as to provide landholders with improved facilities of transport for their produce. The reason these people do not care to tackle their land at present is because they are too far from a market. The difficulties of transit are so great that they are discouraged; but if you were to take the railways to them they would soon set about cultivating their land, and be only too eager to do so, so long as they were sure of a market and a fair price. That has been felt by the Government, as shown in the fact of their increasing the price of land adjacent to the railways. The Premier also dwelt upon the fact that formerly our land was sold at £1 an acre; but very little cultivation resulted, and we

reduced the price to 10s. Still, cultivation did not seem to be stimulated. We then reduced it to 6d. an acre per annum, and still the cry is that people won't go on the land and cultivate it. I ask, if a reduction from £1 an acre to 6d. a year is not enough to induce people to go in for cultivation, is a trifling allowance of £4 a year on 160 acres going to do it? Is that slight reduction going to effect what a reduction of from 20s. to 6d. failed to effect? Is £4 a year going to work this wonderful transformation scene? I cannot see it. In addition to that, I maintain that a great part of the Premier's arguments and sentiments—which sounded very fine and very heroic, uttered as they were with a great deal of enthusiasm—would apply equally to our present Land Regulations; for we all know that the price of our land now is about the lowest in the Australian colonies. Short of giving it away, it is fixed as low as possible. There is no intermediate step between the present price and a free gift; and I think, if our land formed any attraction at all, the present price ought to tempt people to come here to settle on it, without making a free gift of it.

THE ATTORNEY GENERAL (Hon. S. Burt): It is the loan that will fetch them.

MR. RICHARDSON: The Attorney General says the loan will fetch them. I hardly think so. I do not believe that the difference between 5 per cent. and 7 per cent. on £150 is going to prove a great attraction to the man who can afford to spend £200 or £300 of his own in building a house and doing other improvements. On the other hand, if a man is such a thriftless sort of settler and so devoid of energy that he cannot make his farm pay because he has borrowed £150 at 7 per cent., I am sure that the same man won't make farming pay him because he can borrow £150 from the Government at 5 per cent. The difference between 5 per cent. and 7 per cent. on £150—£3 a year—will not make nor mar any man's fortune at farming in this colony.

THE PREMIER (Hon. Sir J. Forrest): The difficulty at present is to get anyone to advance the money to this class of men. They can't get it.

MR. RICHARDSON: I must combat

the theory that it is impossible for a farmer in this colony to raise money for improvements if he can give a fair security. The cry in the past has been quite the other way—that our farmers could borrow too easily, and that this had proved a stumbling block to a great many of them. While on this subject I should like to ask hon. members—I do so without any egotism on my part, though a member of the Commission—to read the final report of the Agricultural Commission, of which my hon. friend, the present Commissioner of Railways, was chairman. They will find summed up there a digest of the conclusions arrived at by that Commission, after their very arduous labors, which involved the travelling of hundreds of miles about the country, interviewing settlers all over the colony, and taking down their evidence. The conclusions arrived at by the members of that Commission were entirely at variance with the principles advocated in this Bill; and I cannot help thinking that our means and opportunities for obtaining reliable and practical information on that Commission, and of drawing sensible and intelligent conclusions, were certainly quite as good as is possessed by any member of the Government now. I cannot think that if that report had been carefully read, with sufficient consideration and judgment, we should have found the Government bringing forward a measure running so counter to the conclusions arrived at by that Commission as the present Bill. I think I have now detained the House long enough, perhaps too long, on this matter, for I cannot help feeling that after all it is only “a storm in a teacup.” I do not think there is much in it. When you consider the net amount of the difference between this Bill and our present Land Regulations, I cannot see that it is such as is likely to revolutionise our agricultural industry. According to the eloquent speech, and I will say the sincere speech, of the Premier—for I heartily believe it was sincere—one would think that there was an immense margin of difference between the principle of this Bill and our existing Land Regulations, so much so that it is going to revolutionise agriculture in this colony, and that instead of being importers of produce we are going to become large exporters. As I have already said,

if you boil the whole thing down, there is not very much difference between this measure and the Land Regulations we at present enjoy. I firmly believe we have the very best Land Regulations now of all these colonies. If the Premier, with his practical knowledge and skill, would go through these Regulations and amend a few clauses, trimming them up a little, I am quite sure he could evolve such a measure as would commend itself to the good sense, and have perhaps the unanimous support, of this Assembly; and I very much regret he has not seen fit to do it. I am going to conclude by moving a little amendment, which I hope will commend itself to the good sense of the majority of this House; and that is: "That this Assembly, while fully recognising the earnest desire of the Government to facilitate the settlement of the lands and to hasten the development of agriculture, is, however, of opinion, that in view of the difficulties and complications which are certain to follow legislation constituting the State a money lender in aid of any special enterprise, it is desirable to postpone the consideration of this Bill until it can be more clearly ascertained by statistics whether the sale, settlement, and cultivation of the lands in the colony are not already increasing at a satisfactory rate, without having recourse to such doubtful expedients as those proposed by the provisions of this Bill."

MR. HARPER seconded the amendment.

MR. DEHAMEL: As no one seems inclined to speak to this amendment, I beg to move the adjournment of the debate, so that we may have time to consider the effect the amendment may have upon the proposal that it is known it is intended to be moved, namely, that the Bill be read a second time this day six months. I now move that the debate be adjourned until Wednesday next, the 23rd instant.

MR. SIMPSON: I think that at this late hour, and considering the length of the amendment which has just been moved, and which we have not yet seen in print, it would be as well that,—

THE SPEAKER: If the hon. member intends to make another speech, he will not be able to do so, if he makes a speech now.

MR. SIMPSON: I was speaking to the adjournment of the debate.

THE SPEAKER: There cannot be any debate upon that.

Motion for the adjournment of the debate agreed to.

#### ADJOURNMENT.

The House adjourned at five minutes to 10 o'clock p.m.

---

### Legislative Council,

Friday, 18th November, 1892.

---

Year Book: distribution of—Kent, Mr. Saville: expected arrival of—Brands and Ear-marks: publication of—Miner's Rights: return of—Companies Bill, 1892: second reading—Adjournment.

THE PRESIDENT (Hon. G. Shenton) took the chair at 3.15 p.m.

#### PRAYERS.

#### YEAR BOOK—DISTRIBUTION OF.

THE HON. J. W. HACKETT asked the Colonial Secretary what steps have been taken to distribute copies of the Year Book and Hand Book of Western Australia throughout the Eastern Colonies.

THE COLONIAL SECRETARY (Hon. S. H. Parker) replied: The leading newspapers in each colony have been supplied with a copy of the Year Book, as well as the Stock Exchanges and all leading Clubs. The Government Statisticians and Registrars General in all the colonies have also each had a copy, and 50 copies have been supplied to Sands & McDougall, for distribution in Victoria and New South Wales. In addition to the above, about 50 copies have been distributed to persons applying for them, chiefly people who have seen reviews of the publication in newspapers. Of the Handbook, 250 have been sent to Sands