

smallest colony as regards population and income, can well afford to wait until our greater neighbors have fully determined upon the course they intend to pursue. At the present time there is no necessity for this colony to be in any great hurry in the matter. In clause 5 of the Speech the Government state that in their opinion the qualification for members should be abolished and also that the franchise should be extended. Under the present Act many cases of hardship occur owing to the loose wording of the franchise sections, and we are willing to take steps to remedy these defects as soon as public business will admit. We are all aware of the state of stagnation that was brought about during the time we were endeavoring to bring about a change in the Constitution, and the Government do not wish at the present juncture to involve the country in a further state of non-progression, which must be the consequence of a change and a general election at the present time. We say, "Let us give our public works a fair start, and do not let us do anything to retard the rapid strides we are now making." We agree that these alterations should be made, and when the state of public business permits we shall be prepared to bring in the necessary measure; but I think everyone will agree that it would be unwise now to involve ourselves in a general election, for it would interfere with the raising of the loan, and would consequently stop the carrying on of our public works. At this late hour of the evening, I shall not dwell upon the other points which have been raised. The only cloud that seems to be hanging over us is the drought at the North; but against that we have a golden lining in another direction in the development of the Yilgarn fields. The output of gold from there is now very large, and with the new machinery that is being taken to the fields, other properties will soon be yielding returns and giving more employment to labor. The telegraph line, which will shortly be completed, will give a still further impetus to the fields. The Murchison fields are also opening up well, and machinery is already being ordered for them, so that in a short time we may find these northern fields as successful as those at Yilgarn. With the gold in all directions and the coal in the Bunbury

District we may look forward to a high state of progression for the colony in the very near future. The finances of the colony have been carefully attended to, and the revenue has exceeded our most sanguine expectations. In fact everything is prosperous with us now, and it will be the endeavor of the Government to do all it can to help this colony in making still further strides on the road of prosperity.

THE PRESIDENT: The hon. the Colonial Secretary will perhaps pardon me if I follow him with a few remarks. I do not wish to follow the Speech which gives such a satisfactory account of the stewardship of the Government; but I ask hon. members to allow me to address to them a few words, as this will probably be the only occasion I shall have of putting myself right on a particular point with regard to the proposed alteration of the Constitution Act. Ever since the present Constitution has been introduced an agitation has been carried on to reduce the franchise and to do away with the qualification for members. In the Press and on the public platform, one of the principal arguments used in favor of an alteration is that the delegates from the old Legislative Council whom you sent home pledged your colony that as soon as the change was made the qualification for members would be abolished. These statements have always been a source of annoyance to me; and as hitherto I have not had an opportunity of refuting them, perhaps the House will bear with me if I now give them a most unqualified denial. I found that immediately after my arrival in London, when in communication with Mr. John Morley, who was one of the best friends we had in assisting us with our Bill, that this qualification for members was regarded with the utmost disfavor, not only by the Liberals, but by the Conservatives also. They said that in the House of Commons it had been found to be absolutely useless, and that it did not keep out the description of persons aimed at; whereas it did keep out others who were desirable, but who had scruples the others had not. It was pointed out to us that there could be no proper representation unless electorates were allowed an absolutely free choice in the matter of their members. But the delegates

pledged the colony in no way, although we did say that we believed at no distant date the qualification would be done away with. That was the utmost we did, and I think it is desirable that the public should know, that not only did we not pledge the colony, but that it was impossible for us to do it, having, as we had, distinct instructions not to depart from the terms of the Bill. The question was well fought out here, and the majority of elected members favored the striking out of the clause, and I certainly agree with the Ministry that before the next general election the qualification should be done away with. With regard to the question of the franchise my opinion will not be shared by many other hon. members. It was only a night or two ago that one of our most moderate, trusted, and able public men reminded me that when the present Constitution was being drafted he and I agreed that, in Conservative interests, we should not commit the mistake which had been made elsewhere. We should begin, we thought, where we are going most certainly to end, and not give opportunities for those constitutional struggles which have taken place elsewhere. I think, however, that the Ministry are acting wisely in delaying this matter, for the reason that some little time hence, when further consideration will have been given, we are more likely to arrive at some decision which will give a greater amount of finality than there would be if it were forced on now. I say, in the interests of Conservatism, we should alter the franchise, as there is no doubt the Act as it now stands is simply intolerable; and whatever be the nature of the change it should be in the direction of finality as far as possible. I do not intend to say anything further on the Speech, except that I am glad to notice that the hon. the Colonial Secretary has taken an early opportunity of showing us that the Government is willing to give this House a fair share of the work of the session. Of course we have not yet reached that stage in our political history when the advantages of an Upper House are so manifest as they are in the other colonies. It is generally in times of trouble, or where there is a strong opposition in the House below against a weak Government, or where, perhaps, the Lower

House is out of touch with the constituencies that the Upper House proves to be of so much use. Another advantage in an Upper House is that the measures of the Government can be considered with more quietude than in the more stormy atmosphere of the other Chamber. I trust the Government will acknowledge this, and will give us every opportunity to further the interests of the colony.

Question—put and passed.

ADJOURNMENT.

The Council at 10:30 p.m. adjourned until Friday, 11th December, at 3 p.m.

Legislative Assembly,

Wednesday, 9th December, 1891.

The establishment of Agricultural Bureaux—Rain-producing experiments in the Northern Districts—Sessional Orders—The Address-in-Reply: Adjourned Debate—Adjournment.

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

PRAYERS.

ESTABLISHMENT OF AGRICULTURAL BUREAUX.

MR. RICHARDSON: I wish to ask the Premier, Whether the Government propose to take any steps with a view of establishing Agricultural Bureaux similar to those existing in the other Colonies?

THE PREMIER (Hon. Sir J. Forrest): The Government has not yet arranged or done anything in the matter, but I may add that I shall be glad to consult with the hon. member on the subject.

RAIN-PRODUCING EXPERIMENTS AT THE NORTH.

MR. RICHARDSON: I desire to ask the Premier, Whether, in view of the great drought prevailing in the Northern