

NEW
SOUTH WALES.Speech of
Sir George Gipps.

9 Sept. 1842.

that the lands beyond the boundaries, or the lands now occupied by the squatters, are the sources from which the revenue may be drawn equal to all our wants; and I agree with his lordship also in thinking that, in order to draw a larger revenue from these lands, some alterations may be advantageously made in the tenure by which they are now held, and that some security should at least be given to the squatter for the value of the improvements which he may make upon them, since it must always be the interest of the landlord to have his land improved, whether the landlord be the Queen, or any private individual; but in the details of his plan I am forced to differ from his lordship, because those details involve a vast number of conditions, the observance of which experience forbids me to expect the Government would ever be able to enforce; and a vast number, too, of deferred payments, which I fear the Government would never be able to collect.

It should be borne in mind that the grants, which are called free or gratuitous in this colony, were not professedly gratuitous when they were made; that they involved a variety of conditions, such as those of settlement, cultivation and payment of quit-rents, and in many cases of other deferred payments, which the Government has in very few instances been able to enforce. I will ask the Colonial Secretary and the Auditor-General, who are here present, what the experience of Government is in respect to these deferred payments? Why, that even the quit-rents are collected with the greatest difficulty, and at an expense which makes it hardly worth while to collect them, notwithstanding that the security for their due payment is as ample as any that can be shown by the proprietor of Belgrave-square for the payment of his ground rents. And if such be the case in respect of quit-rents and of other rents, such as those, for instance, of the leases granted in the time of Sir Thomas Brisbane, all of which are due on lands situated in the older parts of the colony, and comparatively near the seat of government, how much more difficult would it be to collect dues arising out of lands situate hundreds of miles off, extending from Darling Downs to the Bogan, and from the Bogan to Corner Inlet. Any government that attempted to enforce deferred payments of this nature would certainly be defeated; the whole strength of the colony would be arrayed against it. For these reasons, therefore, I think no dependence is to be placed on a revenue to be raised by deferred payments, or, in other words, out of lands sold or given on credit. The only sure system which the Government can go on is that of sale for ready money. I beg also very distinctly to state, that I held these opinions long before I had any knowledge of an Act of Parliament, which, there is every reason to suppose, has already passed, and which, if passed, must entirely prevent the carrying into effect of the plans of the Lord Bishop. The proposed Act of Parliament is not confined to the fixing of a minimum price below which no land shall be sold; there are other provisions in it, such as, first, that all land shall be sold by auction; secondly, that it shall be sold only for ready money; and, thirdly, that no land shall be let on lease for any period longer than 12 months. It will scarcely, therefore, be prudent to rest our hopes on a plan which proceeds on principles directly opposed to such an Act of Parliament. But the Act of Parliament, it may be said, will be repealed. So it will, I have no doubt, if, after a fair trial, it be found to work badly; but I am equally certain that it will be allowed a fair trial; and for such a trial I do not think that four, five, or even six years will be considered too long a period; and that, consequently, even allowing the Act to be an injudicious one (which I am very far from thinking it), it would be most imprudent in us to rely upon any scheme which cannot be carried into effect whilst the Act remains in force.

Before I conclude, I must say a few words more respecting the squatters.

It has been said that I am the enemy of the squatters, and that I am bent on destroying the squatting interest. Now, although squatting did not owe its origin to me, I may safely say that I have been the best friend to the squatters that they ever had, and I believe I may add, I was the first person to point out to the Home Government, which I did in my despatch of the 19th of December 1840, the vast importance of the squatting interest to this colony. I am and always have been the advocate of squatting, but I do not advocate the putting of the squatter on a par with the purchaser of crown land. To do this would be effectually to nullify all the regulations which have been introduced for the disposal or sale of land, since land began to be of any value in the colony; and if I could even so far forget my own duty as to allow the person who may be the first to seize on any quantity of crown land to become the virtual proprietor of it, there are other and superior authorities who will not allow their regulations to be so evaded.

So obviously does the squatting system act to prevent the sale of crown lands, that the late Secretary of State, in a despatch which has been laid before the council,* pointed out the propriety of raising the price of a license to depasture stock beyond the boundaries to five or six times its present amount. Nor was his Lordship prompted to this by any communication from New South Wales beyond a simple narration of facts. It scarcely appears to me that we can go at present as far as his Lordship's suggestion would lead us; but I am satisfied that whilst it is desirable, on the one hand, to improve the tenure of the squatter in every way in which it can be done without indisposing him to become a purchaser of land, so we must, on the other, as soon as the present despondency shall have passed away, make several important alterations in respect to squatting licenses. The opportunity may, if possible, be afforded to the squatter of purchasing as a homestead some moderate portion of the land which he occupies, without forcing him to take a quantity,

* Dated 20th June 1841.