

ONTARIO'S PROPOSED HOMESTEAD LAW.

THE Government of Ontario have brought down their resolutions respecting free grants of land and respecting their proposed liberal homestead bill. The homestead resolution is briefly as follows. That to give greater encouragement to occupy and improve lands, it is expedient that such lands should not be liable for any debt or cause of action incurred or accrued within [] years from the date of such location, and that the locators shall not have power to alienate, mortgage or pledge such land within that period. The succeeding resolution provides that free grants shall not be given upon lands valuable chiefly for their timber or mineral resources, and that all merchantable timber, mines, minerals, upon any lands located or granted shall be reserved. It must be confessed, that there does not seem anything in these resolutions to entice them to be called liberal. Much of course depends upon how the blank in the homestead resolution will be filled up. It would be no great encouragement to settlers to occupy and improve their free grants of land in the wilderness if their lands were exempted from seizure for debt for a space of only five years. But it would be otherwise if it were fifty years. We cannot suppose, however, that the Government intend the longer term. We fear from the whole tenor of their resolutions that they mean to fill up the blank by the insertion of a few years, and thus their liberal homestead law will be a blank indeed. It is of the greatest importance, therefore, that the exemption period should be made as long as possible. We cannot see why the exemption should not be made co-extensive with the settler's life. Once the principle is admitted that the exemption of a homestead from seizure would give great encouragement to the occupation and improvement of land, it will be in direct contradiction of that principle to turn round and limit the exemption to a short period of time.

It is also worthy of remark, that all the lands desired under the free grant are to be exempt. But as the resolutions are submitted in skeleton form, with blanks for the number of acres proposed to be given to each settler, it is impossible now to arrive at any decision as to whether it is wise or not to exempt the settler's land from seizure. There are two points to be considered in reference to this. The number of acres to be given in each free grant is small, the object of giving free grants will be defeated, because settlers will not accept them. And if the free grants comprise a large number of acres—say a couple of hundred each—then it may not be prudent to exempt the entire lot from seizure. In the States, we believe the exemption is by value, the house and as many acres as will, with the house, be worth a thousand dollars, being in some States privileged. According to the resolutions, all the settler's land, and of course all his houses, barns and buildings of every kind, including even houses used as manufactories and mills, no matter how great their value, will be free.

The meaning of the latter part of the resolution, namely, that during the period within which the settler's lands shall not be liable to seizure for debt, the settler shall not have power to alienate, mortgage or pledge his lands is not clear. The first part of the resolution exempts the settler's lands from seizure for debt incurred within a certain period, and the second part of the resolution deprive him of the power of selling, mortgaging or pledging his lands during that period. So that if a settler were dishonest enough he might, during the period in question, incur as many debts as he could, and all his lands would be safe from seizure, and he might then go through the form of selling or mortgaging all his property to any one who did not know his lot was exempt, and then he could hold the price and hold his property too. We may on the other hand suppose that during the period of exemption, something would occur to make it of great benefit to the settler to sell immediately, he might be placed in a position that if he did not sell at once he might incur a very heavy loss, yet he would be powerless to sell, and no one who knew that his lot was a free grant would dare to buy. Again it is to be observed, that it is only the settler's lands—including, we presume, all the buildings upon it that are exempt, yet this leaves it quite competent for the sheriff to seize, not only all the settler's stock and agricultural implements, but also all his household goods and effects.

What provisions the homestead bill that is promised will make for these things remains to be seen. At present, all we can say is, that the homestead resolu-

tion is not satisfactory. It is not satisfactory for the reasons we have pointed out, and further, it is unsatisfactory because it confines the principle of exemption to free grant settlers. If the homestead principle is a good one it ought to be generally applied. It ought not to be restricted to a class, and that class too composed of those who will get their land for nothing. Surely if those who get free grants ought in justice to be protected by a homestead law, the man who cripples his means for years and years to pay for his lot is entitled to the same consideration and the same protection. Surely a man who pays forty dollars an acre for his land is as justly entitled to the privilege of a homestead as the man who pays nothing for his lot. There is such apparent injustice in this limitation of the proposed homestead law that we must attribute it to omission not to design. Altogether the resolution is not satisfactory. But we must wait for the bill to see what the intentions of the Government are. They profess to be desirous to encourage the occupation and settlement of our wild lands, they profess to be in favor of promoting immigration, they declare themselves to be in favor of a free grant and a homestead law, their intention they say is to avoid having recourse to direct taxation, and at the same time to adopt such measures as will tend to develop more rapidly than in the case at present, the agricultural resources of the Province of Ontario—let us see that their actions are equal to their declarations and professions. Ontario, as a whole, we believe, never agitated for a homestead law, she did agitate for free grants. But the Government have come forward to promise both. Let us then have good liberal measures that will in truth encourage immigration and promote the settlement of our wild lands and the development of our agricultural resources. And let not Ontario be put off with a measure which is partial or which fosters fraud, or one which is confined to a class and is liberal and unsuited to the necessities of the occasion.

ONTARIO'S FREE GRANT POLICY.

THE legislators of Ontario are meeting with great difficulty in their land policy. This difficulty arises from the wide spread ignorance that prevails, from the Commissioner of Crown Lands downwards, regarding the extent and quality of the wild lands of that Province, and regarding what lands are fit for lumbering purposes only and what are fit for agricultural purposes. This is a lamentable and remarkable ignorance, and we do not believe that the Government can inaugurate a liberal and satisfactory policy touching the public domain until it is removed. The effect of this ignorance is already seen in the contradictory nature of the promises and performances of the Government on the subject of the Crown Lands. In the speech from the throne they announced their intention of introducing a liberal homestead law, and of encouraging immigration by providing free grants of land for bona fide holders. But scarcely had the House been in session a week when the Premier declared that the Government policy was to hold the timber on the wild lands for the purposes of revenue. Their liberal homestead law also turns out to be anything but liberal. Of that, however, we will not treat just now. Our object is to deal with the Premier's revenue policy. The Premier says that he believes that the people of Ontario still concur with him that it is better to reserve the Crown timber for revenue purposes than to have recourse to direct taxation. Well, let us see if that is true?

In Ontario there are in round numbers 22,000 square miles of Crown timber under license, and the total annual revenue from this source is under \$170,000. This is the entire sum that Ontario will gain by reserving her timber for revenue. But this amount is too much by the cost of collecting. Deduct \$20,000 for collecting, and we have \$150,000 as the sum total per annum for which the Premier thinks Ontario would rather continue her old condemned system of raising a revenue out of her public lands than have recourse to direct taxation. Now it would not be possible, perhaps, to estimate the exact loss which the country sustains by her present policy of holding her public domain and her public timber as a source of revenue, but we can approximate that loss. In the recent debate in the Local Legislature, it will be remembered that it was freely acknowledged that the policy of the late Government of Canada regarding the settlement of the country and more especially the course adopted by the Crown Lands Department of that Government, had been such as to repel immigration, and actually to drive out of the country the immigrants who had

come and who had settled here. If proof were wanted of the truth of these assertions, it could be found in the fact that during the past twenty years for every one emigrant who came and remained in Canada, fifteen or twenty went to the United States. This fact is not doubted, however, and in order to estimate the loss the country has sustained, it is only necessary to mention the other fact, namely, that each emigrant, on landing on this continent, is valued to the Government he comes to land under at \$1,000. With this basis to go on, it is easy to calculate the losses the country has suffered since the time of the union between the Provinces of Upper and Lower Canada; and it is also easy to estimate the future losses of Ontario should she persist in a similar policy to that she condemns. It is not too much to say that if it had never been the policy of this country to retain her public domain for revenue purposes exclusively, we would to-day be richer in a population double and treble what we at present possess, and in material prosperity to the extent of thousands of millions of dollars over the aggregate of our present national wealth.

Leaving these regrets, however, let us come to the more practical point, namely, the alternative presented by the Premier to his project of raising a revenue from the Crown timber. He says Ontario will agree in the wisdom of his policy, because if the revenue is not raised from timber, recourse will have to be had to direct taxation. Now, without doubt, direct taxation is an undesirable thing, but, at the same time, it is a bug-bear that too often does not meet with due consideration. In the present instance, we can easily estimate what direct burden it would bring upon the people of Ontario. The population of that Province is at present estimated at over 1,880,000 inhabitants; and the revenue to be raised is, say, \$170,000, or just about nine cents per head of the population, including the costs of collection. This is the sum total of the burden that would fall upon the tax payers of Ontario if the Premier were to adopt a liberal policy regarding the public lands, and if he were in consequence driven to have recourse to direct taxation. It does certainly seem that the worthy Premier has over-valued the burden of direct taxation, and under-valued the benefits that would flow from the application of the Crown lands and the Crown timber to the legitimate purpose of encouraging immigration. For our part, we are sceptical enough not to believe that the people of Ontario so cordially agree with the Premier's policy as he supposes. We feel convinced, indeed, that if the alternative were presented of a liberal policy that would double the immigration into Ontario in one year, direct taxation to the extent of nine cents, or even more, per head, the vote would be in favor of the latter. But, at the same time, we do not agree that the alternative is direct taxation. We believe that a substitute for that unpopular tax could be easily found, and there is, therefore, a double reason why the people of Ontario should not allow themselves to be frightened by this raw head and bloody bones. Without doubt, it is possible to make the free settler lord of the soil and proprietor of the timber growing upon it, and, at the same time, to collect from him a duty on all the timber he actually cuts for the market, according as he cuts it. By this means the settler would come to have such a high appreciation of the value of his timber as to make him careful not to destroy it, and, at the same, the timber would yield a revenue to the country and immigration and settlement would be encouraged.

Thus far we have discussed this question from a revenue point of view only. That was the strongest argument set up by the Premier in favor of his retention of the Crown timber; and we have shown that after all it is a weak one. We will now turn for a moment to the question of the value of our forests. It will be borne in mind that in arguing in favor of his policy the Premier of Ontario alluded to the fact that under a free grant system two evils would arise to the forests. First, speculators would go on the the wild lands ostensibly to settle; but in reality merely to cut down and sell all the timber growing on them, and having accomplished that they would go away. And secondly, ignorant, careless, and mischievous people, going on the timber lands for the purposes of settlement, would destroy the valuable timber, not only on their own lots, but on neighbouring lands, and thereby great loss of valuable public property would take place. Now, with regard to these objections, it must be granted that the public timber is very valuable—that it is a great source of wealth to the nation; and that it ought to be preserved from de-